My Core Values

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Note: As I always maintain, everything I say below is only my opinion, which is based on my own experiences and observations. – *Swami Devanand*

Everyone should have his/her own set of values.

I think it is very important to formulate one's own set of basic values and principles. This set must be based on your own understanding of yourself and your true nature, and not based on what you think is a "nice value" to have. There cannot be a standard set of values that everyone can adopt since there is great variation in our natures.

You need to practice and adapt to these values over time.

Like everything else, just formulating such a "set of values" is not enough. You need to work on incorporating and practicing these values and principles in your day-to-day behavior. You need to periodically examine whether you are really following your principles.

When you see a conflict between your action and a value you believed in, you need to analyze whether that value goes against your true nature, or whether you were just sloppy and careless. This sort of conflict happened in my case also. Some time ago, I was all gung-ho about *quality*, i.e. I felt that it was important to achieve *high quality* in everything we did, and hence I included *quality* in my basic set of values. To remain quality-conscious, I was required to criticize low-quality work. But, after a while, I realized that it went against my nature to constantly find fault with people's actions or with my surroundings. And so, I dropped *quality* from my basic set of values! I still value and appreciate quality and I strive for it, but, it is no longer my core value, i.e. I don't worry too much if everything I do doesn't turn out to be high quality.

Independence is my core value.

Independence is a complex word and its meaning has numerous flavors. To me *independence* firstly means *self-reliance*. It means I should always strive to reduce my dependence on others to fulfill my needs. I should try not to be a burden on others. Of course, it is impossible to be 100% self-reliant. As a child, for example, I could not have survived without my parents. Or, when I am sick, I cannot refuse help. The point is: I should make all reasonable attempts to be self-reliant, and at least avoid taking favors/help when it is not needed.

Of course, self-reliance also does not mean I should refuse friendly gestures and favors made with unselfish motives. A beautiful thing about life is that our loved ones like to do things for us. If I denied such favors I would be unjust to them as well as to myself.

To me, *independence* also means making my own decisions. This is also being *self-reliant* in a sense. I should not depend on others to make decisions for me, and must take responsibility for what I do. This aspect can sometimes be annoying to my friends and well-wishers, but, it's a tricky matter and I try my best to assuage their dissatisfaction with me, but rarely sacrifice my core value of staying independent. I think making my own decisions (and mistakes) allows me to avoid having to blame others and accept events even-mindedly. It also allows me to be in charge of my life and be able to exercise all the other values mentioned here.

Independence also means I should discourage others from depending on me. This can be confused to mean I do not like to help others! No, it doesn't mean that. It simply means 'offering help when help is not needed creates dependence' and I should avoid that.

The other flavor of *independence* has to do with *freedom*. To me it is the *freedom of spirit*. I try to remain *free-spirited* by avoiding becoming a slave to anyone or to anything. "Anything" is really a vast word – but in particular it includes things such as, ideologies, emotions, desires, and ambitions. Of course, life would be quite dull if there were no emotions, desires, ambitions, or ideologies. I am not proposing that these are all bad things. The point is I try not to become a *slave* to any of them, in the sense where my mind becomes obsessed, closed, and set on a path of no return. *Freedom* is about always having a choice to change course, to change ideas, to change decisions, and so on.

Progress is my core value.

Life runs on a multi-lane highway. Each lane symbolizes an important aspect of life, such as, the physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and so on. One who is able to keep his life's vehicle going in all these lanes, is likely to feel happy and successful. I try to ensure I am making "progress" on each of these fronts. Sometimes, I get too focused on one aspect and ignore the rest. Which I think is fine, as long as I don't forget to return to the other aspects at some later time. In the bigger scheme of things, I should try to do justice to each of these lanes. That's *progress* to me. It must be on-going, never-ending.

Action is my core value.

We often get stuck in the phase of making grand schemes or plans. While having a vision or mission is important, staying idle is not good. I always favor action over analysis. Planning and vision-painting must be attempted, because that gives direction to action. Action without direction can be wasteful. But, even then, I give preference to action over idleness, even if sometimes there is no clear direction, because, often, direction is found through action and exploration, whereas, planning and analysis can cause mental fatigue and cynicism.

Being action-oriented allows me to tolerate delays and interruptions. It's when one makes plans that one gets frustrated with these things.

Being action-oriented allows me to stay relatively immune to results. It's when one makes plans, one becomes conscious of outcomes. With less focus on outcomes, action itself becomes enjoyable. Sometimes along the way I am even rewarded with unexpected pleasant surprises, which would not be predictable in any plan.

Acceptance is my core value.

Acceptance as a basic value has been very helpful to me. *Acceptance* is mainly applicable when you are faced with adverse, uncomfortable, unsatisfactory, or painful situations. According to this value, I believe it's important to accept the people around you for what they are and accept your circumstances as they present themselves, instead of complaining, rejecting, or blaming.

Acceptance is not a matter of just superficially saying "I accept", but truly in your heart accepting the situation or the person. Of course, that took me a lot of practice, and I still have to work on it! But, it has certainly made me more at peace with my environment.

Acceptance does not mean compromise.

Acceptance is not the same as being *fatalistic*. It is not the *conclusion* of a matter. For me, acceptance is only the first step. After I accept a situation, I start thinking about whether and how I can improve it. If, for example, I did not make satisfactory returns on an investment, I first accept it with the least possible bitterness or grief. But, later, I try to figure out if there is a better way to improve my returns. Everyone that works in my team has already been *accepted* for what he/she is, so, if they make a mistake or do something that may be generally unsatisfactory, it does not bother me greatly; I am able to accept it without much effort. Because, I am optimistic that that mistake can be corrected.

So, for someone like me, *acceptance* requires him/her to be very optimistic that things will improve.

Gratitude is my core value.

Gratitude is another basic value that I try to incorporate in my thinking and behavior. Whereas acceptance is about dealing with the negative aspect of our environment, *gratitude* is about responding to everything else. I try to be grateful for everything – small or big – that's going well. Starting with simply being alive every day, to being in good health, to getting food to eat, and so on, I look for as many reasons to be grateful as possible. When someone cooks something for me, my first reaction is to be thankful for her generosity and kindness. The thought of criticizing some minor aspect of the dish is far from my mind. I try to be grateful for every act of kindness performed (by anyone) for me. I get joy for the beauty and bounty of Mother Nature that are presented to me – whether it's in the form of cold or heat, snow or rain, sunshine or clouds, plains or mountains.

I think *gratitude* helps me to be constantly aware of how fortunate I am to be a living, intelligent human being on this extremely rare and beautiful planet called earth in this vast and indifferent universe. In comparison to all the things that I feel grateful for, my miseries and inadequacies start appearing pitifully insignificant.

Simplicity is my core value.

What is simplicity? To me, simplicity means selecting a way of living or doing things that leads to the least amount of stress and maximum degree of freedom. In almost every sphere of life, you have alternatives to choose from. Simplicity asks you to choose the one alternative that:
- Is easy to understand
- Is easy to implement
- Creates minimum burden on your time and freedom.

Complexity (the opposite of Simplicity) leads to loss of control, waste of time and energy, frustration, and in most cases disasters. Symptoms of complexity include perennial shortage of time and nagging worry about something.

Collecting personal assets leads to complexity. These assets require money, space, maintenance, and protection, and often lead to your emotional involvement. They take away a piece (and sometimes peace too) of your mind. Having fewer assets, on the other hand, leaves you freer, richer, and unencumbered. Mahatma Gandhi's fixed assets consisted of his walking stick, a pair of clothes, his eye-

glasses, writing pen, and a copy of Bhagvad Geeta! I don't think I can go that far, but, I certainly try to think hard before acquiring anything for myself.

Simplicity is related to consumerism. The more money you spend, the more complexity you create. Live within your means (which means don't spend more than you earn). Do everything in the most economical way. Save money for the rainy day. Use things that you are comfortable with; don't fall for brand names. Use things to the very end of their useful lifetime. Don't get greedy. Of course, these are the things I tell myself.

Simplicity plays a big role in how you handle your relationships. Getting emotionally involved with anyone's affairs so much that you start demanding things in return (favors or authority) is akin to incurring *complexity*. Keeping some detachment, but offering a caring and warm relationship is *simplicity*. Give your best to your friend or relative, but expect little in return – that is simplicity. Of course, "staying detached" and "giving your best" may sound contradictory. But, it is my experience that "detachment" is related to "taking" or "expectations", and so, it does not really conflict with "giving". Of course, I don't claim that I have perfected these things, but, I certainly see their benefits whenever they work for me.

Simplicity is applicable in the workplace – in the choice of management techniques (if you are a manager), or working methodologies (if you are a worker). One can build, for example, complex management theories, and get lost in them; or one can adopt time-tested, easy-to-understand, and transparent models, and achieve much more. As an engineer (which is what I am), the simpler the models or equations you choose, the higher is the likelihood of your product becoming elegant and actually getting built on time. (Einstein used to say that any natural phenomenon that requires a complex mathematical equation is probably not well understood.) As a computer programmer, the simpler the algorithms, the fewer the bugs your code will have.

Simplicity has great implications in daily routines. Your morning exercise routine can be made greatly complex by requiring expensive Gym equipment or club memberships. If the Gym is closed, or if you are traveling, your exercise routine goes for a toss. A simpler exercise routine that requires only a mat and a small room, would work anywhere. Dependence on other people's services creates complexity. Your driver or housemaid doesn't turn up, or demands a pay hike; you have lost your peace of mind. Self-reliance is simplicity – you are free and unencumbered anywhere, any time.

Sometimes simplicity can mean you get less than others. For example, investing in the stock market is certainly complex – requiring a lot of time, mental stress, and so on, but it is potentially more rewarding financially than the simplistic method of investing in liquid funds and fixed deposits. One must choose such complexity based on one's temperament. In general though, the rewards of simplicity outweigh those of complexity.

Living a simple life does not mean leading a dull life.
There are probably two types of "simple" life. One involves simplicity in everything - including in relationships. This was probably adopted by people like Swami Vivekanand. The other type of "simple life" is more practical for ordinary people like me and that is the one I would like to practice. Which is this: Simplicity in all "stupid" things so that I can live a rich (not necessarily complex) life in "meaningful" things. In this theory, for example, having deep friendships is included in "meaningful" things. So, although, (as mentioned above) keeping a safe distance from people is part of this type of simplicity, exception is to be made when you sense someone special, because that is the very "purpose" of simplifying everything else!

Simplicity may be attractive but it takes a tough mental discipline to adopt. The marketing-infested environment that we live in today entices us to upgrade our lifestyle every day. When we upgrade we run the risk of losing simplicity. The rules to observe in order to maintain simplicity are: 1) Don't blindly get into experimentation with completely new things unless their purpose and utility are properly understood, and, 2) Upgrade (existing possessions to new ones) only if the existing ones are broken or given away. For example, I don't buy new shoes unless the old ones are damaged. I don't download a new software version (even if it is free!) if the existing version meets all my needs.

Summary: Simplicity and Complexity are *not* two sides of a coin; they are actually two ends of a wide spectrum. Calibrate your lifestyle on this spectrum such that you get peace of mind and freedom. The more you live nearer the "Simplicity end, the happier you will find yourself to be.

Resource-consciousness is my core value.
This consists of the following R's:
a.   REFUSE: refuse to acquire things that are unnecessary, wasteful, or dangerous for the environment. I will refuse to acquire/accept anything if I can live without it.

b.   REUSE: I will use my existing resources again and again.

c.   REDUCE: If I must acquire something, I will try to reduce my requirement.

d.   RECYCLE: I will let it be processed so that it can be reused by someone else.

e.   REPLENISH: I will try to replace what I have taken (e.g. plant a tree).

Gentleness is my core value.

I try to be gentle with people and things. I think when we are rough with things they break or give lower quality service. When we are rough with people, we risk damaging relationships and creating stress. Gentleness is about performing actions carefully, thoughtfully, delicately, and without haste. For example, when I see people banging on their computer keyboard as if it were an unbreakable everlasting tool, I feel sorry for them and for their keyboards. By being gentle we increase the longevity of our surroundings and thus enjoy their benefits longer.

Gentleness also helps you grow spiritually, because you begin to appreciate better the existence and purpose of everyone and everything around you. A device that provides a certain type of service is not just a piece of dead, easily-replaceable metal anymore; it becomes the manifestation of natural forces to serve a specific purpose. Being gentle with people basically means protecting their dignity and avoiding hurtful treatment. Gentleness with people helps reduce friction, increase mutual respect, and strengthen relationships. At least it prevents creating enemies.

Finally, gentleness towards myself is implicit – it helps me avoid accidental injuries to my body and mind. It is evident that a large number of accidents are due to actions performed thoughtlessly and in haste.

Adventure is my core value.

I think we get to live this human life once, and so, we should make every attempt to make it interesting. Being adventurous means exploring new ideas, going off the routine track, pushing the envelope, and flirting with the cutting edge, etc. In everything I do, I try to be unconventional and question whether there are other ways to do things, and if there is more out there than meets the eye. In my relationships, I push people to levels of interaction that they may not be familiar with. In my day-to-day life I explore new ways to do the same routine things.

Of course, adventure comes with risk, and so, sometimes adventures fail in spectacular ways. To deal with this, I assess the risk associated with every

adventure and assure myself that I am willing to take that risk. For example, I do not take part in things that involve physical risk, like sky-diving. I am not prepared to lose a part of my body just to enjoy such an adventure. I also do not endanger the lives or well-being of other individuals for the sake of my own adventures. But, I feel, there are still numerous adventures to be enjoyed in human life.

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