

# LIGHT ON LIFE'S DIFFICULTIES



**JAMES ALLEN**

**THE MIND POWER SERIES VOL. 44**

# Light On Life's Difficulties

James Allen

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*Light On Life's Difficulties, J. Allen*  
*Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck*  
*86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9*  
*Deutschland*

*ISBN: 9783849615703*

*[www.jazzybee-verlag.de](http://www.jazzybee-verlag.de)*  
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## **James Allen: A Prophet of Meditation**

Although the late James Allen, of Ilfracombe, is comparatively unknown, yet to thousands of seekers after

truth, he has proved a guide, philosopher, and friend. One of his works, "As a Man Thinketh", has gone into no less than eleven editions; surely proof that he has a considerable vogue. The most casual reader of any of his works cannot fail to be impressed by the simplicity, cheerfulness, and benevolence which seem to radiate from the soul of the writer. We cannot place James Allen in any exclusive category, as he teaches so much that harmonizes with all the best thought of our age. Liberal Christians, Theosophists, and many other enlightened bodies of truth-seekers may claim him as an exponent of at least several of their distinctive views; be he was simply a strong, true, individual man who wrote and spoke out of the depth of his own convictions, and never held himself bound to voice the peculiar tenets of any cult. Wide knowledge of the Scriptures of the world, professedly sacred and other, coupled with intense sympathy with all human causes have rendered his works a delight to the scholar, as well as an inspiration to the less cultured aspirant for instruction in that path of wisdom which inevitably leads to power and peace. His literary style is clear and simple, and in dealing with subjects that are often vague and illusory, he used language that made his meaning easily understood. James Allen disliked publicity, and, perhaps, it is because of his disregard of the uses of advertisement that he is not so well known as he might otherwise have been. After all, however, it is the man's message that matters, and he who runs may read in the James Allen Library the story of the spiritual life of the writer. The worship of the personality was a thing that he always guarded against, and for that reason his body was cremated and his ashes scattered to the four winds of Heaven, so that no man or woman in the future could make a place of pilgrimage of his grave, or say "the dust of James Allen lies here.": His books alone are monuments to his memory, and they are being sent with the utmost speed to all the corners of the earth, and are being

translated into various languages. "The Eight Pillars of Prosperity" has just been published in the Spanish tongue.

James Allen was born in Leicester on November 28th, 1864. His father was at one time a very prosperous manufacturer, but evil days overtook him when James was about fifteen years of age. Nearly everything was lost, and Allen, senior, taking what money was left, went to America to make a new home for his wife and family, but within two days of his arrival in that country he met with an accident and died in a New York hospital. His empty pocket-book and an old silver watch were returned to the family as the only things found upon him. James now found himself in his native town of Leicester, at the age of fifteen, with a mother and two younger brothers to support. He worked as many as fifteen hours a day in a factory, but never gave up his beloved books.

Mr. Allen states that at the age of seventeen, he found his father's Shakespeare, of which he became an ardent reader. "I read Shakespeare," he himself has said, "in the early morning, at breakfast time, in the dinner hour, and in the evening." He knew the whole of the plays by heart ultimately, and could lose himself in them when surrounded by hundreds of workmen and by the whir and thud of machinery.

Then came Emerson's Essays, calm and radiant, revealing to him a higher realm than that of the passions with their fleeting pleasures and certain pains. "Circles," "Compensation," "The Over-Soul," and "Self Reliance" were the essays which impressed him most, particularly "Self Reliance," which showed him the importance of conduct and the worth and dignity of character. It helped him to battle successfully with natural timidity, which put a check on initiative and originality.

Then, at age 23, he came across Sir Edwin Arnold's "The Light of Asia." Describing his sensations after reading it, he has said, "I could not stir from my seat till I read every word. When I did rise from the reading of this book, it was as though I had become a different man. A curtain seemed to have rolled back from the face of the Universe, and I saw the causes and meaning of things which had hitherto been dark mysteries. There was a revelation which was almost blending in its brilliance and suddenness, an exaltation which alarmed me while it transported me into a felicitous insight. The vision quickly faded, but its influence remained, the memory of it saving me in many an hour of darkness and temptation, until that calmer time of meditation and knowledge, ten years later, when it returned never again to fade from the mind." In "The Light of Asia," Sir Edwin Arnold sought, by the medium of an imaginary Buddhist votary, to depict the life and character and indicate the philosophy of that noble hero and reformer, Prince Gautama of India, the founder of Buddhism. "More than a third of mankind owe their moral and religious ideas to this illustrious prince, whose personality, though imperfectly revealed in the existing sources of information, cannot but appear the highest, gentlest, holiest, and most beneficent, which one exception, in the history of Thought."

If ye lay bound upon the wheel of change,  
And no way were of breaking from the chain,  
The Heart of boundless Being is a curse,  
The soul of thing fell pain.  
Ye are not bound! The soul of things is sweet,  
The heart of being is celestial rest;  
Stronger than woe is will; that which was good  
Doth pass to better -best.  
I, Buddha, who wept with all my brother's tears,

Whose heart was broken by a whole world's woe,  
Laugh and am glad, for there is liberty!  
Ho! Ye who suffer! Know.  
Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels,  
None other holds you that ye live and die,  
And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss  
Its spokes of agony.  
Its tire of tears, its nave of nothingness,  
Behold, I show you Truth! Lower than hell,  
Higher than heaven, outside the utmost stars,  
Farther than Brahm doth dwell.  
Before beginning, and without an end,  
As space eternal and as surety sure,  
Is fixed a power divine which moves to good,  
Only its laws endure.

From the date of reading "The Light of Asia" began James Allen's great search for truth.

At the age of 26 came "The Bhagavad Gita." There followed the books of the Chinese sages and the Gospel of Buddha by Paul Carus, Dr. Bucke's Cosmic Conservances also had an influence on him, inasmuch as it gave a scientific explanation of what had already been revealed inwardly.

When about the age of 25, James Allen left his native town and went to London, where he was for a time a private secretary, working from 9 to 6 o'clock, and using every moment out of office hours for writing his books. He afterwards founded "The Light of Reason," and gave up his time to the work of editing the magazine, at the same time carrying on a voluminous correspondence with searchers after truth all over the world. He met Mrs. Allen, who was a sister in an East End mission at the time, when he was 29 years of age. She proved a true mate, and now carries on

the work which her husband inaugurated. Leaving London, they took up residence in beautiful Ilfracombe, where the remainder of James Allen's life was spent.

His first book was "From Poverty to Power," which is considered to be his best work. It has passed into many editions, and Mrs. Allen states that tens of thousands have been sold all over the world, both authorized and pirated editions. In this book he urges the reader to strive to realize, and merely hold as a theory, the evil is a passing phase, a self-created shadow; that all your pains, sorrows, and misfortunes have come to you by a process of undeviating and absolutely perfect law; have come to you because you deserve and require them, and that by first enduring, and then understanding them, you may be made stronger, wiser, nobler. He says: "When you have fully entered into his realization, you will be in a position to mould your own circumstances, to transmute all evil into good, and to weave, with a master hand, the fabric of your destiny." Soon after the publication of "From Poverty to Power," came "All These Things Added," and then, "As a Man Thinketh." Other books followed such as "Above Life's Turmoil," "The Mastery of Destiny," "Byways of Blessedness," "The Life Triumphant," "Out From the Heart," "Through the Gate of Good," "From Passion to Peace," "Man: King of Mind, Body, and Circumstance," and "The Eight Pillars of Prosperity." James Allen took a keen interest in many scientific subjects, delighting in astronomy, geology, and botany, and might have written on a wide range of subjects had he chosen to do so. He was often asked for articles on many question outside his own particular work, but he refused to comply, concentrating his whole thought and effort on preaching the gospel of selflessness. After a short illness, he died on January 24th, 1912, in the forty-eighth year of his age. Six days later his remains were cremated at Leicester, and his ashes were