

The Philosophical Research Society, Inc.

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THE BEGINNINGS OF LEARNING



DEAR FRIENDS:



IN THE BEGINNING of the human experience, there was no formal system for the transmission of knowledge. The earliest social organizations that we know were the brood families united by blood ties. Leadership was usually invested in women who were the matriarchs of their clan. What passed for education was the perpetuation of beliefs and experiences of the elders. The facilities provided by rudimentary languages were scanty and inadequate. Words were clarified by gestures which gradually evolved into ritualistic patterns. Even in these remote days of prehistory, families realized the importance of guiding their children along the road to self-sufficiency. Each child was born into a strange and uncertain environment. Life was a continuing struggle for survival against natural adversities. The responsibility for the instruction of the young was in the keeping of the elders who could only share their extremely limited thoughts with their descendants. In the brood family all knowledge was held in common and was passed on as a common heritage.

In the course of time a tribal society developed. The various groups made possible a broader foundation of traditions and experiences. Learning passed into the keeping of tribal sages, many of whom were mystics having psychic powers. From them came a rude structure of religious conviction, leading gradually to simple ethical and moral teachings. In the tribal structure community forms of initiation provided children with a more or less formalized system of instruction. Rituals became associated with every major aspect of life. There were ceremonies attending birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Nearly always such observances were accompanied by trials or tests, often severe, to prepare the young for the responsibilities of maturity. It was an ancient rule that children were not born as citizens, but were required to prove their devotion to the well-being of the collective unit to which they belonged. There were two systems of rites; one for the boys and the other for the girls, suitable to the different needs of their respective sexes. Normally the girls were

encouraged to discipline and enrich their emotional natures and to become custodians of the gentler values of life. In later times they were the custodians of the arts, whereas the boys were equipped to protect the survival of the clan in war or peace. The matriarchal structure continued and endures to this day among the remnants of the tribal institutions. It required thousands of years to bring about the next important step in the advancement of culture.

The family archetype unfolded through that great system of Mystery Schools that flourished among all the nations of antiquity. In these institutions knowledge was not separated into specialized arts and sciences as we know them today. The educational system was holistic. Knowledge was one body of information, substantially interdependent. There was no separation between religious and secular learning, and moral teachings dominated in these schools. The old tribal rites were enriched with elaborate symbolism in which the candidates actually participated, or to which they were observers. Concurrently there were philosophers who accepted private pupils, imparting to them broad concepts suitable to elevate the mind and strengthen integrity. In Greece sages such as Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras gathered about them qualified disciples and contributed to the public weal. From these instructors and their academies, the Mystery Schools gained many of their initiates. The Mystery system itself was divided into several grades through which candidates progressed according to their capacities. From the ancient tribal lore descended the conviction that each of the stages of human life required special consideration. Like the brood family the sanctuary-universities were principally concerned with preparing the individual for the duties of citizenship in the larger political-social culture.

Twenty-five centuries ago the great Chinese sage, Confucius, pointed out that the survival of civilization depended upon the security of the home. This was the earliest of human convictions and continues to be the most important single factor in human life. Perhaps it would be useful to give serious consideration to this subject. The Mystery institutions were patterned after the archetypal symbolism of the brood family. Every home is a temple of initiation and the earliest school of essential learning. The elders of the family are the officers presiding over this lodge. They take the places anciently assigned to the sages, counselors, and masters of the mysteries. Among the Amerindian tribes of the Southwest the instructors of mankind are called "the olds," and "the trues." From them descends the sacred tradition and that mysterious radiance which the Iriquois Indian described as "orenda." This term implies veneration for the wisdom of the past, dedication to the responsibilities of mature living, and respect for all created things. The young person became proud of his racial and cultural heritage and realized that it was his moral duty to keep faith with the heroes of the past. Orenda brought with it a kind of enthusiasm and a voluntary dedication to the highest convictions of the soul.

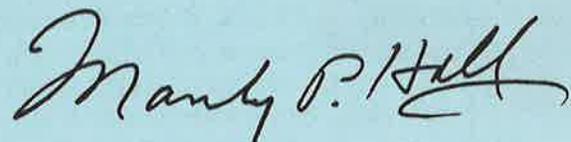
Each child born into the home is a candidate for initiation into the sacred mysteries of human purpose and destiny. Most of the secret societies of the past were divided into three grades and the novices were expected to understand the various symbols which distinguished these grades. The individual passes through three degrees of personal unfoldment and the path along which he advances is ordained by Nature, itself. The first degree is childhood which is primarily concerned with adjustment to existence in the material

world. The soul coming into birth must be guided lovingly and wisely as it begins the perilous journey of mortality. Here, the parents must explore the depths of their own insight and understanding and become deeply involved in the destiny of their children. The end of the labor is physical orientation, not only in society, but in the terms of the physical body itself. The second degree is adolescence, a time of extreme stress in which the emotional life is unfolding and intensifying. Wisdom appropriate to this occasion should also be imparted by the elders, not only by words, but through personal example. Moral teachings are imparted, not from prejudice or intolerance, but with the highest available degree of spiritual insight. It is at this period that religious principles which are to become the guardians and guides of conduct must be established in the psychic nature of the young person. The third degree corresponds with maturity. It is intended that the mind shall become the director of character. Maturity brings with it responsibility and the ability to accept with dignity collective and personal obligations. It is the beginning of the life of service. Career becomes important. The adult builds his own home, sanctifies it by affection and dedication, and prepares for the responsibilities of parenthood. The mature person is now a "master builder," laboring at his appointed tasks for the glory of God and the advancement of society.

In the Greek system these three degrees were called the lesser mysteries, for their principal purpose was to equip candidates to function constructively and creatively in the mundane sphere. Those who wished to go further prepared themselves to approach the sanctuaries of the Greater Mysteries. In these higher degrees they were instructed in the universal purpose for which man was created, and thus prepared for universal citizenship. They were taught the further advancement and purification of their own natures, and solved the mystery of transition from this world to life beyond the grave. They learned that there were two deaths. In one, the body is separated from the soul, and in the other, the soul is separated from the body. The latter is the mystical or philosophical transition, and it was anciently taught that this could take place prior to physical decease. By cultivating the higher parts of our own natures we could be resurrected from a material estate and experience the Divine while still embodied in the human form. When enlightenment is attained man overcomes the last great enemy, death. This thought is clearly set forth by Milton in his PARADISE LOST.

Over the years many parents have come to me disturbed and confused in their relationships with their children. They are unable to answer the basic questions young people ask or to give them a proper code of conduct. Most of these parents admit that they have been unable to regulate their own lives or provide strong and practical leadership in the home. They are burdened with dilemmas similar to those which afflicted the primitive tribal groups. Nothing more clearly reveals the average person's shortcomings than the obvious fact that they have no foundation to guide themselves or those who come after them. When the blind lead the blind, all fall into the ditch together. If the modern home were built around the concept of a school of initiation, many of these difficulties could and would be solved.

Most sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Manly P. Hall". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

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