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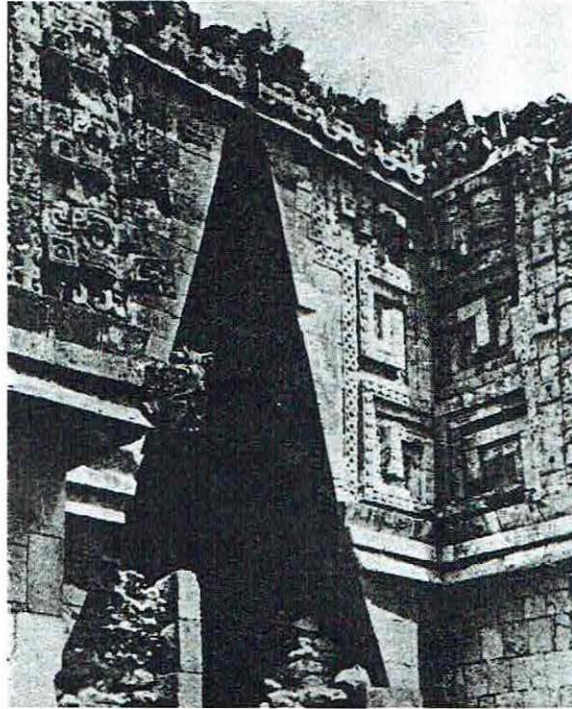
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DO IT YOURSELF

Mayan Lesson Number 160

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MEDITATION

Beloved Centurion:

As you begin this lesson, you may find it difficult to agree with some of the things that we have said regarding the importance of obstacles in your life, and the wonderful character-builders these obstacles are when you are able to overcome and rise above them. I know that it would seem like a very big price to pay in order to become a bigger and better person, but the examples that we have pointed out to you, as we begin this lesson, are of course extremely rare and more difficult to rise above, as when we speak of Helen Keller and some of the other glorious triumphs over extreme adversity.

As you read on in the lesson, however, you will understand why we say that every obstacle which is put in our way and is mastered is a step to success and mastery of life. We wonder why this must be and we never know the answer, but we do know it is true.

Some people, it would seem, go all through life without having encountered any obstacles, but they are the weaker ones; those who have them and overcome them are really blessed. They are kinder, they are more tolerant, more understanding; they stand ready to extend a helping hand, thereby being much happier people as they receive the joy that comes from helping others.

Yes, truly, obstacles are important in your life, and when we doubt this let us think of Jesus. His name and His works have endured for, lo, these hundreds of years and will endure forever. Surely His obstacles were great and serious.

So keep in mind always the thought that the lessons you receive as a Centurion in the Mayan Order are designed to keep constantly before you the things you must do to live a more perfect life. Particularly in this series you are taught things which you must do for yourself, for in no other way can you accomplish complete mastery. No one can do it for you.

Many of the things we tell you are already known to you, but your lessons serve to keep you on the path by reassuring you of what you must do in order to conquer your obstacles.

In all your thinking be firm in the knowledge that you can overcome all obstacles. Never feel that they are so great they cannot be conquered and be grateful for them as you repeat the words of the following prayer:

P R A Y E R

I thank Thee, Heavenly Father, that Thou hast not made the road too easy, but that Thou hast promised me the strength and courage to overcome. Amen.

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LESSON NUMBER SIXREMOVE THE OBSTACLES

HANDICAPS

I F you never find any obstacles in your road to the more abundant life do not think of it as good fortune. If you do find them, consider it a sign that you are strong enough to remove them. Only the weakling is given an easy road, for even an easy road he will consider hard. The coward is not worth testing, so he has nothing to try him. The hero is worth it, so he has his trials.

If you encounter obstacles, then, congratulate yourself. It is because you have possibilities. The effort you have to make and the ability you have to use to remove your hindrances is probably destined to bring those possibilities out. A player with no handicaps can succeed so easily that it hardly seems worth doing. No one envies him.

We have numerous examples of the advantage of having a handicap. Helen Keller is one of them. You may not consider any blind and deaf person fortunate, but let us consider it more deeply. The struggle to get past the handicaps of blindness and deafness has made Helen Keller a great soul and a great person. Who knows with how much less she might have been content in life without that struggle to make. Effort itself begets sinew for whatever makes it, body, mind, or spirit. The person who never has to struggle for anything is unfortunate.

A young Negro girl, newly enrolled at Tuskegee Institute was talking to an old colored woman who sold peanuts at the campus gate. She looked at the grounds and buildings and remarked that Mr. Washington would surely have been a rich man if he had built up all that property for himself. "La, Child, he wouldn't a been worth a nickel", the old woman wisely replied. It was overcoming handicaps that made Booker T. Washington great, and the ability to do so that made him rich in terms of the life more abundant.

An old English song represents a blind man thanking God that since his sight has been taken away his soul has learned to see. The stories of men like Charles W. Eliot with his scarred face, Charles P. Steinmetz with his twisted limbs, Clarence Day in his arthritic helplessness, and Edward Sheldon with his years of physical helplessness, should challenge all of us with lesser barriers in the way not to falter before them but to find ways to make life count for even more than it would have done without them.

Let us hope you have no such serious handicaps as any of these, but you will have things to get over, or around, or out of the way. Appraise them one by one. See whether it will take labor, ingenuity, self-control, more understanding, greater will power, or what; and apply whatever is needed. No matter what they are, or what it takes to remove them, you can have a more abundant life in spite of them.

THE ANGEL IN THE ROAD

At this point let us pause to examine a special possibility that is different. We shall for awhile be listing obstacles we can and should remove from our way, but let us not forget that occasionally one has been placed there to stop us from going farther on the wrong road. We must be wise enough to recognize such for what it is, something placed there for our own good.

The Book of Numbers tells how the king of the Moabites sent the prophet Balaam to pronounce a curse on the Israelites passing on their march to Canaan. Balaam had no scruples, but on the way first the beast he rode and then Balaam himself saw an angel standing in the road to intercept them, and even Balaam would not go against that.

Occasionally someone going his headstrong way meets an obstacle that is really an angel in the road warning him not to proceed. Perhaps there are trouble and defeat ahead. Perhaps it is not the right road for us at the time. Perhaps it is the way to a certain and serious mistake. Perhaps there is a better way. Whatever the reason, when God sends an angel to stand in our way we should heed the warning and be grateful. There is no telling what failure and regret it may have saved us.

Do not be turned back by weakness, or lack of purpose, or some merely negative condition; but when you come upon an obstacle that seems from a good source, stop and consider whether you should turn back and seek a better way, or take this one at a better time. Take the warning graciously, as it was graciously intended.

I remember a woman who, in middle life, conceived the idea that she should go to the foreign mission field and work the remainder of her life. Her purpose was a well intended but mistaken one. First, she was already too old to carry such a load. Second, by the time she made the long preparation, including the learning of a native language, she would be older still. Third, older people do not so well withstand the rigors of some foreign climates, and one in ill health cannot carry on the work required. Those who knew better persuaded her that she could do more for the mission cause at home. They were angels standing in the way.

It is important to have the zeal and the faith to go forward in any true road of more abundant living, but it is also important to have the judgment to determine, or to take good advice, as to whether a given road is such a one. You can remove an ordinary obstacle from the road, but removing an angel would be another matter.

An ill-considered ambition may occasionally be a false alarm. We have to turn the searchlight on our impulses and day dreams and view them in the light of better judgment. To do so may save us from mistakes that would be costly to undo. If you see an obstacle in the road look carefully to see whether it is an angel. If it turns out to be an angel, look carefully to see whether he is motioning you

back or waving you on. God has many kinds of grace, and one is restraining grace.

OBSTACLES OF CONDITION

T H E difficulty with the middle-aged woman referred to in the preceding section was the assumption that her commendable desire led her to aspire to a place and work that would have made failure a foregone conclusion. It would have meant too abrupt a change in her life and work to things with which she was not familiar. At home she could help send other and better qualified workers, while in the field herself she probably could have done little or nothing.

If she had been young, and strong, and able to qualify in preparation, it would have been good for her to go. Then she could have overcome any obstacles in her way, while at her age and in her situation she could not. If there are obstacles that cannot be changed, do not beat against a stone wall. If there are obstacles that can be changed, and if you deem it wise to do, change them.

However, we are not here referring so much to life work and its locale so much as to one's spirit and manner of living wherever he may be. Probably you have already chosen what you will do and made yourself a place in the world for its scene of action. This is not a suggestion that you change it, but rather that you improve it and make it mean as much as possible. A part of that process is overcoming obstacles, so let us think first of obstacles of condition.

One of these is the question of place. It is a common thing to assume that one can make a new start only in a new place. For one who is already well launched in life that is not likely to be true. It may take more courage and ability, though, to change one's way of living in the home community than to go elsewhere, but it is likely to mean more too. At home friends and neighbors will see and know, but that makes it require all the more determination and that determination will help to make you strong and unafraid. The person who can improve his manner of living right where he is known best has won much more of a victory than one who hides himself among strangers to do it. ANYWHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT.

Living a less purposeful life will itself in time build up conditions that will hinder one. If one has made the wrong kind of friends, they may stand in the way of living a changed life. It is not easy to turn from either, but one must get the road open. Make the change kindly. Hurt no one. Just live your highest conception of life. If some come with you, well and good. Do all you can to take them with you, but if they will not come, let them go.

Many obstacles of condition will naturally yield to your developing ideals and practices. Those that do not may be easier to remove than you thought they would be. Remember that every fine watercourse was once full of snags and sand bars, and every fine highway once had to be cleared of stumps and stones.

SELF-CREATED OBSTACLES

G E T T I N G barriers out of the way of living the more abundant life calls for some careful self-examination for a special reason now to be mentioned. You will need to know yourself better now than you ever did before, for many of our worst hindrances are within ourselves, and many of us do not know they are there or what they are.

Among country people one used often to hear the expression, "He is standing in his own light." Physically that would not be possible, of course; but in the process of living one's life it is not only possible but frequent. We do stand in our own light; then we cannot understand the darkness because we cannot see what we are doing. If we wanted a more sensational title for this division of the lesson, we could give it some such heading as "Get Out of Your Light". That is exactly what we mean here.

Some people get all bound up in their own tensions, and it may have happened to you. Have you tried to think something out, to make a plan, or to carry out one already made, and found you could not because you were blocked by something within? Fortunately this can be stopped, or will pass away; but while it lasts it paralyzes creativity.

When this happens you are a victim of your own inner tensions. You have let things bear on you too hard, tried to deal with too many things at once and get the wires so tangled that everything stops till the traffic jam is cleared. Do not surrender, and do not despair. The condition is distressing; but everyone has it, and you can do something about it. Understanding it and how to deal with it, you may in time master it completely.

You may do as the traffic cop does, by clearing up the confusion a little at a time; but a quicker and surer way is to clear the intersection entirely and start over. Relax, forget it, and do something else for awhile. Then you will suddenly find your mind cleared, and you can make a new beginning, watching out still more carefully for the menace of these blocking traffic jams.

Any one of us may have mental habits, or personal ways, or human traits, or old conditionings that get in the way of our living as we know we could if we would keep at our best. If we have some personality weakness or damage picked up along the way, we should not worry about it but just train ourselves away from it. Live life in its freedom, richness, goodness and power, and more and more any hindering old tendencies will be replaced with normal, dynamic ones. The depressing shadows will give way to the sun and fresh air of a better way of thinking, living, and managing our contacts with people.

Our obstacles may be in conditions, may come from other people, or may be in ourselves. Since within ourselves is closest it may be well to look there first. The nearness of them may make it quickest and easiest to remove them too.

LIFE'S CHARACTERIZATIONS

I F you were a writer of fiction you would have to consider six things in the building of a story - theme, plot, setting, action, dialogue, and characterization. The last is one of the most important because it dominates the others. You will cast your characters. Each will be different from the rest. Just as in real life he will be a certain kind of person, and being that kind of person will cause him to do and say what he does. The sum of all the things said and done by all your characters will be your story.

Life is either a long story or a series of short ones, as you may prefer to think of it. There are all kinds of characters around you like yourself, and like you, they are doing what they do because they are the kind of people they are. The influences they send out beat, cross, rebound, and mingle, around and upon you. These influences help or hinder. It is part of your problem at least not to let them hinder, and you may even be clever enough to take some of the hindrances and turn them into helps.

But that is only a part of the setting for the story of your life, and not the chief one. The chief one rises from the fact that so far as you are concerned you are the leading character in the tale. The strongest and most determining influences in it rise from your own life, moulded as it is by your own character and personality.

You are a special kind of character, so special that there is not another one in the story like you. You play a master part. It will determine the outcome of your action, for you too will do what you do because you are the kind of person you are.

This brings us to the most important point you have to consider. This day and your whole life will be determined not merely by what you do but by what makes you do it. The outcome of your story will be as wise or foolish, as happy or unhappy, as helpful or hurtful, as successful or unsuccessful, as prideworthy or shameworthy, as the action you have built into it, and in the same way that action will be a replica of your own nature.

Jesus said you cannot successfully store new wine in old bottles or mend an old piece of cloth with a new patch. He meant that you cannot base new action on old motives nor build new habits on old ideals. If you are going to build a new way of living, you must start with new foundations. The more abundant life will always need a more abundant base to support it. You will always do what you do because you are what you are, so begin with yourself. You will not have to worry about the action when the motivations are right, and you must set them right yourself with aid from the Helper.

ACHILLES TENDONS

T H E R E is an old story about the hero Achilles and how he came to fall victim to an arrow from the bow of Paris at the seige of Troy. It says his mother, having heard that the waters of the River Styx at the border of the abode of the dead, would render flesh proof against any weapon, dipped her baby into the stream to make him safe from violent death. But she overlooked the fact that the water did not touch the tendon of the heel by which she held him. Long he withstood all attacks, till Paris heard the story and sent an arrow into the vulnerable tendon of his heel.

Since then any vulnerable spot or quality has been called an Achilles Tendon. Anyone may have a weak spot in his physical makeup and a point of easiest surrender in his moral power. There are few if any who do not have some weak spot among their qualities and tendencies, some Achilles Tendon of mind or spirit at which failure and breakdown can most easily occur.

In human nature there are several of these weak places which can become self-generated obstacles to our going forward with anything we know we should do. We have already referred to the fact in another connection, but it seems well to call attention to it again here. It is not only a possible obstacle to the more abundant life, but it is perhaps the one that stops more people than any other. It is the simple indisposition to get at a thing.

Some people are so healthy and sleep so well and so long at night that they are ready for the day's work each morning. There are more who feel a little sluggish till they have stirred around a little. But what about all the precious hours after the rested feeling of the morning has passed? There are things to be done then too for those trying to live abundantly.

This ennui has to be broken up or it will be a hindering and defeating influence. Take care of your physical condition and get enough sleep; but even then you will need to look out for the hindering power of this Achilles Tendon of sluggishness, procrastination, and indecision.

When you feel this condition trying to overpower you, take a walk or a little exercise, but do not overdo it or fatigue will come to the aid of your already threatening dullness. Then you will feel less like putting enthusiasm into your living than ever. Of course you can live after a fashion dragging through the hours; but if you are going to be happy, courageous, effective, and triumphant, you will have to put your best into the moments.

A bright conversation, an inspiring bit of reading, a letter about interesting things, will help when the long reach of the day is taking the zest from you. A few moments at anything that loosens up your reactions to life will help. If negative people or small failures have discouraged you it may be a little harder; but it is all the more important that you rescue yourself. The obstacle is within, so that is where it has to be defeated. And you must do it yourself.

NEGATIVE PEOPLE

W E have our choice of three moods in which to live - plus, minus, and neutral. The plus mood is the constructive mood. One of the most common obstacles to living in it is negative people. That trio everywhere met, Messrs. Tom, Dick and Harry, may be positive and help you on, or negative and stand in your way. Look out for negative people and avoid the snares they consciously or unconsciously set for you.

To begin with, some will be inclined to be more or less jealous of any progress you make. They do not like to see anyone do better at anything than they have done, so instead of trying the better way themselves, they try to discourage others who do. They do not like to go to the trouble of overcoming that well-known besetment called laziness, and if they see you showing signs of doing so they may take the attitude that you think yourself superior. As a matter of fact, you are only trying to rise above the level of inferiority, and they are free to do the same, but too many would rather stay as they are and have you stay down with them. So they discourage you, but don't let them. Anyone who ever tried to live or act on a better level has had this to contend with. Disregard it.

The human mind tends to be a little negative anyway. People who have not learned better find it easy not to believe in themselves, or things, or possibilities, or other people. They demand proof of what should be evident. They ask more proof than is necessary, and are quite likely to refuse it when they get it. They shut themselves off from the best by refusing to believe in it, and they try to shut you off with them if you show any sign of the faith which is natural to the constructive mind.

Don't let them. Don't reveal your plans and intentions until they have been accomplished, and even then don't overdo it. Keep your enthusiasm high, but keep it to yourself. Look at the higher life you want to live, and cling to the glorious faith that you can do it. Take your cues from that, and not from those who would like to convince you that you cannot.

You need always to keep fortified against the discouraging effects of temporary setbacks. If after every loss of a skirmish a general gave up hope of winning the battle, or if the loss of every battle meant the loss of the war, few great causes would ever be won. Learn to think of it in the large, and you will usually see that your failure or defeat is small, temporary, and unimportant.

These and similar hindrances can be defeating, but you do not need to allow them to. Every one you overcome will leave you stronger and richer in possibilities than before.

MEDITATION

I am stronger than any obstacle that stands in my way. I now marshal my strength in faith, and victory is mine.

May the essence of this Meditation aid you in the attainment of mastery over your own life.

YOUR CLASS INSTRUCTOR.



The next lesson, the final one in the DO IT YOURSELF SERIES, is entitled "Live for the Immortal Things".

