A LITTLE
BOOK OF

RUSKIN BOND

A LITTLE BOOK OF *life*

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RUPA
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Introduction

As a schoolboy with literary inclinations, I read almost everything that came my way, from the plays of George Bernard Shaw to the thrillers of ‘Bulldog Drummond’, a forerunner of James Bond. A book that left a strong impression on me was a handsome volume called *Words to Live By*, in which various ‘achievers’ or people of eminence selected passages from the classics and various works of philosophy or religion. These passages or lines had inspired them at crucial moments, or during difficult periods of their lives.

This prompted me to keep my own little notebook or diary in which I put down the ‘words of wisdom’ that I came across in the books I read. Seventy years later, I am still doing it; as much out of habit as out of a need for advice from the great and the famous.

Well, there is always something to learn no matter how old we are, and I still turn to my little book in order to find words that might cheer me up when I am down in the dumps—as we all are, from time to time.

Perhaps you, dear reader, will find it helpful too. And I have asked my publisher to provide you with a few blank pages between sections, so that you can jot down your own thoughts, observations, or favourite quotes.

Keep this little book by your bedside, or on your desk, or on the kitchen shelf, and turn to it from time to time. It will have something comforting or helpful to say to you.

Ruskin Bond

Believe in yourself.
Soon others will believe
in you too.

Love the beautiful,
desire the good, and do
your best.

Study the face of nature
and you will never
be bored.

‘Life can only be
understood backwards, but
it must be lived forwards.’
—Søren Kierkegaard

‘Reading is to the mind
what exercise is to the body.’
—Joseph Addison

‘Never tell an unnecessary
lie. The truth has
great authority.’
—P.D. James

Do not pray for an easy life.
Pray to be a stronger
person.

Help a stranger in distress,
and one day you will
receive help when you least
expect it.

Most ideas never work—
unless you do.

‘Light suppers make
long lives.’
–Granny’s kitchen proverb

If you live for yourself
alone, you are in great
danger of being bored
to death.

‘Never seek to tell thy love,
Love that never told can be;
For the gentle wind
does move
Silently, invisibly.’
—William Blake

We take it all for granted
when we are young—the
leaping, the running,
the loving, the fighting…

You have to be old before

you can appreciate
being young.
And then, of course,
you can only look back
on youth with a certain
wistfulness.

Winston Churchill: ‘We are
all worms, but I do believe
I am a glow-worm.’

By all means observe
the conventions, but
remember that it is only in
personal independence that
happiness is to be found.
Stay free!

The greatest victory is the
one you win over yourself.

Courtesy is a powerful
weapon—the more so when
it is used in the face of
arrogance and hostility.

If you rest on your laurels,
you are wearing them in
the wrong place.

Grandmother defined a
true gentleman thus: ‘He
must be gentle as a woman,
and manly as a man.’

'Politics is the art by which
politicians obtain campaign
contributions from the rich
and votes from the poor on
the pretext of protecting
each from the other.'
—*Oscar Ameringer*

He who is always trying, is

doing; and he who is always
doing, does.

Life will always give us what
we know we are worth.
It never fails to take us at
our own valuation.

Almost anyone can do the
first half of anything; only
the people who do the
second half arrive.

Adversity is always
intermittent; and therefore,
if effort is constant,
you are bound to win.

A Depression is a period
when people are obliged
to do without things their
forefathers never had.

If you can smile when

you feel hurt, the hurt
is half cured.

Go and do things. You are
bound to succeed in some
of them.

You will sometimes be
punished when you do not
deserve it. Before giving
vent to your indignation,
reflect on how often you
have deserved punishment
without receiving it.

And here's a good Arabic
proverb: 'When your son
grows up, make him
your brother.'

Don't be depressed by your
surroundings.
That pebble at your feet
has as much beauty as any
great work of art.

Praise all countries, but
live in your own.

If you want to travel fast,
keep to the old roads.

When too much work
accumulates, take a holiday.

Travel is a pleasure only
when I have no particular
destination, and plenty of
time in which to get there.

‘When all men say you are
an ass, it is time to bray.’
—English proverb

Expect good,
and good will come.

‘Beware of all enterprises

that require new clothes.'
—Henry David Thoreau

Most people are better than
life allows them to be.

'If you have much, give of
your wealth.
If you have little, give of
your heart.'
—Arabic proverb

Your room must have
a window.
Look at the clouds, look
at the stars, look at the
good earth.

Step out lightly, step out
brightly, and luck will
come your way.

When one man is
indispensable, no man
is free.

Sow an act, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap
a character.
Sow a character, reap
a destiny.

Be courageous. But if you
don't have courage, have
strong legs.

A great idea will always run
faster than any censor.

Avoid quarrels. You will
find that most quarrels are
weak on both sides.

'The turtle only makes
progress when it sticks its
neck out.'
—James Bryan Conant

Let no man take your
dream away.

It will sustain you to
the end.

Keep an open mind.
Different books, different
faiths, often say the
same thing.

If we fear someone, we give
that person power over us.
Be gentle, but don't allow
yourself to be trod upon.

Don't let petty-minded
people prevent you from
doing your thing.
The dogs may bark but the
caravan moves on.

'Never measure your
generosity by what you give,
but rather by what you
have left.'
—*Bishop Fulton J. Sheen*

Avoid long speeches. The
less a man knows, the
longer he takes to tell it.

If you have good health,
you are young;
and if you owe nothing,
you are rich.

Those who keep good
gardens are usually
contented folk. Always
make space for flowers,
even if all you have is a
window ledge.

Be as interested as you
possibly can in all things—
and especially interested
in some things.

‘Nobody grows old merely
by living a number
of years.’
—Samuel Ullman

Failure is not defeat,
it is just learning
how to succeed.

If 100 per cent seems
impossible, let us achieve
the 95 per cent that
is possible.

One courageous thought
will put to flight a host
of troubles.

Something attempted may
fail; inaction must fail.

Believe in God.
Believe in people.
Believe in yourself.
Then go ahead!

‘The strongest man in
the world is the man who
stands alone.’
—Thomas H. Huxley

Be true to yourself, and
you will be true to others.

To find happiness, look
halfway between too little
and too much.

Don’t give up. One success
will erase many failures.

Try loving your enemies.
If nothing else, you’ll
confuse them.

Think of others as if you
were the others.

The difficult can be done
immediately; the impossible
takes a little longer.

Stay still within, even if
the world around you is all
sound and fury.

Feeling down and out?
Lift up your head
and shout—
‘It’s a great day!’

Now and then there comes
a time in our affairs when
courage is safer than
prudence.

Be like water.
There’s no stopping it.
No matter how tiny the
trickle, it’s going to get
somewhere!

It's of no great
consequence in this world
who lets you down, so long
as it isn't yourself.

How many dreams might
have become happy
realities but for that
terrible little sentence,
'Too much trouble!'

When it pays better to talk
than to listen, change
your company.

To succeed in anything,
you have to care desperately
for the thing itself and not
for what it brings with it.

What have we to expect?
Anything.
What have we to fear?

Nothing.
What have we to hope for?
Everything.

Most men want their
children to be a
credit to them.
Wise men try to be a
credit to their children.

‘Life may be short,’ said
Granny, ‘but a smile is
only a second’s effort.’

May you have the wisdom
to be simple,
And the humour
to be happy!

One of my favourite
writers, John Buchan said,
‘Trying to see something
solid in the mist is the
whole fun of life, and
most of its poetry.’

Be honest, give your
opinion for what it’s
worth; that is, if you are
asked for it.

‘Good courage breaks
bad luck.’
—*Proverb*

It is only through humility
that we are able to
preserve our dignity.

We have a lot to learn
from children. A good
teacher will always learn
something from a
good pupil.

The wisest man is he who
doesn't think he is.

There are no fresh starts
in life. But there are
new directions.

'What is truly beautiful
needs no adorning.'
—Sataka

Do what you know best,
and do it well.
Act impeccably. Everything
will then fall into place.

'Everything that depends
on others gives pain,

everything that depends on
oneself gives pleasure.'
—Manu

For any beauty you possess
at sixteen, be very grateful.
For the beauty you have at
sixty, you may be proud—it
is of your own achieving!

There is always a suitable
work for every season, not
to be done out of season.
That is why we need not
fear old age.

'A lost battle is a battle one
believes lost.'
—Joseph de Maistre

The great successes of the
world have been the result
of a second, a third, even a
fiftieth attempt.

‘Well begun is half done.’
Yes, but remember ‘half
done’ is only half done.

When a difficulty presents
itself, remove it at once
if you can,
for the longer you look at it
the less you will like it.

‘If at times life seems a
battle,’ said Grandfather,
‘well then, enjoy the battle.
Make it a good battle.’

What if you failed
yesterday? Today is not
yesterday, is it?

‘Live and let live’ is
a good maxim, but
‘live and help live’
is better.

The moment we can
visualize possibilities,
actualities are not
very far away.

‘God gave us our faces,’
said Granny, ‘we give

ourselves our expressions.'

The reason why few
people succeed in moving
mountains is that few of
them practice on molehills.

'The torment of envy is
like a grain of sand
in the eye.'
—Chinese proverb

'What you think of yourself
is much more important
than what others
think of you.'
—Seneca

'A soft answer turneth away
wrath; but a grievous word
stirreth up anger.'
—Proverbs 15:1

If you can rule
your own spirit,

you are stronger than the
man who rules a city.

A picture on the wall is not
just something to look at.
After a time it becomes
company.

‘A merry heart doeth good
like a medicine:
but a broken spirit drieth
the bones.’
— Proverb 17:22

Value good friends.
Remember Coleridge’s
words: ‘Friendship is a
sheltering tree.’

Consider yourself dead that
you have completed your
life up to the present time;
then start living as though
your life has been gifted to
you again.

Those who are overly
religious are well-practised
in self-deception.

Every writer worth his salt
suffers from a keen sense
of failure, because he
knows he could have done
things better.
It's the bad writers who
are always pleased
with themselves.

Chart your own course
through life.
What the stars foretell is
strictly for astrologers.

In the spring the
mountains always look
as though they have
just been created.

‘Fanaticism consists in
redoubling your efforts
when you have forgotten
your aim.’
—*George Santayana*

Egotism is really a failure
of sympathy, a failure
of proportion.
To recognize this is the
first step towards becoming
a loving, just and
well-balanced person.

‘No sacrifice is worth the
name unless it is a joy.
Sacrifice and a long face
go ill together.’
—M.K. Gandhi

Be tranquil.
Do not plan life too early.
Follow your intuitions; take
gratefully the joys of life;
take its pains hopefully;
do your business cheerfully.
And leave the rest to God.

There are some who go
about proclaiming with
complacent pride that
they have no time to read
or think. What then will
they be able to give their
children, apart from a fat
cheque book?

‘A thing is not necessarily true
because a man dies for it.’
—Oscar Wilde

Grandfather said: ‘If you
cannot win, make the
fellow ahead of you exert
himself to the utmost.’

Written somewhere:
‘We die only when
the will dies.’

‘Nothing is at last sacred
but the integrity of your
own mind.’
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

‘Destiny is simply the
strength of your desires.’
—J. Garfield

It is good that others
should succeed.
Do not allow their success
to cast a shadow on your
own efforts.

Before you get upset,

ask yourself:
Does it really matter?

Old age is not to be
confused with growing old.
We can grow old at any
age—twenty-five, thirty,
forty. And we can be
young at seventy,
seventy-five, eighty.

Never despair. But if you
do, then work on
in despair. There is always
a light at the end of
the tunnel.

‘The journey of a thousand
miles begins with one step.’
—*Lao Tzu*

Friends for the table are
easy to find;
but rare are those when
danger is near.

The trouble with rich people is that they never seem to have any cash in their pockets. Afraid of pickpockets?

‘You know, the way love can change a fellow is truly frightful to contemplate.’

—P.G. Wodehouse

‘Experience is the knowledge that enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it a second time.’

—Franklin P. Jones

Sympathy is what one woman offers another in exchange for details.

‘Whoever scorns the poor
reviles his own Maker.’
—Proverbs 17:5

Nothing really ends
happily ever after, but if
you come to terms with
your own isolation, then,
paradoxically, it becomes
immediately possible to
find a friend.

It is a human being's
privilege to fashion his
inner life for himself—
without the interference
of priests, pundits, popes,
babas, and other peddlers
of spirituality.

Don't complain too much.
Things will come right
by themselves.

'It is impossible to enjoy
idling thoroughly unless
one has plenty of
work to do.'
—*Jerome K. Jerome*

Wherever you go, most
of your life will have to
happen in your mind.

Adversity is always
intermittent; and therefore,

if effort is constant,
you are bound to win.

If you visit your bean and
lettuce merchant
every day, you won't have
to visit your chemist.

Be guarded in your speech.
Don't talk too much. Many
words invite many defeats.

Happiness: He who has
happy children is
greater than a king.

'If death was a thing that
money could buy,
The rich they would live,
and the poor they
would die.'
—*J. Sheridan Le Fanu*

Do what you feel you must

do. Don’t listen to other
people. Let them go to the
devil. It’s your life,
not theirs.

‘By doing nothing, one
wins the world.
But when one grasps, the
world is beyond winning.’
—*Lao Tzu*

To be successful, one has
to pit one’s wits not against
people, but against life.

What I valued, I lost;
What I gave, I gained.

Never be dismissive of
the young. Never be
contemptuous of the old.

‘To handle yourself, use
your head; to handle

others, use your heart.'
—Eleanor Roosevelt

Do things at your own
pace. And know
when to stop!

Some people believe in a world where people do this or that because they are good or evil. In the real world people act because they have to.

'Money often costs
too much.'
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

‘There is no cure for
birth and death save to
enjoy the interval.’
—*George Santayana*

Anyone alive who wishes
to preserve his sanity must
first of all preserve his
sense of humour. And then
his sense of wonder.

There are no general

truths. But there are
particular truths: who did
what, when, why.
Especially why.

‘Success is doing what you
want to do, when you want,
where you want, with whom
you want, as much as
you want.’
—Anthony Robbins

The trouble with marriage
is that it sets you on a very
predictable course.

In the long run, ability
counts for more than
personality. (As I depend
on the former—for I am a
realistic man—I should
keep public appearances
to the minimum!)

Simplicity must never
be confused with
simple-mindedness.

‘A great man is always
willing to be little.’
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

‘An old man loved is
winter with flowers.’
—Old German proverb

One of life’s greatest
pleasures lies in watching
a plant grow—from seed to
seedling, to green branch
to bough, to flower,
to fruit.

Life is not something to be
put up with, but a gift to
be enjoyed with zest.

‘A mirror is brighter when
polished with grit.’
—Amir Khusrau

I wouldn't go so far as to say that a garden is the answer to all problems, but it's amazing how a little digging and friendly dialogue with the good earth can help reactivate us when we grow sluggish or morose.

'A strong man and a waterfall always channel their own path.'

—Anonymous

Each one of us is a mass of imperfections, and to be able to recognize and live with our imperfections, our basic natures, defects of genes and birth, makes for an easier transit on life's journey.

You can generally get success if you do not want victory.

Epicurus says, ‘Death does
not concern us.’
It is not something we live
to experience—we cannot
lose what cannot be missed.

It’s the simple things in
life that keep us from
going crazy: a pigeon in
the skylight, sunshine,
birdsong, the bedside book,
the potted geranium…

After years of striving,
and finding and losing
and striving again, now,
past seventy, I think I have
learnt something of the
value of stillness;
I don’t fret so much;
I laugh at myself more
often; I don’t laugh at
others; I live life at my
own pace.
Is this wisdom, or is it just old age?

One of the most effective forms of healing has been largely neglected by doctors and patients—that's healing by reading. If you are in the dumps or in bed with a bug, or recovering from a serious illness, or waiting for a fracture to heal, get hold of books by your favourite authors and read as much as you can. You will start feeling better far sooner than if you simply lie on your back and feel sorry for yourself. (If the books put you

to sleep, all the better.) And it's safe, too: I have yet to hear of anyone dying from an overdose of reading.

Winners hang on
when losers let go.

You will find life exactly as
you take it, make it, live it,
and give it.

Aim at a lovely
simplification of life,
and so give your soul
room to grow.

Bad times are good times
to prepare for better times.

If you are capable of
smiling, no one will bother
whether you are
good looking or not.

‘There is skill in all things,
even in making porridge.’
—Granny’s kitchen proverb

‘There is no dependence
that can be sure
but a dependence
upon one’s self.’
—John Gay

The only truly educated
person is the self-educated.

To live in peace with
others, first make peace
with yourself.

‘Your own friend, and your
father’s friend, forsake
not; neither go into your
brother’s house in the day
of your calamity: for better
is a neighbour that is near
than a brother far off.’
—Proverbs 27:10

Authors should be read,
not heard.

Often, it isn’t poverty
that makes us poor, but
the inability to cope with
hardship. Life is as unfair
as it is fair and fate is
blind; only our ability to
carry on, regardless, is our
wealth and fortune.

A purpose is something
to achieve, not talk about.

‘The beauty of life is
nothing but this, that
each should act in
conformity with his nature
and his business.’
—W. Somerset Maugham

‘Let your neighbours
discover you before you
make yourself
known to them.’
—Zen wisdom on modesty

‘I never knew a person
so poised that he wasn’t
disconcerted when a
doorknob came off
in his hand.’
—W.C. Fields

When we walk close to
nature, we come to a better
understanding of life; for,
it is from the natural world
that we first emerged and
to which we still belong.

Death moves about
at random, without
discriminating between
the innocent and the evil,
the poor and the rich.
The only difference is that
the poor usually handle
it better.

‘Whoever boasts himself of
a false gift is like clouds
and wind without rain.’
—Proverbs 25:14

Follow instinct rather than
intelligence, and it may
result in a modicum
of happiness.

The value of stillness—
while the hands are
busy, the heart cannot
understand!

Happiness is as elusive as
a butterfly, and you must
never pursue it. If you stay
very still, it may come and
settle on your hand. But
only briefly. Savour those
moments, for they will not
come your way very often.

‘Whatever you have,
spend less.’
—Samuel Johnson

‘If you want to make sure
that your wife will listen to
what you have to say, do
your talking in your sleep.’
—Anonymous

‘Nothing can be loved too
much, but all things can be
loved in the wrong way.’
—W.H. Auden

‘I’ve seen more tears run
down the pretty faces than
the plain ones.’
—Evelyn Nesbit

There is no harm in sitting
in an office and making
money, but sometimes
you must look out of the
window. And look at the
changing light.

‘Two things a man can
never hide—that he
is drunk and that he
is in love.’
—Anonymous

‘If I am not for myself,
who will be for me?
And if I am not for others,
what am I?
And if not now, when?’
—Hillel

How much time do we
spend counting and
cataloguing what we
possess—people, objects,
money? Life usually
happens when we stop
doing that.

Before you enumerate
another’s faults, take time
to count to ten…
ten of your faults.

Maxim from my

grandmother’s recipe book:
‘Let not your tongue cut
your throat!’

‘About the time we think
we can make both ends
meet, someone goes and
moves the ends.’
—Herbert Hoover

Napoleon: ‘Never awake
me when you have good
news to announce, because,
with good news, nothing
presses; but when you
have bad news, arouse me
immediately, for then there
is not an instant to be lost.’

‘Insist on yourself;
never imitate.’
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

There are definite limits
on a man’s wisdom, but
absolutely no limits
on his stupidity.

A new thinker or teacher
is often one who does not
know what the old thinkers
have thought.

Fame is like the wind.
It blows in all directions,
then vanishes
without warning.

He who laughs with you is
a friend. He who laughs at
you is an enemy.

The greatest truths are
full of fiction, the greatest
fiction is full of truths.

A fool always tries to
appear wise. The wise man
is not afraid to play
the clown.

‘Success is where
preparation and
opportunity meet.’
—Bobby Unser

The egoist? He’s the one
who does not think of you.

Contentment is easier to
attain than happiness. I
take as my guide the small
ginger cat who arrives on
my terrace every afternoon,
to curl up in the sun and
slumber peacefully for a
couple of hours.

When a man says money
can do anything,
that settles it. He hasn't any.

Arthur Wellesley: 'Nothing
except a battle lost can be
half so melancholy as a
battle won.'

'No great thing cometh
suddenly into being, for
not even a bunch of grapes
can, or a fig.'
—Epictetus

A West Indian proverb:
'Every day no Christmas,
an' every day no rainy day.'

Select wisely the person
you must live with
forever—yourself.

'Come, friend, let us lose

tomorrow’s grief
And seize this moment of
life:
Tomorrow, this ancient inn
abandoned,
We shall be equal with
those born seven thousand
years ago!’

—Omar Khayyam

Let this little book be a
garden in your pocket.

MAY YOU HAVE THE WISDOM TO BE SIMPLE, AND THE HUMOUR TO BE HAPPY!

Ruskin Bond, India's most loved author, puts together his favourite sayings, aphorisms and quotations in this delightful little book on life and living. Drawing on his own observations and life experiences and those of his favourite authors, he presents thoughts on nature, friendship, love, family, money, enemies—in short, pithy statements. This is a book you can dip into anytime, and come up with something that will make you smile or think with its wit and gentle common sense.

RUSKIN BOND has been writing novels, poetry, essays and short stories for over half a century now. He has also compiled and edited a number of anthologies over the years. He was awarded the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957, the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993 (for English writing in India), the Padma Shri in 1999 and the Delhi Government's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012.

Non-fiction

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