

## Counsel For Those Contemplating A Missionary Life<sup>1</sup>

*Missionary Adoniram Judson to the Foreign Missionary Association  
of the Hamilton Literary and Theological Institution, N. Y.*

Maulmain, June 25, 1832

Dear Brethren: Your letter of last November, from the pen of your Corresponding Secretary, Mr. William Dean, is before me. It is one of the few letters that I feel called upon to answer, for you ask my advice on several important points. There is, also, in the sentiments you express, something so congenial to my own, that I feel my heart knit to the members of your association, and instead of a commonplace reply, I am desirous of setting down a few items which may be profitable to you in your future course. Brief items they must be, for my lack of time forbids me from writing at length and in detail.

In commencing my remarks, I take you as you are. You are *contemplating a missionary life*.

1. **Let it be a missionary life;** that is, come out for life, and not for a limited term. Do not fancy that you have a true missionary spirit, while you are intending all along to leave the heathen soon after acquiring their language. Leave them! For what? To spend the rest of your days enjoying the ease and plenty of your native land?
2. **In choosing a spouse for life,** have a particular regard to someone who has strong vitality and health, and not deliberately, or without good cause, bring a burden on yourselves and the mission.
3. **Be not ravenous to do good on board ship.**<sup>2</sup> Missionaries have frequently done more hurt than good, by unwise zeal, during their passage out.
4. Take care that the attention you receive at home, the unfavorable circumstances in which you will be placed on board ship, the unmissionary examples you may possibly meet with at some missionary stations, **do not transform you from living missionaries to mere skeletons before you reach the place of your destination.** It may be profitable to bear in mind, that a large proportion of those who come out on a mission to the East die within five years after leaving their native land. Walk softly, therefore; death is narrowly watching your steps.
5. **Beware of the reaction which will take place soon after reaching your field of labor.** There you will perhaps find native Christians of whose merits or demerits you cannot judge correctly without some familiar acquaintance with their language. Some appearances will combine to disappoint and disgust you. You

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<sup>1</sup> This was taken from: Pulling the Eye Tooth from a Live Tiger - A Memoir of the Life and Labors of Adoniram Judson Volume 2 by Francis Wayland, p. 38-41.

<sup>2</sup> *All footnotes have been added by the editor.* It is recorded that his journey by vessel from Salem, MA, USA to India was over 150 days.

will meet with disappointments and discouragements, of which it is impossible to form a correct idea from written accounts, and which will lead you, at first, almost to regret that you have embarked on the cause. You will see men and women who you have been accustomed to viewing through a telescope some thousands of miles long. Such an instrument is apt to magnify. Beware therefore of the reaction you will experience from a combination of all these causes, lest you become disheartened at commencing your work, or take up a prejudice against some persons and places, which will embitter all your future lives.

6. **Beware of the greater reaction which will take place after you have acquired the language** and become fatigued and worn out with preaching the gospel to a disobedient and gainsaying people. You will sometimes long for a quiet retreat, where you can find a respite from the tug of toiling at native work—the incessant, intolerable friction of the missionary grindstone. And Satan will sympathize with you in this matter; and he will present some chapel of ease, in which to officiate in your native tongue, some government situation, some professorship or editorship, some literary or scientific pursuit, some supernumerary translation, or, at least, some system of schools; anything, in a word, that will help you, without much surrender of character, to slip out of real missionary work. Such a temptation will form the crisis of your disease. If your spiritual constitution can sustain it, you recover; if not, you die.
7. **Beware of pride; not the pride of proud men, but the pride of humble men**—that secret pride which is apt to grow out of the consciousness that we are esteemed by the great and good. This pride sometimes eats out the vitals of religion before its existence is suspected. In order to check its operations, it may be well to remember how we appear in the sight of God, and how we should appear in the sight of our fellow-men *if all were known*. Endeavor to let all be known. Confess your faults freely and as publicly as circumstances will require or admit. When you have done something of which you are ashamed, and by which, perhaps, some person has been injured, (and what man is exempt?) be glad not only to make reparation but improve the opportunity for subduing your pride.
8. **Never lay up money for yourselves or your families.** Trust in God from day to day, and verily you shall be fed.
9. **Beware of that laziness which leads to a neglect of bodily exercise.** The poor healthy and premature death of most Europeans in the East must be eminently ascribed to the most deliberate neglect of bodily exercise.

10. **Beware of refined and genteel living.** Maintain as little interaction as possible with fashionable European society.<sup>3</sup> The mode of living adopted by many missionaries in the East is quite inconsistent with that familiar interaction with the natives which is essential to a missionary.<sup>4</sup>

There are many points of self-denial that I should like to touch upon, but a consciousness of my own deficiency constrains me to be silent. I have also left untouched several topics of vital importance, it having been my aim to select such only as appear to me to have been not much noticed or enforced. I hope you will excuse the monitorial style that I have accidentally adopted. I assure you, I mean no harm.

In regard to your inquiries concerning studies, qualifications, etc., nothing occurs that I think would be particularly useful, except the simple remark, that I fear too much stress begins to be laid on what is termed a thorough classical education.<sup>5</sup>

Praying that you may be guided in all your deliberations and that I may yet have the pleasure of welcoming some of you to these heathen shores, I remain

Your affectionate brother,

A. Judson

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<sup>3</sup>From the close of the war to his removal to Maulmain, Dr. Judson had been intimately associated with many of the civil and military officers of the British Government...He was frequently the honored and cherished guest of the gentlemen to whom the care of the ceded provinces was committed. He however, soon perceived that engagements of this kind, from being mere relaxation, began to engross too much of that time the whole of which he had devoted exclusively to the Burmans. In a matter of duty, he was incapable of doing a thing by halves. He immediately resolved to cut off everything like fashionable interaction with his English friends—a resolution to which he steadfastly adhered to the close of his life...No one enjoyed intelligent and cultivated society more keenly than he; and he surrendered it only in obedience to those principles by which he designed to govern his life. — pg. 446-447, Volume 1: Pulling the Eye Tooth Out of a Live Tiger

<sup>4</sup>"There are several missionaries...who never acquire the languages, except a mere smattering of them...but beguile their time and expend their labors among their own countrymen and the country-born population, under the fallacious idea that through them the Christian religion will gradually reach the masses of the native population. (p. 318)

<sup>5</sup>Judson wrote on January 3, 1835 saying, "My ideas of a seminary are very different from those of many persons. I am really unwilling to place young men, that have just begun to love the Savior, under teachers who will strive to carry them through a long course of study, until they are able to unravel metaphysics, and calculate eclipses, and their souls become as dry as the one and as dark as the other. I have known several promising young men completely ruined by this process. Nor is it called for in the present state of the church in Burma. I want to see our young disciples thoroughly acquainted with the Bible from beginning to end, and with geography and history, so far as necessary to understand the Scriptures, and to furnish them with enlarged, enlightened minds. I would also have them carried through a course of systematic theology, on the plan, perhaps, of Dwight's. And I would have them well instructed in the art of communicating their ideas intelligibly and acceptably by *word* and by *writing*."