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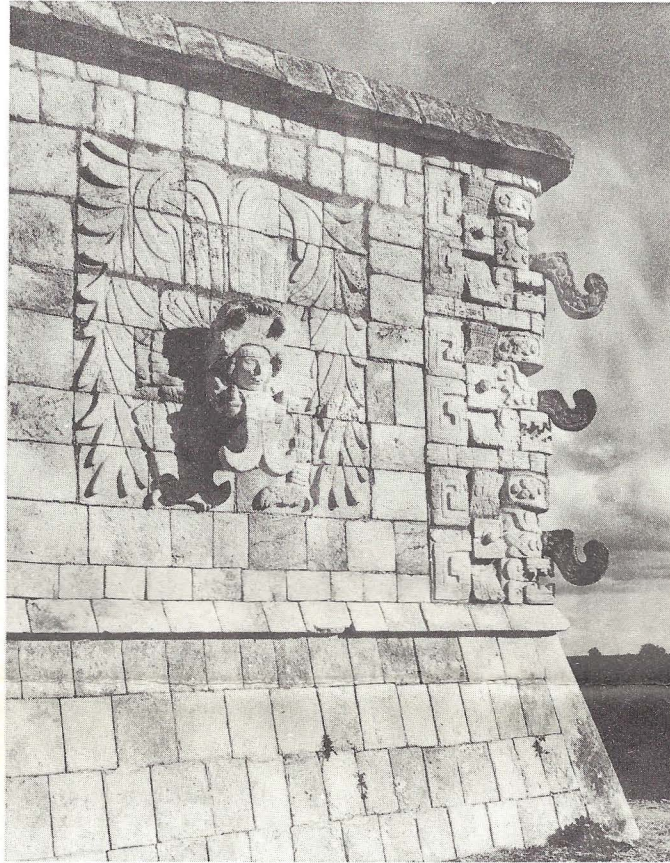
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What Are Your Plans?

Mayan Revelation Number 219

Division of Habits

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Large Consequences

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The Time Element

Habit Climax

Choosing Habits

BELOVED CENTURION:

Now, while you are making the inventory of your life, we come to a division of vital importance that we have called "The Division of Habits". The reason it is so vital in your life is that habit can make or break your character. It can help you build a life successful and worthwhile, or it can tear down and destroy anything you might want to do.

I have seen more homes destroyed through wrong habits on the part of one or both individuals in the marriage partnership than any other one thing I know of. I have seen more ambitions thwarted through wrong habits. In my vast experience, I have seen more suffering through wrong habits than from any other cause.

By the same token, I have seen lives completely changed through the adoption of good habits. I have seen people turn wrong habits into good habits and, by so doing, find happiness, success, good health, the companionship of friends, and many worthwhile accomplishments too numerous to mention.

And as we come to this study, I would ask you to remember that while it is easier to form good habits in the younger years, it is possible to change from bad habits into good habits at any time in your life. It is never too late to change, although it is true it is much easier to learn to form good habits in early life.

If you give a child the habit of regarding truth as something that he must respect, and give him the habit of respecting the property of other people - in other words, give him the good habit of never doing anything that would affect others adversely - he will grow up with a well-formed character and will never think of telling an untruth or violating the property of others, or doing anything that would be detrimental. It will be his way of life, his habit of living, and, as a result, the life of that child will be happier throughout the years.

The habits of drinking and smoking are two of the most devastating habits and the most far-reaching in their effects. They affect health and, of course, alcohol can affect not only the health, but also the relations with others and careers to a point where what could have been a success results in failure.

There are "smaller" habits that many people acquire, such as always being late for an appointment, whether it is business or social. It has become a habit with them. It never occurs to them to be punctual. Many a good position has been lost by the forming of just such a habit as this.

So, while they may seem like a small thing, in reality it can become a large thing. Some people get into the habit of gossiping. It starts out as an idle practice, and before they know it, they are really enjoying talking about others until it becomes a vicious thing.

All these things are habits, and the important thing I want to impress upon you in this division of your life is that it is possible to correct these bad

habits and turn them into good ones if you make the effort to "nip them in the bud", to use an expression that you have, I am sure, used many times.

In the pages that are to follow you will see how it is possible to recognize habits when they are beginning to form. If they are good habits, nourish and cultivate them and make them grow in order that they may blossom and make your life something beautiful. But if they are bad habits, destroy them as you would a weed before they have grown large and gone into flower, thereby casting their seed in many directions in your life. Always remember this - after a habit has become well entrenched, it becomes a part of your life, and it is so very difficult to overcome.

It is difficult, I know, to break a bad habit. There are institutions and various societies to aid those who are endeavoring to master a bad habit. That is why, in my work, I urge everyone to break the habit before it becomes so much a part of you that it would seem impossible.

And always remember that habits are not formed overnight, but gradually, so great care must be employed for a great change can come over your character without your being conscious that there has been a change.

A single bad habit will ruin an otherwise faultless character, just as a black ink spot will ruin a letter you have written on an otherwise white page.

Because overcoming bad habits is so difficult, there is only one solution - take it to the Father in prayer. He is always ready to help you. Let us petition Him in the following prayer:

PRAYER

Help me, Heavenly Father, to look squarely and see clearly the habits that control my life, and to remove every one that is negative and destructive, while I keep and cultivate all those that strengthen and bless. Amen.

*** INDICES ***

IE call the first finger on the hand the index finger because it points to and indicates things. Many other things do the same, like the index of a book, a highway sign, or a habit. A habit, born of a tendency, a desire, or a belief, is a ruling item in the index of our lives. In fact, it is a double one, for it points both ways - to whence we have come and to where we are going.

The word habit comes from a word meaning where one lives. One's habits compose the area of action in which he lives and operates his life, and his life is exactly what these habits indicate. They fix the limits of his life today, but

they also point in the directions in which it is expanding. A habit is a channel in which we are moving, a norm or mould into which we are pouring our lives and where they will take permanent shape.

A certain driver on a western highway came to a section of construction work consisting of a new, soft, unfinished grade. He pulled up onto it, got fast in the sand, and had to be pulled out by a tow car and helped back where the mistake was made. There stood a warning sign which he had not seen. It was like a good habit, yet one which he did not follow, and therefore found himself in trouble.

We have habits of movement, speech, purpose, and motive. They determine what we are most likely to do, and thus to build into our years and our lives. We are, as they say, free agents. We have been given the power to choose and decide for ourselves, but if that is all we do we are soon in confusion. We have governing mechanisms by which we can keep on the safe roads, and among them are good habits, and as long as we follow their pointing fingers, we are safe.

Such habits as purpose and motive are inward by nature, but there are other inner habits even behind them. All habits, outer and inner, grow from our thinking, viewpoint, and feeling. Life is like a clock. Mostly the hands go right, but now and then and here and there they get to going wrong. It may be enough to reset them, but usually the trouble comes from within. In that case the works must be repaired. The remedy is an inner readjustment.

If you have a piece of building to do you want to be sure of your workman's habits. Is he honest or undependable? Is he steady or spasmodic? Does he take pride in his work, or does he not care? You are your own helper in living. Ask the same questions about yourself. They are indices, or matters of habit.

Sometimes when one does something well we hear people remark that it is a habit of his. That means that he has mastered his habits and made them sound. Even if you have done that, keep working at it and improving it. It is one of the best forms of insurance you can carry. You might call it the policy of sound habits.

*** SMALL BEGINNINGS ***

IT has been said that great oaks from little acorns grow. It might also be said that complete lives from little habits grow. But still again it might be said that strong habits from little actions grow. That is where a habit begins, in an act, even as an act begins in a thought or a desire. There is always a first time. However, good or bad as an act may be, it will always be easier to do the second time and the proportion will follow through.

There is a dangerous pitfall here. It consists in thinking that anything small is unimportant. It isn't if it is an act, for there is life in it and it will grow. We shall see presently why this idea is such a mistaken one, and cite a few instances to serve as hints how serious it can be. If small things always remained small it might not matter much, but they do not.

Small things that have life in them are potent for good or insidious for harm. A disease germ is small. So is a thought, a purpose, or an idea. So also is an atom. Never under-rate such things. Consider what they can build into. The star Betelgeuse, the circumference of which is larger than the orbit of the Planet Mars, is built of atoms. We should think of the possibilities of growth when we are so easily deciding that something is only a small matter. That is exactly where we often let ourselves get entrapped into large consequences. Watch your words, and you will not have to worry about their consequences. Watch your thought, and you will not have to be so careful about your words.

A large part of our concern as we go through life might well be watching out for little things. Like reading the labels on bottles to see if what they contain is habit forming, we need to watch the actions and tendencies which require all the more care because there are no labels on them. We just have to be wise enough to know about them and take care. A former generation used to say to watch the pennies and the dollars would take care of themselves. The same might be said of what we call the big things and the little things.

"Just this once" never means exactly the way it sounds, nor even what it says. It is well enough if it points in the right direction, but the people who seem so fond of it are too seldom concerned about that. If it points in the wrong direction, as too often it does, there is destruction down that road. "Just this once" will be found to mean repetition, and each repetition will be another winding of the prisoning cord around one's life to hold him from his true destiny. It happens that in that "once" the whole danger lies.

Of course, good habits begin small too. That is well, because it makes them as easy to begin as the wrong ones are. Put "just this once" always on the high road instead of the low one, or the neutral one. It is just as easy to start right as it is to start wrong, and the same doubling of the power of habit with each act prevails.

"Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a destiny." So our fathers used to say, and some of them did very well with it too. It is still true that, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

*** LARGE CONSEQUENCES ***

ALL the foregoing hinges on a fact we must always take into consideration - the fact that little things do not always stay little, but are subject to the law of growth and change. It is even more important to watch out for them than for the big things. The big things may already have attained their growth, and will stay put, so to speak. Not so with the little ones. Let us look at a few examples of what happens.

At its source in Lake Itasca in the extreme northwest corner of Minnesota, the Mississippi River is about twelve feet wide and one foot deep, a stream anyone could easily walk across. At its mouth on the southern coast of Louisiana it is so large that it divides into three wide streams, and a great delta has been built there of the soil carried down the course of The Father of Waters to the Gulf of

Mexico. Most of its smallest tributaries are larger than itself at the beginning. It is so with a habit.

It was a countless company of Hebrews that moved out of Egypt toward Canaan, though it had been about some seventy souls that had entered it more than four centuries before. Each of the twelve tribes then consisted of but one man. The aged Jacob and his family were powerless even to support themselves. The host into which they grew was strong enough to wrest Canaan from some of the strongest peoples of the ancient world, the Hittites for instance. It is so with a habit.

The Great Pyramid of Cheops began with one stone, laboriously quarried, transported to the scene, and put into place. But time and labor added more, till one of the most impressive structures on the face of the earth stood out there against the sky, where it still stands as one of the wonders of the world. It is visited by people from all over the world, and men still wonder how so vast a thing was ever constructed, till they remember that it was put together piece by piece. It is so with a habit.

The American Nation began with two small shiploads of permanent settlers, one at Plymouth Rock in what is now Massachusetts, and the other at Jamestown in what is now Virginia. The nation they joined to bring into existence now consists of millions of people. One day the Jamestown settlers bought twenty Negro slaves from a Dutch ship putting into the harbor. Before slavery was abandoned in America that number had grown to four millions. It is the same with a habit.

The Grand Canyon began ages ago with the action of a busy little stream, wearing away stone and whittling away soil, till today there are places where it has cut its bed a mile deep and opened out a chasm fifteen miles wide. One look at its brown, swirling current, shows that it is still working at its age-long task. What it will ultimately accomplish will be vaster still. It is the same with a habit.

A habit is the most fertile of seeds, and it produces the vastest of crops. Never think of it for what it is, but for what it will be; and remember that what it will be it is now and every day becoming. This development is subject to your will. It is happening because you let it, or make it. Remember too that this is as true for a good habit as for a bad one, or a useless one.

*** CHANGING HABITS ***

YOU cannot change a habit, but you can change habits. A habit is good or bad forever. It cannot be changed, but it can be put aside and another take its place. You cannot change a habit, but you can adopt a different one, or a whole program of different ones. What this will mean to you depends, of course, on whether you substitute others that are better or not as good.

If you do not want a certain way of life, do not start the habit that leads in its direction. You can substitute a different habit sometime, but it will get harder to do every day and finally become next to impossible. You may stop a break in a dyke while it is still a trickle, but it moves toward impossibility every moment. One who watches his life closely can head off the beginning of a habit, or break it at any point - if he is strong enough. One who merely follows the course of impulse, desire, or even chance, is always in danger.

Thought, purpose, impulse, and desire, will do exactly what the Colorado River did in excavating the Grand Canyon. Like a trickle of water running down grade, it will twist and turn to follow the path of least resistance, cutting a deeper channel and accepting help from tributaries till it becomes a flood. People who have not reached the problem stage with their habits may scoff at this, but those who have been through it will tell you it is so.

It is said that an act, good or bad, multiplies its hold on one about four times each time it is performed. What a tremendous force, then, one builds up either against himself or in his favor, as he follows even the first footpath of a habit! Take a number, any number, and multiply it by four. Keep on multiplying each new result by four. You will soon run out of paper, and see for yourself how the power of a habit can grow.

If a captor binds you with one thread you can break it easily enough. A few added strands will make it difficult. Surprisingly soon more added strands will make the cord so strong you cannot break it. One stick of wood is easily broken, but even a small bundle of them will defy your muscle. A bad habit has a diabolic power, and a good one has a beneficent power, which either has a way of multiplying till it can mock the strongest human will. This is the way people sometimes get enslaved, or by which they remain free.

This latter statement is true because any law works both ways. The same act cannot either ruin or save, but the same law can. At the beginning, and with increasing difficulty along the way, one can gain an ever stronger hold on the things he holds beautiful and precious by making habits of them.

Though a habit begins with an act, that act has roots in desire, will, and purpose. If one intends to build a new habit or set of habits that is the depth where he must begin. Then his acts will be what they appear to be, and so have the power of genuineness. Make frequent evaluations of your habits and their results, and if changes are needed, attend to it in time.

§§§ THE TIME ELEMENT §§§

TIME is a vital and increasing element in this matter of changing the kind of habits by which one's life proceeds. As we have said, a habit, however easy to form, even unconsciously perhaps, becomes harder and harder to exchange for a new and better one with passing time. This is in accord with a general law that all change is easier in younger years than in later ones. This should not deter us from the effort, however, for the will too should be stronger in later life.

Youth has great self-confidence because it has great energy. Note that we are using the word energy rather than the word power, which belongs to later years. Youth also has great adaptability and great will power of an impulsive kind as compared with the steady and uncompromising will of maturity. The force of youth is of the shock variety. This gives it ability to exchange habits, for it can do almost anything if it does it quickly.

Then, of course, youth has the advantage of not having allowed itself to get wound into the imprisoning hold of such a strong web of fate as the years can accumulate. No age is an entirely helpless prisoner, but youth needs no more of a struggle than the severing of a cord, which as years go by will grow into rope. On the other hand, youth has the disadvantage of being less aware of the danger involved in allowing a wrong tendency to get a start.

Let it be strongly and repeatedly emphasized that change of habits is possible to all. Even the person who feels helpless in the clutches of an unfortunate habit or set of habits should not despair. He should remember that if a thing is right and good there is some way to do it, and if he keeps trying he will find that way. The human spirit is always strong enough, if it will, to overcome the acquiescence of age, and no one lives who cannot enlist the ever-available help of the Most High. If substitution is needed, be heroic enough to make it. We are only saying that the sooner it is done, the better. Prevention is always preferable to cure. "It matters not how deep intrenched the wrong, be strong."

A squid or an octopus is a good example of what happens when one lets mistaken habits begin to get a hold upon him. First one tentacle lays hold, and while one is thinking that can be removed, another takes hold, and so on until the only way seems, however wrongly, to surrender. To add to the peril of the situation an ocean squid blackens the water till a victim no longer can see how to deal with his danger. The time element has constantly worsened the situation.

Or it is like falling into soft concrete, from which one might escape if he would do it quickly enough; but any delay only gives the imprisoning substance a chance to set and harden around him. The best thing is not to fall in, but once having done that the next best thing is to escape quickly.

Or it is like stepping into quicksand, which holds one ever so gently, but with increasing sureness. The first step may seem ever so inviting till it has been taken, but never again. Some habits are more like quicksand than others in that one needs outside assistance to escape. There are situations in which one should turn to others, still doing his own part toward the victory of overcoming. All these things remind us that a good set of habits is always safe, while a bad set never is.

§§§ HABIT CLIMAX §§§

WE now come to point out a very serious aspect of the matter of habits. There might be more pleasant things to say, but in some cases nothing more important as regards this particular subject. It is that habits reach a climax at which they are most difficult to deal with because they have become

unconscious and automatic; second nature, as some people might say. In other words they have become a part of us. Consider carefully what that means, whether the growing habit be good or not. What a wonderful thing it is automatically to follow the right road! What a fearful thing it would be automatically not to do so!

When that climactic stage is reached it is still possible to do something about it, but it takes constant and wearying vigilance which makes it, to say the least, extremely difficult. It is most discouraging when your tendency is to do a thing before you become conscious of it. It is like trying to hold something with no handle. This is splendid if the habit is a good one. In fact, it is the ideal to try to attain. But if the habit is not a good one, it is like slipping on the ice and knowing only that you have fallen.

In childhood were you ever required to wear some new garment in which you did not feel natural or think you appeared well? Then you saw someone you admired wearing one in the same style. Then you discovered that it was the fashion. Meanwhile, you grew accustomed to it, so you had no feeling of strangeness. In the case of a habit, that feeling of strangeness is a warning and a protection. After we grow accustomed we no longer have that safeguard, but only a vigilance which we may sometimes be too weary or too careless to maintain.

When you consider doing a thing that might become a habit, look forward and try to see what it will become and what its effects on your life will be as time passes. Try especially to see what it will mean to you when it has become second nature to you, and when you do it like you breathe or walk, with the unconsciousness of ingrained custom. Do not be content to think of the present moment. Consider that into which it will build if you let it, or if you make it.

Another thing to take into account is the fact that as habits approach this automatic stage they put out branches, so to speak. An old code, like The Ten Commandments, for instance, has long since turned into something like a tree, a tree of life we might say, with countless ramifications reaching into everything in life and conduct. This is a blessed thing if the habit is good, and vice versa.

Or we might say that adopting habits and letting them mature is like building timbers into one's house of life. They may place a strain on the structure or they may become supports that will strengthen it and increase its usefulness.

If there were a spectrum lens that would show an analysis of the life of any one of us its bands would be the tendencies that lead to habits or result from them. Mentally we can apply some such lens, and it should help keep us safe.

*** CHOOSING HABITS ***

IN view of all these things, it must be clear that habits are among the most decisive things in the making of our lives, and that they should be carefully checked for any needed changes each time we take inventory of our lives and make plans for realizing our hopes and possibilities. All this being true, what habits should one choose, and how can he best go about making that determining choice? We can only deal with the matter in principle, but the details can be

worked out by each one concerned.

First of all, many, if not most, possible human habits are known by the means of choice we all possess to be either good or bad, helpful or damaging. These means of choice are common and familiar. One is our own experience with them in practice. One is what we have observed of them in the acts and lives of others. One is the age-long experience of the human race with them, since there is not much that is new, and most things that come up for acceptance or rejection have been tried many times with well-known results. One is the instruction of thoughtful and informed people. And one is the influence we call conscience.

Everyone should give respectful and conscientious attention to the words of the wise. Listen to those of the living wise men around you. If they are older, so much the better, for they have observed, thought, and experienced more. Give some of your reading time to the writings of wise men of the past. Even some of the remote past have surprisingly helpful things to say. Their instruction shows us that the same questions we face now were also coming up long ago, and that Wisdom was leading people to satisfied living while Unwisdom was shattering human happiness then as now.

Watch the lives of those around you. The place where you live is a laboratory where all these things are being put to the test. See what they do. Notice how different some of the results are than what it seemed to you they would be. Always check them by the kind of life you want to live, the kind of life you know to be worthy, safe, and satisfying.

Use yourself for a practice study. Watch yourself as frankly as you would watch another person. Analyze yourself often. That is, take an inventory of the factors in your life as you would a stock of goods or a list of other kinds of assets or liabilities. Get rid of what you cannot approve. Not only is it a hindrance to you, it is a menace. Retain what you see to be good by all the tests you know; and cultivate it, for that is an important part of your stock in trade.

Think about these things, and weigh them as carefully as an apothecary weighs or measures what he dispenses. Do not take anything for granted, when you are deciding what shall increasingly be a part of your very self, - that will determine and mark out what your life is to mean in the world in your own time and afterward. Put decisiveness into this matter of dealing with habits.

This lesson, with its seven sections, indicates the beginning, but not the end, of what you can do in the Habit Department of the business of living your life. You stand at the counter of destiny with all kinds of values from which to choose the ones you will accept as your own. It is a crucial place to stand. Choose well.

AFFIRMATION

I choose to reject the habits that would injure my life physically, mentally, or spiritually; and to accept and cherish those that will help me to build a destiny in harmony with the will of my Maker.

Blessings,

Your Instructor.