



Brief Spiritual Instructions: From the Notes of Archbishop Seraphim's Spiritual Children

On Love and Obedience

Love for God consists in the fulfillment of His commandments.

One should look upon one's brother as an Angel, and upon his sin as an illness. One needs to separate man from his sins. We should hate sin, but love and pity man.

Vladyka Seraphim said of himself: "Nothing upsets me as much as upsetting words said to a neighbor, even when it is necessary."

I strive to think almost not at all about myself. Strive to do this, too. You will find genuine love when you cast aside self-love.

Hear people out, but about oneself (one's sicknesses and sorrows) do not speak!

Obedience is true love. Obedience is the source of life and blessedness, while disobedience is the source of death and unhappiness. Genuine obedience makes the obedient one like unto a burning bush. Obedience does not burn in fire, does not drown in water, and raises one from earth to Heaven. But disobedience sinks in water, burns in fire, and casts one from earth to Hades. Obedience is Paradise, but disobedience is Hades. For obedience God sends abundant joy.

Obedience is love, but disobedience is non-love, it is the trampling upon love. Never decline from obedience.

In disobedience is hidden pride. In humility is hidden love. In pride there is no love. All your unhappiness comes from your pride.

On Humility

Nothing can help us be saved, apart from humility. We humble ourselves before our neighbors when we do not judge them. Prepare for monasticism through meekness and humility.

The three foundations of monasticism are: abstinence, humility, and obedience.

Have humility. Then you will learn all that is good. The humbler you are, the closer you will be to God. I ask you, my joy, to attain humility more quickly.

Be humble, and everything else will be added unto you. Humility means always considering yourself as insignificant.

Flee vanity. It is only through humility that you can become a genuine monk. If vain thoughts enter your



head, you need to say: *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory* (Psalm 113:9).

Only one who is humble can be a true monk.

Remember the words: *Set, O Lord, a watch before my mouth* (Psalm 140:3). Do not teach if you are not asked!

Humble yourself and remember the words of the Lord: *But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word* (Isaiah 66:2).

How does one acquire humility? By silence. Be silent! Be stupid! Let everyone consider you to be stupid! Silence is the primary means for the attainment of humility and love. One is saved by silence.

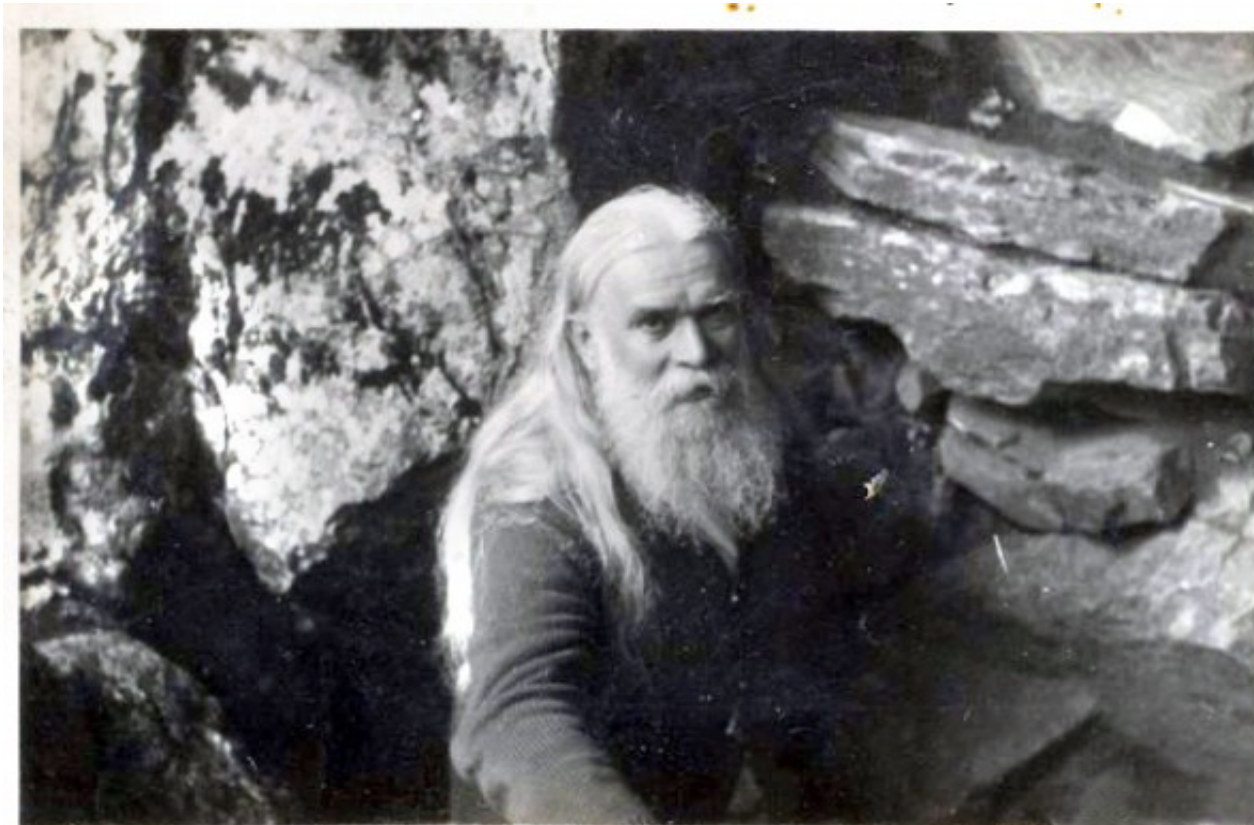
In order to acquire humility, be silent when you are mocked and when they are angry with you, and pray within yourself the prayer “O Theotokos and Virgin.”

When you are offended, be silent without fail, and you will acquire humility. However, one needs to be silent not only with one’s mouth, but also with one’s heart. Against pride, just as against judging, one needs to fight with silence.

Be humble. Then you will truly abide in Christian peace. *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you* (John 14:27). It is for this reason that the Lord came to earth, to give us His peace – all His treasure.

Let us humble ourselves under God’s mighty right hand, and the Lord will not be slow to grant us joy. The most important things for salvation are meekness and humility.

To the question “What is meekness?” Vladyka Seraphim replied: “When you are scolded, always blame yourself and do not get angry. Without afflictions one cannot be saved.”



On Following God's Will

Every person is the craftsman of his own happiness, and it depends on the person himself whether he will be saved. Without the voluntary efforts of his own will, man cannot enter Paradise.

Always do everything according to your conscience!

Strive never to offend anyone. Never grow angry. Never teach. When something happens against your will, say: "Glory to God! Glory to God!" One needs to restrain oneself.

All afflictions and unhappiness are sent to us because we do not have humility. We need to live as God commands, and not as we want to. Nothing happens without God's will. In our lives there is nothing accidental. I pray to the Lord, that His will would always be with me.

In afflictions, read three chapters from the Gospels.

One who is striving towards monasticism must not be troubled by anything, but must put all his hope in God.

To my words that the Lord had abandoned me, Vladyka Seraphim replied: "These words of yours are from the Devil. The Lord cannot abandon you. He is merciful. You cannot even imagine God's mercy. Therefore all the God-Pleasers were distinguished by their mercy."



If you fall into despondency, read the Lives of Saints. Strive to read at least a few lines from them. For the soul, they are truly grace-filled rain, which refresh, reassure, and gladden.

It is difficult for you, but think of how it was for the Savior on the Cross. The end is near; life passes quickly. We are guests on earth, migratory birds.

Always remember these words: “The earth is cruel, but Paradise is sweet.”

On the Battle with Sin

Steep and thorny is the path that leads to the Heavenly Kingdom. What is your path? It is the struggle unto blood against fleshly passions and self-love. Self-love is the soil upon which grow passions, emptiness of life, and sorrow.

Hatred of sin is the beginning of spiritual rebirth.

Do not give assent to the demons!

There is nothing worse than insolent sin (that is, when one sins consciously).

Vladyka Seraphim said: “Spiritual philosophy is a difficult science: one needs to spend ten years reading lives and battling with one’s passions.”

Self-love brings sorrow and is healed by silence.

Battle against self-love with silence. The Devil most often destroys people through vanity. In earthly delights is hidden the poison of perdition.

To mock and to joke – therein lie a subtle manifestation of vainglory!

To the question: How does one battle with gluttony? Vladyka replied: “Through abstinence.”

Never envy. This is a grievous sin.

Walk down the street with lowered eyes.

The Lord especially values virginity and loves monks. At first it is very difficult and one needs constantly to compel oneself, but in the end the Savior’s words are fulfilled: *For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light* (Matthew 11:30).

Dispassion is the victory over passions. From it, complete peace comes upon the soul – the Heavenly Kingdom while still on earth.

On Prayer



The Lord is near; if you call upon Him, He will respond immediately!

Pray as simply as possible. For example: “Lord, have mercy!” And when you turn to the Mother of God, say: “Matushka, Heavenly Queen!”

Prayer saves from all afflictions.

When you are despondent, it is good to read the Savior’s parting discourse with His disciples (cf. John 13-17) or the Psalter.

On the power of the Psalms, Vladyka Seraphim said: “Saul was comforted by the Psalms of David when he was seized by strong sorrow. St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, to whom the Lord send the hard trial of despondency and sorrow, also always read the Psalter.”

If it is difficult for you to pray and your heart is stony, one needs first of all to recite the prayer “O Theotokos and Virgin,” and then it will become easier for you.

During the course of the day, constantly repeat “O Theotokos and Virgin”; and, if you will do this, the Mother of God will love you.

When you pray to the All-Holy Theotokos, call her Virgin. This is especially hateful to the demons.

A spiritual child of Vladyka Seraphim shared with him that it was difficult for him to maintain attention on the words of prayer. Vladyka told him: “Herein lies everything: constantly to compel oneself to attention, constantly to return one’s mind to the heart, because only thereby is true prayer attained.”

To the question: How does one learn heartfelt prayer? Vladyka Seraphim said: “In the Jesus Prayer, one needs to concentrate one’s heart on the word ‘Lord.’ As a string gives forth sound when one plucks it, so too does the heart manifest love, compunction, and tears when one concentrates on the word ‘Lord.’”

Read the Lives of Saints. In them you will find everything; they will teach you everything. Compare yourself not with your neighbors, but with the saints – such a comparison reveals to us how great sinners we are.

The highest form of deception is prayer for display. Act like the fool-for-Christ Vasenka, whom I once visited. He prayed without ceasing, but when he heard that one of the nuns was approaching, he would immediately lie down and start snoring. That is how one should behave.

Concerning prayer, Vladyka Seraphim also said: “Not a single one of our prayerful tears is in vain.”

On Repentance

If you want the Lord to be merciful to you, always repent, be merciful to the suffering, and comfort them. *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7).*



One always needs to repent of one's sins. It is especially important every evening, before sleep, to repent to God for the sins that we have committed over the course of the day.

If the Devil had repented, the Lord would have forgiven him. This is written in the Life of St. Anthony the Great.

Self-accusation is the beginning of salvation, while self-justification is perdition for man.

To the question: "How to repent" Vladyka Seraphim replied: "Say: 'O God, have mercy on me a sinner,'" and then added that Fr. Ambrose of Optina, when he was asked: "How should one pray?" replied: "At first I read many prayers, but now I only repeat the prayer of the publican."

For you to learn repentance depends not only on me, but more on you yourself. Repentance in its essence is humility. And you must humble yourself. Then humility will teach you true repentance.

Vladyka Seraphim often recalled the Russian saying: "Do not search the village, but search in yourself." This meant that one should not seek blame in others, but in oneself. "Blame yourself for everything," he added.

On Simplicity of Heart

Be as simple as a child, as trustful as a dove, and as wise as a serpent.

Remember Christ's words: *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven* (Matthew 18:3). This is your main rule: be simple in all your thoughts, feelings, words, behavior, and your relations with people. Being simple means not in any way allowing artificiality and behaving before people as before God. To become simple means a change, a change of life; it means such a change as can be accomplished by the right hand of the Most High (Psalm 76:11 – *This change hath been wrought by the right hand of the Most High*). Then you shall not perish, for simplicity is humility. And on humble people God spreads His grace as upon the Holy Table.

On the Orthodox Faith

Guard sacredly and strictly our Orthodox Faith, both in its canons and in its dogmas. Do not adapt your faith to your life, but your life to the faith. Draw all your happiness from the True Orthodox Faith. Then you will be true sons of the Orthodox Church, and the Lord will pour out on you even here His boundless mercy.

Someone might say: "Why does one need to guard faith in Christ and strive to acquire the other Christian virtues? Is it not enough to have love in order to be found worth of eternal salvation?" Such questions arise only among those who have no understanding of the Christian spiritual life. Can one climb a mountain without going up its foothills? Obviously not. In just such a way one cannot, without the foundation of all the Christian virtues – that is, without sincere faith in Christ – attain the summit of love.

Let us remember, my beloved children in Christ, that *without faith it is impossible to please Him* (Hebrews



11:6), that without the Orthodox Faith there is no grace, that there is no true love for one's neighbors, and that there is only fatal egoism or only empty words about love, such as is the case among heretics and sectarians. Therefore, let us make an effort sacredly and strictly to guard the Orthodox Faith, and along with it always to have a grace-filled, true love for our neighbors.

Translated from the [Russian](#).