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VADE MECUM, VOLVENTIBUS ANNIS

Degree 10

THE MAYANS
SAN ANTONIO,
TEXAS

Number 298

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The Road to Attainment Series

LESSON SIX

THE ROAD TO MATURITY

Mayan Revelation Number 298

THE LIFTING POWER OF A SENSE
OF HUMOR

THE CREATIVE USE OF MEMORY

THE KINDLING POWER OF IMAGINATION

THE REWARDS OF APPRECIATION

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CONCLUSION

AFFIRMATION

BELOVED PERFECTOR:

Maturity is an intangible quality of personality. We speak of people as "of mature years" but that does not mean they are mature persons. Childishness does not disappear with the passing of childhood. We can remain undeveloped for as many years as we live. Yet, all of us would like to think that we are mature. We resent those qualities within ourselves that make us jealous, or selfish, or critical of others.

A young woman came to your Instructor for a conference. After describing frequent fits of temper, periods of resentment and jealousy, she said: "I know right away when I have been petty and small, and I hate myself for it, but I can't seem to avoid these outbursts of childishness. Can you help me?"

The answer to the problem this young woman faced demands that she become a mature person. She has never grown up. She continues to reproduce the temper tantrums which were effective in getting what she wanted as a child.

All of us struggle with the problems that prevent us from being mature. In our better moments we too ask the question: "Can you help me?" This Lesson is designed to offer certain keys to a mature personality. They assume that you feel an eager desire to improve yourself and your outlook. It is important that you dismiss pride in your own accomplishments if you are to receive the full benefits of this study. Be prepared to look at yourself as a stranger may see you for the first time. If you can make a frank appraisal of your weaknesses, then you will be in a position to develop those qualities that will contribute to maturity of personality.

You have traveled roads along which were signboards suggesting alternate routes to a given point. You studied those signboards to discover which offered the most direct route or the best four-lane highway. As we travel the Road to Maturity, there are certain signboards that point the right direction. It is these signs that will occupy our attention during this Lesson. There are other ways that might be considered, but the ones we suggest in this study are the most direct keys to a mature personality.

PRAYER

Gracious God, forgive us for our childishness. Too often we want our own way, rather than the way of Thy Truth. Make us to know Thee and to do Thy will. Give us strength to become the mature persons Thou didst intend us to be. Fill us with a sense of Thy presence that throughout each day we may be illumined by Thy Grace. In Jesus' Name. Amen.



THE LIFTING POWER OF A SENSE OF HUMOR

THE first signboard on the Road to Maturity states very clearly: "Utilize the lifting power of a sense of humor." The marks of childishness are whining, fretting, complaining. There is no laughter, no joy to accompany these immature outbursts. Conversely, it is an indication of maturity when we can see in an annoying or frustrating situation something that is amusing.

A sense of humor is one of the qualities the Creator has planted within us to keep us from going mad, or to save us from becoming pompous, or conceited. It can do more to help us maintain poise when we are under heavy strain than any other personality characteristic. Since humor is a necessary factor in keeping life balanced, it must follow that it is a gift of God. When the tension of life is great, and we are tied in knots, laughter lightens the strain and lifts the load.

You may have humor without happiness, but you will find it difficult to find happiness without humor. Man is the only creature who laughs and weeps, who recognizes the incongruous, and who is able to compare things as they are with what they should and can be. Humor makes for sanity, health, and faith. It removes hostility and oils the machinery of human relationships.

The most mature people throughout the ages have been those who found enjoyment in laughter. Jesus of Nazareth is the supreme example. The reader of the New Testament can hear chuckles of happiness as the crowds listened to His teachings. Catch the humor in His words: "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into a ditch." Or a new translation of familiar words: "Why beholdest thou the splinter which is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the plank which is in thine own eye?"

The message of Jesus was appealing to the common people. The children crowded around him. If He had not had a merry heart, if He had been solemn and gloomy, He would not have attracted such numbers. We are left to imagine the twinkle in His eye, the smile which lit up His face, and the tone of His voice as He dramatized the stories He told.

When we look at the taut, bitter, and angry faces of the Pharisees, when we note their petty jealousy and plotting, we are left with no doubt as to who was the mature person, Christ or His critics. The joy of Jesus made him stand out as victor, even when He was subjected to torture and death.

Henry Ward Beecher, the great preacher of the middle nineteenth century, said: "Blessed is the man who has a sense of the humorous. He has that which is worth more than money." He had learned and had put into practice the principle that contributes to maturity - the ability to laugh even in the midst of hardship.

Abraham Lincoln is rightly included on the list of our great Americans. The affectionate term which the people gave him, "Father Abraham", was more than a tribute to his strong leadership. It was a recognition of his maturity as a person. One day Mr. Lincoln was standing in the midst of his stern-faced cabinet. History has indicated that they were men of petty outlook. Mr. Lincoln said, "Gentlemen, why don't you laugh? With the fearful strain of these days I should die without laughter."

It is said that two Quaker ladies were discussing the outcome of the Civil War. One said she thought Jefferson Davis would win because he was a praying man. The other remarked that Abraham Lincoln was also a praying man. The first replied: "Yes, but he is so given to jokes that the Lord will not know whether or not he is in earnest when he prays."

Yet Abraham Lincoln was the most mature person in the America of his generation. Who of us can separate that maturity from the lifting power that came to him from a well-developed sense of humor?

H. A. Overstreet in his masterful study of human personality, "About Ourselves", says: "We are led to feel that humor, whatever it is, is a gift of the gods." It is a social and political balance wheel. It punctures false superiority and sham. Humor helps us to see ourselves as we really are.

A British editor made the observation that during the fearful bombing of London in 1940 the morale of the people was sustained by faith and a sense of humor. We need to relax when life is so tense and so serious and so crowded with calamities that, if we brood over them, we tend to break under the strain. In such moments find something which seems so ridiculous that it makes you break into laughter.

There are people who see ten reasons for crying where they discern only one for rejoicing. It should not be so for those who possess a vital faith. If we are children of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, the smiles ought to chase away the frowns.

It is a fact of the ages that humor - and the inner joy that accompanies it - is a mark of a mature person. Of course, it should be evident that we should not enjoy laughter at the expense of another's pain. There is a false humor that cuts and scars. Nor does serenity come from the laughter that is brought by the clown. The mature person has a joyous heart produced by the constant awareness that God is good, and we are pitiful and foolish creatures when we neglect to use His gifts.

You may not have been born with a sense of humor. If not, then cultivate it. Find something in every situation that causes you to smile. "There is gloom enough to keep you glum; there is gleam enough to keep you glad." Keep the gleam in your eye every day. It will not only make you happy, it will help to make you a mature person.

There is a lifting power in laughter. If you miss this lifting power you bear a load that is heavier than it needs to be. Even the worst sorrow should give way to the joy and hope of the eternal life. If you would follow the Road to Maturity, utilize every day the strengthening power that comes from laughter.



THE CREATIVE USE OF MEMORY

THE second signboard on the Road to Maturity reads: "Make creative use of memory." It is within our power to treasure in memory the happy events and experiences of the past so as to bring joy to the present. The mature person has a vast storehouse of experiences gleaned from books, nature and travel, upon which he draws constantly to transform a dark day into a fresh reason for delight.

Thank God for the gracious memories that serve to encourage your heart. Dip into these treasures when skies are dark and you feel that you have no place to turn. If you are tempted, because of personal sorrows or national crises, to sink into the depths of despair, the memory of better days will help to quicken the hope that the shadows are merely temporary.

The memory of life's high moments and rich experiences kindles gratitude, and the grateful heart is always the happy heart. The treasures of memory are like a bank account upon which we can draw to insure stability and calm in the time of stress.

As necessary as memory is to our happiness, we must avoid living too exclusively in the past. The function of memory is to give significance and joy to today's experiences, not to serve as an escape. Memories can provide meaning for the present and hope for the future. They can enable us to see that every present hardship has been known in the past, and that the temporary defeats of former years were dispelled as forces for good were brought to bear upon them.

Do not hold in your memory that which destroys happiness. The motto of Paul was, "Forgetting the things which are past ... I press on." Yet he never forgot the joyous excitement of the day his life was changed. That memory stayed with him, and empowered him.

We all need to pray: "Lord, teach me to forget what I ought to forget, and to remember what I ought to remember." This suggests an important principle closely related to memory. We must learn and practice the art of forgetting those things that have no value. The failures of the past are best put aside. We should not dwell upon our errors and mistakes and disappointments. This is not to say that we should fail to cultivate the memory of the forgiveness and mercy of God. We are callous if we forget the example and love of those whom we have lost awhile. We are softened and uplifted by the memory of past associations with those we love.

The line between forgetting and remembering is close. The mature person does not morbidly give way to vain regrets. Much of the past is beyond human power to change.

Vain regrets are most poignant in the incidents of life when we were forced to make a choice between two courses of action. At the time, perhaps the reasons for going either of the two ways seemed to be almost evenly balanced. In some instances we are consoled when, in the light of after events, we feel that the choice we made was the wisest and best. In other instances we are besieged by continuous regrets because we have come to believe that the decision we made was wrong. Then it is wise to strive to forget the past, for it is irrevocable, and will only hinder our progress in the present and in the future.

"If I had done this instead of that ... If I had gone to another school ... If I had settled in another location ... If I had secured the job I wanted ten years ago ... If I had made a different investment ..." Some persons even go so far as to say, "If I had married John instead of Harry, or Edna instead of Mary." Life is a continuing misery when it is full of "ifs" and "might-have-beens".

What is past is finished and cannot be changed. Don't waste your life bemoaning the choices you made. You must use your energy to face the present and the future. Begin today to drop "if" out of your vocabulary.

After all, it is by no means certain that the other choice would have been better. The decision you might have made could have untold results in misery, or in tragedy.

Vain regrets are as useless as they are harmful, and they paralyze the powers that make possible your future progress. Forget your mistakes and errors and failures. Remember the golden hour in which you were given the freedom of choice. Be thankful for whatever wisdom and insight led you to make wise decisions. Leave the past in God's hands as you turn hopefully toward the future.

The ability to do this is a mark of maturity. Memory is intended as a force to enrich your life, and it will do so if you cultivate it with expectancy and with gratitude. The treasures of memory can add to your present fortune. Do not neglect them for they will vanish if they are left unused.



THE KINDLING POWER OF IMAGINATION

THE third signboard on the Road to Maturity calls for us to "kindle the power of Imagination." Memory deals creatively with the past, but imagination contributes to our happiness by enabling us to project ourselves into the future. G. Stanley Hall, the eminent psychologist, said: "The imagination is one of the most potent of all human faculties ... By it we escape the limits of time, space, and even all personality that hedges us in; lives may be ever so limited, yet by this power we can almost become citizens of all time and spectators in all events. By it the poet, artist, and prophet have wrought their magic in the world."

The agnostic will accept nothing as truth which is not visible, tangible, and knowable. He wants nothing but the facts. Such a philosophy casts away the part of us that dreams and hopes. Like Confucianism, it attempts to build up, without the imagination, a system of philosophy in which the unseen world is left out. But imagination is a vital part of the human mind. It should not be brushed aside.

Visualize a more glorious future in this present world through the use of your imagination. You need not cultivate an easy-going optimism that is blind to the forces of evil, but maintain a living faith in the ultimate victory of the right. Jesus announced not only a personal victory but a victory for humanity when he declared, "I have overcome the world." If you would be mature, then clear your mental vision to see that those who struggle to realize God's purposes need

have no reason to fear. We have as our allies an unseen host of spiritual forces. This assurance wipes out any disturbing anxiety.

Through the exercise of imagination we can bring either misery or happiness to ourselves. Through the exercise of imagination we can bring either misery or happiness to other lives. How shall we treat our fellow men? In the Golden Rule Jesus answers: "Use your imagination to put yourself in their place and treat them as you would like to be treated yourself." Jesus enlisted the imagination of men in the interest of the good way of life.

The use of the imagination is essential if we are to realize the highest spiritual truths. The mother of the famous artist, Millet, gave this counsel to her son, "Go down and get the last day of your life and make it always your company and keeper." Even when he found himself in situations that were sordid and difficult, Millet was able to see life as it might become.

Imagination is an essential quality of the mature mind. It keeps us from becoming bogged down by temporary defeats. It opens our minds to values that are eternal. It enables us to personalize the God whose handiwork we observe in nature and in the unfolding of history.

Kindle the power of imagination as an essential contributing force to your highest self. Refuse to be chained by events that may be only a passing phase in your experience. Your imagination is God's gift by which every day can be transformed. As you develop this gift you will travel further on the Road to Maturity.



THE REWARDS OF APPRECIATION

THE fourth signboard on the Road to Maturity directs us to "the rewards of appreciation." The mature person recognizes his debt to others, and constantly pays tribute to those who have contributed, and who now are contributing, to his privileged position.

The person with a childish outlook resents the praise and recognition given to others. He is driven by the mistaken idea that his own security is threatened when someone else is being praised.

In a recent social gathering a distinguished guest was being honored. It was painful to note that each time a tribute was paid to the guest, the wife of a young executive interrupted the conversation to say something about the virtues or abilities of her husband. After this happened four or five times the young wife stood clearly revealed for what she was - jealous, insecure and childish.

The Rev. Hilda Trees has become well known as a woman preacher in rural parishes in Maine. When she went to her first church she was greeted by one of the deacons. "Every time we get a new minister," he said, "he is worse than the one we had before. Now we get a woman!" But a miracle occurred. The church was filled each Sunday. Some who never went to church were found regularly in the congregation.

After several years a newspaper correspondent went to the town to learn the secret of her remarkable ministry. When asked to explain what had happened, a farmer said: "She loves people and appreciates their hunger to know God." He went on to say that she found little to criticize, but much to praise.

This principle is a mark of maturity. Leave carping criticism to others. Endeavor to understand the reasons why people act as they do. Be certain that qualities which are unpleasant have their source in some factor in their background.

A recent book by the Japanese leader of the Young Woman's Christian Association bears this unique dedication: "~~To all the friends along the way who have given me candles for my lantern.~~" She is aware that she owes a debt to many people for her privileged position.

You owe a great deal to others. Take time to write a note to several of these persons. Speak a few words of appreciation to those who have helped you with encouragement or with assistance. You will become stronger by every word you speak that tells someone else you are aware of their generosity.

One of the Mayo brothers was honored at a banquet for the contribution he had made to the health of others. Before receiving the plaque he insisted upon bringing to the platform fourteen doctors who had worked with him. In response to the tribute paid him, he turned to the group standing with him. "These are the men who deserve the credit", he said.

Learn to appreciate the virtues of others. Pay tribute to the kindness of your friends. Don't hesitate to recognize the debt you owe to someone else for the opportunities that you have today. You will not only grow in stature by the quality of appreciation, but you will be happier and more relaxed in the presence of others.

The ability to appreciate is a mark of maturity. Cultivate it as you would a beautiful plant. It will grow and flower to bring you lasting joy.



THE CALL FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

THE final signboard on the Road to Maturity indicates that "active participation in the struggle for a better self is more constructive than the role of the onlooker." Often our insecurity or fear of failure keeps us from attempting that which might bring us success and happiness.

Lorado Taft was one of our greatest sculptors. In an interview he revealed the secret of his attitude toward his life and work; "What we sculptors, what every individual needs to remember, is this," he said, "that we are a part of an eternal cycle and because of that we are tremendously important as personalities. We need to take a long look at life. We need to get the hint of eternity back into our work and thoughts. Because we are children of God what we can do we must do." Those who

knew Mr. Taft pay tribute to him as a man of remarkable maturity.

"What we can do we must do." To hesitate or to procrastinate is to lose an opportunity to enrich the lives of others. But more than that we are kept from personal development along the lines that God has intended for us.

You will be tempted at times to dissipate your energies in discussion or argument. It is more comfortable to avoid involvement when the struggle may be painful. This was the dilemma that confronted Plato many centuries ago. For many years his role in Athenian society had been that of critic. But the time came when he felt compelled to thrust his influence into the community struggle, even at the expense of his life. His maturity as a philosopher and as an individual was evident at that time.

Life is complex. Many times we prefer to allow others to speak concerning the evils inherent in our society. We comfort ourselves with the thought that it is none of our business.

You are on the Road to Maturity when you accept the opportunities life offers you. To fail in this challenge is to rob yourself of the joys that come to the completely developed personality.



CONCLUSION

THE Road to Maturity is open before you every day if you are willing to travel over its surface. The signboards have pointed the direction. It remains for you to begin the journey.

Don't be discouraged if you encounter rough spots and sharp inclines. If you persevere you will slowly but surely reach your goal. God has made it possible for you to be a mature person. He is willing to help you, but the determination and the perseverance must be yours!



AFFIRMATION

I am determined, with God's help, "to put away childish ways", and to walk the pathway to maturity.

Blessings,

Your Instructor.