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3910 Los Feliz Blvd. - Los Angeles, Calif. 90027 - 663-2167

MANLY P. HALL
President - Founder



HENRY L. DRAKE
Vice-President

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THE ORACLES OF ANTIQUITY

DEAR FRIENDS:



MOST OF THE NATIONS that flourished upon the earth in older times believed that it was possible to have direct communication with Deity in times of unusual emergencies. The Jewish prophets received considerable attention in the Old Testament, and many of their words were accepted as direct communications from God. Very little is said to explain the circumstances which qualified these elder counselors for the high esteem in which they were generally held by their people. No one seemed to question the importance of prophetic utterances and they are incorporated into holy writ as divinely inspired. These sages and soothsayers reprimanded kings for their misdeeds, and were seldom punished for what might well seem to be direct attacks on prevailing policies and the general conduct, or misconduct, of nations, communities, and private lives. Perhaps one key to the situation can be found in the old American Indian social structure.

Nearly all of the tribes which populated the Western Hemisphere prior to foreign colonization had their wise men or women who claimed to foretell the future and direct the daily activities of these tribal groups. The Amerindian soothsayers were natural psychics, possessing what we like to call today "extrasensory perception" and other unusual extensions of consciousness. These old wise ones are now generally referred to as medicine priests which is actually a non-Indian term usually bestowed upon them by skeptics. The word "medicine," when referring to these natural mystics, might include healing powers and most of the prerogatives now associated with religious leadership. Each tribe had three leaders. First and foremost was the temporal ruler who was responsible for the general safety and well-being of the members of his tribe. The second in authority was the medicine priest who was consulted whenever serious problems arose. The medicine priest was able to communicate with the tribal Deity while in a state of trance; he could leave the physical body at will and journey to the celestial lodge in the sky where the immortals assembled to guard the destiny of their people. The third chieftain was the war chief who was in charge of all matters relating to the defense of the tribe against marauding bands that might attempt to encroach upon the physical domain of his people.

The medicine priest seldom received instruction from a predecessor. He was born to his office or grew into it at an early age. He was nearly always a quiet, introverted Indian, given to prayer and meditation. He depended largely upon the wisdom of ancestral spirits, and these in due course initiated him into the healing rites appropriate to the needs of the tribal community. All Indians performed vigil, and in times of fasting unembodied or disembodied entities appeared to them, especially the being who was to become their totem throughout physical life. The totem was a guardian preacher, usually in the form of a spirit animal. If an Indian lad, during his vigil, saw the thunderbird which was the American Indian version of the phoenix, he was destined to become a priest. The most important thing to remember is that in the comparatively small Amerindian tribal units the medicine priest had to be correct in most of his prophecies and healing chants. I have known several of these priests who had served their people well, some for as many as fifty years, and were still held in the most profound admiration.

The most celebrated of the Greek oracular shrines was the one at Delphi, and the history of this famous place extended over a period of more than four thousand years. It was dedicated to the god, Apollo, who spoke through his entranced priestesses. These sanctified women spoke in hexameter verse, and their words were translated and arranged by priestly scribes for the benefit of supplicants. It could not be popular superstition alone that sanctified this oracle, the influence of which extended as far as Persia and Rome. Every type of question was brought to the altar of this shrine, and it was assumed that the answers were given directly by the god, Apollo, whose statements were infallible. There is a great advantage in a religious doctrine which is being continually reaffirmed and expanded by one of the sovereign divinities. The Greek states were never without spiritual guidance--not dependent upon a priestly caste, but originating directly in the pronouncements of the Divine Will. The Delphic Oracle continued to influence Mediterranean politics as late as the sixth century A.D.

The Romans depended heavily upon auguries, and a collection of books dealing with prophecy, known as the sibylline writings, were under the protection of special officers appointed by the government and could be consulted only in matters of national importance. Omens were derived from the flights of birds, the sound of wind moving through the branches of trees, and were pronounced from an examination of the entrails of sacrificed animals.

After the collapse of classical civilization the belief in patron deities gradually faded away and greater dependence was placed on human scholarship. Experts in various fields dictated courses of action, but there is little evidence that decisions by the learned were more effective or accurate than the pronouncements of entranced prophets.

The Chinese practiced many types of augury, the most unique being oracle bones. The flat bones of large animals were incised with various inscriptions and then red hot instruments were placed on the underside of the bones. The heat caused a crackling and the lines thus formed traversed the inscriptions and these designs were studied and interpreted by priestly scholars. Somewhat later, the I Ching became the prophetic book of Chinese scholars. Confucius wrote the commentary explaining the sixty-four basic hexagrams. The wording, like that of the Greek oracles, was obscure and almost completely symbolical. It

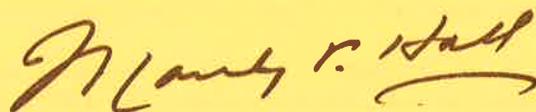
required considerable intuitive judgment to find the correct meaning of a particular trigram. It would seem that to answer his question, the inquirer must retire into the depths of his own inner consciousness, depending upon mystical faculties within himself to find the correct solution. The I Ching is now being heavily studied by Western scholars who have sensed its psychological implications and are beginning to understand the basic truths underlying prophesies and oracles.

In the West there was a long break through the Dark Ages, and most people depended entirely on the Church for spiritual insight. By the beginning of modern times, tarot cards were introduced as a means of questing out the portents of destiny. The human being has always sought for some kind of metaphysical guidance. He needed the experience of direct communion with a universal principle superior to himself. The tarot cards were similar to the I Ching because a factor of chance was involved and it was assumed that chance was just another name for providence, but various patterns of tarot card layouts formed a link between physical circumstances and metaphysical intervention by celestial powers.

For centuries natural mystics and psychics were persecuted as heretics. In recent years, however, considerable attention is being given to what has been called "the mystical experience." Under this heading are visions, forewarnings, and sudden inexplicable expansions of consciousness. There is considerable suspicion that the auricle of the heart and the oracles of antiquity had a deeper meaning than has generally been suspected. The god in man certainly speaks at some times and under certain circumstances, and this voice is an expression of the Divine Power and the Divine Will at the source of individual and collective life. The ancient shrines have been desecrated, but the link between humanity and the Divine Power which fashioned it has never actually been broken. The mystic disciplines of the ancient priesthoods have survived to us through the philosophical teachings of Pythagoras, Plato, and Buddha.

Deprived of the high philosophical codes which regulated the development of man's psychic faculty, there is no adequate control of the psychic faculties which many persons possess. The result has been much confusion and contradiction among accounts dealing with psychic phenomena. The basic fact that it exists, however, cannot be denied. When properly controlled by the state, natural psychics made valuable contributions to the countries in which they lived. The prophetic arts can be expanded and refined until the human being can gain practical assistance and mystical inspiration from the development of his own psychic resources. Perhaps most of all, he feels that his life does not depend entirely upon the uncertain testimonies of the senses nor the opinions of the mind. There is an indwelling truth which can be reached and will protect the sincere person from the fallibilities of his own nature. It was this ray from the Divine which sustained the oracles of antiquity, and as time goes on it is virtually inevitable that the deities will speak again from the adytum of the sanctuary of the heart. We need no longer visit some distant place in search of guidance or inspiration. We can go in to the little closet of the heart and commune with the Spirit of the Innermost.

Most sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "W. L. G. Hall". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned at the bottom right of the page.

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