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Reaching for the Stars

Mayan Lesson Number 166

THE LAWS OF GROWTH AND DEGENERATION

USE AND GROWTH

AS JESUS PUT IT

HEREDITY

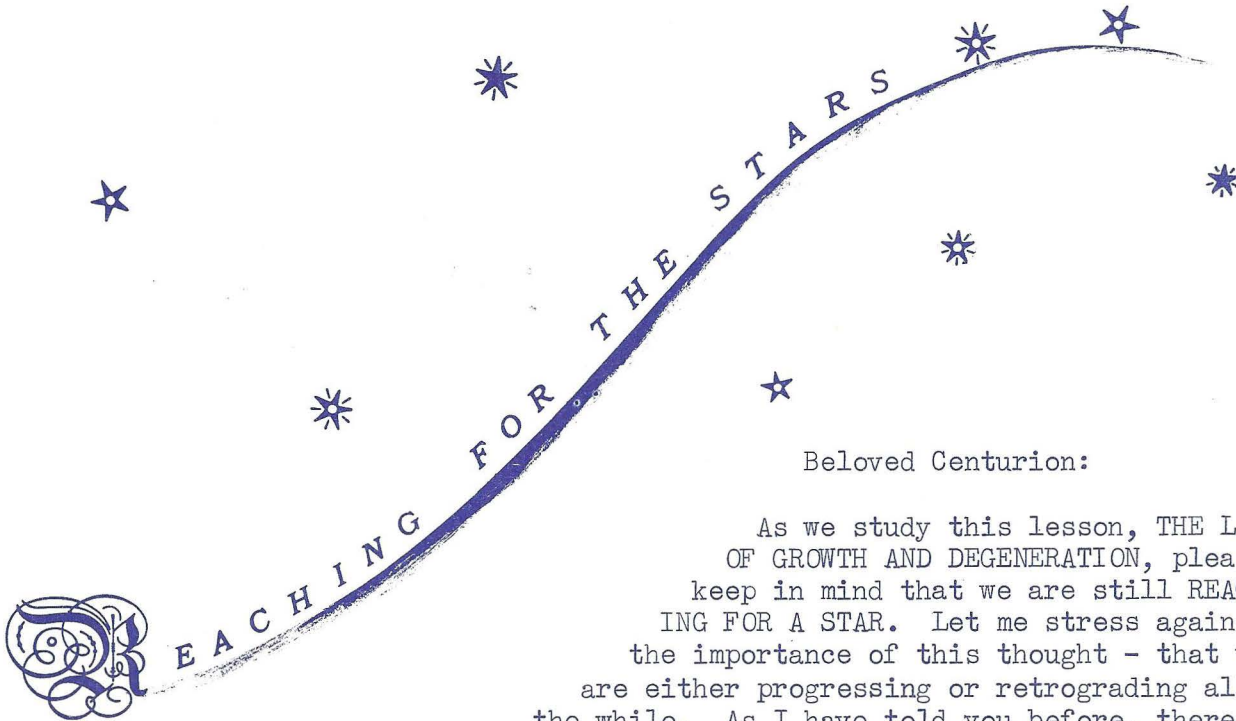
PARABLE SIDELIGHTS

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AFTERTHOUGHTS

THE LAW OF DEGENERATION

MEDITATION



Beloved Centurion:

As we study this lesson, THE LAWS OF GROWTH AND DEGENERATION, please keep in mind that we are still REACHING FOR A STAR. Let me stress again the importance of this thought - that we are either progressing or retrograding all the while. As I have told you before, there is no such thing as remaining stationary or on a plateau in this life. We must grow or degenerate. That is the law.

So important is this truth that great writers often elaborate on it. I like the following thoughts on this subject:

Henry Ward Beecher: "We should so live and labor in our time that what came to us as seed may go to the next generation as blossom; and that what came to us as blossom may go to them as fruit."

Victor Hugo: "Progress - the stride of God!"

George MacDonald: "All growth that is not toward God is growing toward decay."

Margaret Fuller: "I am suffocated and lost when I have not the bright feeling of progression."

There are many, many more philosophies and quotations on this one truth, the importance of progress, growth, and the disastrous results of permitting oneself to go backward or stand still while others go marching ahead - letting life pass you by.

Our greatest aim in Mayanry is to try to continuously bring home to our members the importance of never permitting a negative thought to have a part in daily life. Regardless of how difficult it may seem to you at this moment to accomplish your desires, whether it is in your business life, your home life, or whatever it may be, it can be done. Ways open up. Sometimes the manner in which

the problem is solved is seemingly a miracle, but really it is only the work of God in your life.

As an example, among the letters I receive daily, was one from a member who had been inactive in the Mayan Order. She was returning to us and here is what she said:

"How very glad I am that I have been able to resume my lessons. They are so full of wonderful, inspiring and uplifting words that I hate to think of all I would have missed had I not resumed them. Mayanry has done so very much for me that as I look back over the months, I can almost count the progress I have made, step by step.

"I must tell you that the latest thing that has come to me is the new work that I have. It seemed to be presented to me quite by accident, but, being a Mayan, I know that God's hand was directing each move. It is like a new life for me, and I'm sure I could never have done it had I not learned the basic principles of wisdom and understanding through Mayanry. I can hardly wait for each new lesson - so eager I am to go on and on and climb higher and higher on the Pathway of Mayanry and learning."


This is just one of hundreds of letters which we receive every day. Sometimes our failure to progress is because we try too hard, and in so doing we lock out that which we are seeking. Just open your heart and mind to receive and if your desire is good and your aim is worthy, know that somehow, somehow, you can use the powers which have been given you. Never permit this truth to go from you.

And now we repeat together the words of the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, I am thinking of the powers
with which thou hast endowed me.
Help me not to lose or allow them to grow weaker,
but to conserve them, develop them, and use
them in the doing of thy will.

Amen.

U S E A N D G R O W T H

 THE relation between use and growth is so common, and we all see it operating around us so continually, that we may easily forget its importance. Everyone sees and knows that a used muscle develops while an unused one degenerates. Every strong man has developed his muscles by use, and every weak one is a person who has not done so. All this is well known.

We must go on from there to realize that this applies to all our powers and capabilities. The athlete we see in a game or contest has developed his muscular power by exercising it, but he has also developed his powers of perception and coordination by the same means, so he can see what to do with his strength and be able to do it quickly and accurately. It is sometimes a marvel what he can do, and this phase of athletic skill seems to increase as time goes by. A football game, for instance, requires much more precision, coordination, and quickness than one did a generation ago, and the players have been built up to meet that necessity by more exacting practice.


This principle applies in any skill or art. Doctor Einstein, for example, did not spring full-grown into the scientific arena. He began working with the equations governing physical laws and forces in his early twenties, if not sooner, and through the years built up a monumental scientific understanding and skill. No doubt there have been many potential Einsteins, but only one with the necessary patience and determination to build up the abilities needed to work with.

It has been said that genius is one-tenth inspiration and nine-tenths perspiration. At least it is true that no matter how much genius one may possess, it will remain unknown unless with painstaking patience he builds up the abilities necessary to express it. The same is true of the master in any art, skill, or endeavor.

Some people with small abilities have been able to increase them amazingly by this common, simple, well-known formula of use and practice. Probably there is no one without some special ability, but if there were such a person even he could do wonders by choosing some preferred line of endeavor and cultivating his ability by using whatever powers he does possess, however limited.

It is hardly necessary to indicate that all this applies to you, as that is the reason why these things are being said to you by means of words on a page. It remains only to begin using the elementary principles we are stating, and keep at it. You can do in your field and your measure something like Einstein did in his, if you will follow the same law as it applies to you, and do it with the same persistence and devotion. Abilities are standard equipment, but skill in using them is not. The one comes with us, but the other must be acquired.

H E R E D I T Y

 LET us now go a little more deeply into the facts we have just been noticing. When we do we discover that they are more than facts; they are laws. Each individual may build up his abilities and capacities by use. If he really tries he grows stronger and more skillful with them as time goes on. Then he probably will pass the potential of health and ability he has built up on to his descendants. A generation does the same. Any generation becomes heir to what past generations have been and have been capable of doing. We begin where our fathers have left off.

The history of the remote past is pretty grim reading about pretty grim times. The difference between those times and ours did not come about by accident.

It is the result of struggle. All of civilization that deserves the name is the consequence of the long climb our fathers made so that we might come into the world at a higher level of ability, opportunity, and advantage, than they did.

The process does not stop even there. The greater powers and opportunities we have had handed down to us have laid upon us the greater obligation. Like our fathers, we are expected to do the best we can with what we have, but the fact that those who have gone before us have handed down so much greater advantages than they themselves means that more is rightly required of us.


The process does not stop there either. What our fathers owed to us we owe to those yet to come. Every generation has been building for the future, and so must ours. We have wider knowledge, juster laws, and the ability to use better manners, than did the caveman; but let us not be so self-sufficient as to forget that the centuries will bring others who will surpass us as far as we have surpassed the caveman. We must remember that we owe this to the future, in addition to what we owe the present.

"The centuries have been getting ready for us", an inscription on a memorial gateway reminds the undergraduates of a certain university. They have, and we owe a debt of gratitude to those who made it true. We also are here to make it possible for future generations to be grateful to us that we helped get ready for their coming. All this is mankind building up a racial heredity of strength and ability. It is the human race accumulating powers and qualities through exercise, effort and struggle. That is the reason for the improvement the centuries have seen taking place.

Is one, then, not to build up his abilities and dedicate his efforts to his own needs and desires? That is a question over which many stumble, a point at which many miss the way. The wrecks of men and empires who let their efforts become ingrown warn us not to make the same mistake.

Here is the principle - what one does for the spirit he also does for the flesh, what one does for others he also does for himself, and what one does for the future he also does for the present. In God's economy, nothing is lost.

LEARN BY TRYING

 LET us now look at some of the evidences of the fact that one phase of this law of development is that the sum of our abilities is what we have tried and found we could do. We learn by trying, and what we thus learn becomes a part of ourselves. Then what thus becomes a part of ourselves becomes through us a part of the world life. Once to realize this law would surely waken anyone to the importance of his best efforts with the sharpness of the sudden shock of touching the electrode of a charged battery. One who had really gotten this into his mind simply could not ever again be apathetic and inactive.

Take some of the single-celled or few-celled creatures in a water pool. They have never stirred from their places till some day one of them pushes out first a little bit of its protoplasm here and then a little bit there, and finds that it

moves. It keeps moving, slowly at first, and finds that it changes its location a little. Later it may go visiting, or move to a new home. What had been stationary has found that it is capable of motion. It has acquired motility because it has used a power its dim consciousness had never known it had. Even that dim consciousness is quickened a little by the discovery.

Something about having made an effort and succeeded seems to have become a permanent part of the life of this tiny creature. After a long time perhaps a little water worm emerges. It too keeps its place because, though it may have a rudimentary brain, it knows nothing about motion, the interesting process of going places, and the valuable ability to move out of the way of danger.

One day this wormlike creature gets so tired of lying in one position that it wriggles a little, and behold, it moves. It tries it again, and finds it can swim. Water creatures without legs and feet still swim the same way that little creature did long ago. It merely tried something new, and found it could do it. A new power, a new way of life, were born through struggle.

This must have grown and spread till there were new species with new abilities, and these species improved these abilities through use till new ways of life emerged. Do you not see that it all came about through reaching for something that lay at first beyond the grasp, reaching for a star, so to speak? None of this would ever have taken place if none of God's creatures had ever ventured to try something it did not know it could do.

The development of the human species has been long and great. One by one man has learned to do wonderful things. For instance, he wanted to fly, and he had a certain persistent feeling that it could be done. He failed again and again, but he kept trying till one day he got a crude, motor-driven, winged contraption into the air and kept it there awhile. The rest of the story is well known. It has been the same with other developments. Now man is working on new projects, and some day he will succeed with them, just as the little water worm discovered he could swim because he wiggled his body in the water and it moved.

There is your law of progress and development. You can apply it in countless ways, and you will always find it one of the most enjoyable games you ever played.

THE LAW OF DEGENERATION



Now come face to face with the sadder side of this whole matter, the part that should make each of us stop and think, and forever after guard ourselves from falling into the trap it sets for us. It is the fact that we can let powers degenerate as well as develop them, that while development requires effort, degeneration requires none, and that while development can go on and on, degeneration tends to become complete and final.

We cannot tamper with the laws of nature and life. To challenge them always ends in defeat and ruin for the challenger. It has been tried countless times, and the result has always been the same. Let us now take the winning side of it,

once for all.

As in the case of development, we have all seen the law of deterioration taking effect. We know that a used muscle grows stronger and that an unused one grows weaker. But while a neglected muscle can be exercised back to strength again, there seems to be a limit to the degree and number of times it can be done, and it is certain that if it is neglected long enough and completely enough, it will atrophy and lose its power ever to function again.

That this carries along the line of heredity we can see in the now useless and troublesome vermiform appendix in the human body, which probably in other times and circumstances was a needed organ that has now degenerated into a wasted vestige. The splint bones that served the ehippus, or early horse before the species grew hoofs are now useless traces behind and above a horse's foot.

Fish that live in subterranean caves still have traces of the eyes that once served their kind when they lived where there was light to which to react, but without the stimulation to use they gradually disappeared. But since they needed some form of perception to take the place of sight they have developed extremely sensitive skin nerves that tell them of the approach of any object there in the dark where eyes would serve no purpose anyway.

But these organs and powers are always on their way out. They never come back and never would. What is lost by this law seems to be lost forever. Something else, like the skin nerves of the fish, may be developed to serve instead, but what nature has taken away as the penalty for non-use is gone forever. That is the law of degeneration, which we shall show comes up in one of the parables of Jesus when we come to the next section of this lesson.

This applies to every organ and process of our bodies. It applies to the power and precision of our minds. It applies to the operation of our senses, abilities, and skills. It builds for the person who tries. It destroys for the person who does not. And what it destroys it does not restore. Do not be its victim. Let it work for you. It will serve you well.

A S J E S U S P U T I T



JESUS, with his marvelous skill at condensation and suggestion, put all of this into the brief space of what we call The Parable of the Talents. The talents were pieces of money, but they were symbolic of any life value we may possess - health, strength, mind, learning, skill, character, spiritual understanding, or anything else of the kind.

The story is that a man intending to be absent for a time trusted three servants with the management of some of his money while he should be away. One he asked to take care of five talents, a sum worth about five thousand dollars. The second was to be responsible for two talents, and the third for only one talent, valued at about one thousand dollars. The sum assigned each was supposed to be in proportion to his ability.

While the rich man was gone, the servant who had received five talents traded with the sum and doubled it. The man who was given charge of two talents did proportionately the same and doubled his. But the man with the one talent - representing both the least capital and the least ability, buried it in the ground for fear it might be lost.

When the day of reckoning came, as it always does, the man who had doubled the five talents was commended and rewarded. So also was the man who had capably managed the two talents. But the man who had been trusted with the least and had done nothing with it, had it taken from him and was condemned.

Then the Master summed up the whole matter and stated the law briefly but fully in these words,

"To him that hath shall be given, but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away."

Simplified, it meant that whoever builds up what he has naturally has abundance, but whoever does nothing with what he has loses it. Even if it is little it becomes less and finally nothing at all. That is the law of development and degeneration, and it is surer than the stars.

Out of the infinite reaches the Master has trusted each of us with a suitable measure of real working capital in the form of time, strength, talent, and the like, together with a certain other measure of potential ability, talent, and similar values, a possible increase in worth that may be gained by capable use, according to whether and how we try.

Some of us, like the first two servants, try to add this possible value to the actual one, working with what God has given us to improve it. Others, like the man with one talent, having no creative imagination and not seeing any possibilities, save keeping what we have, run squarely up against that other law of life decreeing that what one merely seeks to save, he loses.

Work with what powers you have, and they will grow and improve. Leave them alone and they will decrease and disappear. That is what happens to our powers and possibilities of body, mind, and spirit. Our business here is to take our actual assets, our working capital, and so manage them as to increase them, to double them by adding the potential worth to the actual value.

P A R A B L E S I D E L I G H T S



HE Parable of the Talents is a masterpiece of the law we are now considering, so let us not leave it till we have looked at a few more of its implications. They can make a great difference in our lives, either way.

All the versions of this parable we have show the man with the greater trusts doing better, and the man with the smallest one failing even though he had the least to risk. Perhaps the first two had more experience, but it looks as though the real reason for their success was that they were not afraid while the man who failed was. One who trusts no one else really does not trust himself.

In actual life sometimes the characters are reversed. There it is sometimes the five and two-talent men who fail for lack of a sense of responsibility, while many one-talent people succeed because the very smallness of their working capital makes them feel that they must make some showing with it.

Those who deal with money and property must observe some limitations of profit and increase, but those who deal with life values do not. There is no legal limit or maximum allowance on the exercise of one's best abilities in living a wider, richer, more useful life. There are no roadblocks on the highway to excellence, quality, wisdom, usefulness, and good. There is nothing to stop or delay you save your own powers of decision.

Everything God has given us has a production potential of some kind. You can use it for good, and as you do so its productive power increases. Like the talents in the parable, or property in use, or money invested, it has the power to multiply itself. It will not do this automatically, but it will do it in response to faithful and intelligent management.

We are stewards, administrators, managers under appointment, of all that comes to us, including our possessions, our abilities, and our capacities both actual and potential. We have no right to appropriate them wholly to our own use or to manage them solely as our own. The test of our stewardship is how the whole estate prospers. The steward always receives his reward, and it too will grow.

Each of the three men in The Parable of the Talents accepted a trust. Two of them dealt with their shares in a constructive way, while the third dealt with his in a negative manner. Each received the appropriate reward for what he had received and what he had done with it, and each reward was positive or negative according to the manner in which the trust had been kept. It was not the master who was responsible. Each man had selected his own result when he made his choice of action. It is so with us all. Where each of us stands today is where we came ourselves. We were perfectly free, for better or for worse, to have chosen another course.

You gain or lose every day by using the laws of life rightly, wrongly, or not at all. You have the power to go forward with your life, but no one will make you use it. You must speak the word of command yourself.

A F T E R T H O U G H T S



IN closing this lesson, let us consider a few random observations on the operation of these laws of growth and degeneration.

Stop at this moment. Locate yourself and determine your direction. Suppose you are at midstream in a boat. One of two things is happening to you. You are either rowing upstream or drifting downstream. You are sitting still, did you say? No, you cannot do that. If you are using your oars you are moving upstream, but if not you are drifting down. You do not remain stationary. Nature will help you down, but you have to work your way up. To go backward all you have to do is - nothing at all. Remember that if you decide to climb some chosen hill of superiority you still cannot reach the top with one step, however hard you try.

Among all the people who have gotten off the ground you cannot find one who started at the top of the ladder. It takes time to train a strong arm, build a generous knowledge, acquire a superior skill, or accomplish an important task. The many who have done it before you have all found that they had to take one step, live one day, and lay one brick at a time. They too found that they had chosen a long road to travel, but they had the courage and patience to begin and keep going. It is a pleasant road, for the consciousness of progress warms the heart; but even a lovely road can be long. It takes heroes to do worthwhile things, and heroes do not give up even when it looks as though they had reason to.

It has taken God a long time to get His creation where it is now, and it will take Him a long time yet to get it where He has planned to take it. But that does not change either His purpose or His methods. You will have to learn the same attitude. Whatever you do, it will take time to get it right; but it will be worth the while.

How will you keep books? The answer is, you will not have to. You yourself are the record of what you have done and how well you have done it. What you were doing was becoming a part of you all the time when you were doing it. Every deed, word, and thought, of all the years past is woven into the fabric of your life today. Your character, personality, ability, and worth, make up the record, and God knows exactly how to read it. It makes a great deal of difference how we fill the hours and days, for we are writing with unseen pens.

What you are today is what you did yesterday. What you do today will be in part at least the result of what you did yesterday, and it will change you in its turn. You are building now the foundation on which you will stand tomorrow. You are now shaping what you will have to work with when the story is nearing its close and you cannot change it much. We have to finish the work of one class satisfactorily before we can be promoted to the next. What grade have you reached? Are you moving on to higher classrooms, and to ultimate graduation?

That is what the law of growth is all about, and it completes the process in time - if it is not allowed to come into conflict with the law of degeneration.

M E D I T A T I O N

I seek to know the talents with which my Master has entrusted me, and so to use them that they will improve and multiply.

YOUR CLASS INSTRUCTOR.