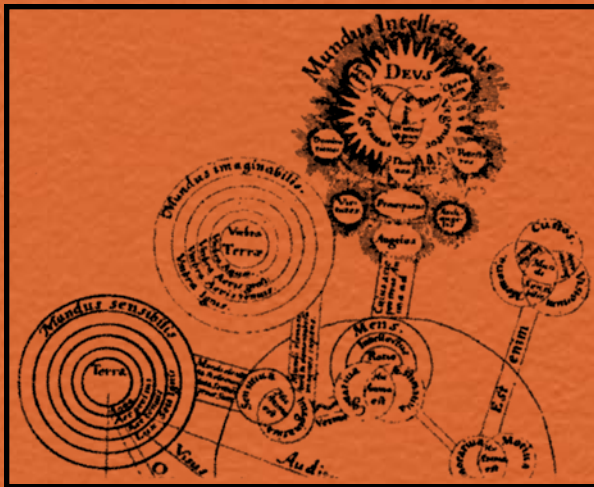


THE BLIND SPOT IN THE MIND

WHY WE HAVE DIFFICULTY
UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES



LECTURES ON PERSONAL GROWTH
by Manly P. Hall



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THE BLIND SPOT IN THE MIND

WHY WE HAVE DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

(from a lecture originally delivered at PRS on April 3, 1960)

Of all the problems that each person must solve, the complexity of his own temperament is probably the most challenging. Most of us have very little trouble giving other people good advice—we see exactly what is wrong with them—and we tend to develop the attitude that perhaps we have been more fortunate; that through experience or opportunity we are just a little wiser than the others. And then a little problem comes home to us, and confusion immediately results. The confusion, of course, arises from the important principle operating in nature that impersonal judgment is always the best. It is very true, and we cannot deny it, that we can advise others in many areas where we cannot solve our own difficulties, simply because personal involvement results in loss of perspective.

To meet this type of situation, we must plan our own thinking just as surely as we must plan every other activity of life. We spend many years becoming proficient in some art or science. We must also give some time and thought to the disciplining and directing of our own consciousness. We have a feeling, I think, that the moods that arise within ourselves are inevitable; that there is nothing we can do about them. We are bewildered, and sometimes rather disappointed, at our own lack of personal integration.

Around this theme, therefore, we develop what might be termed “blind spots” in our understanding. Several factors can lead to this type of blindness. One is prejudice.

In any area where we have prejudice, we lose sight of facts. Prejudice is a kind of intensity that drives us past the reasonable and usually lands us in a difficulty. Another common cause of this type of difficulty is a certain psychological astigmatism. We are out of focus when it comes to certain areas of activity.

We can study this problem, make important researches, gather statistics, but all our findings come to one general conclusion, and that is that each person has areas of his own understanding that have not been developed. These areas represent fields of activity with which he is not familiar, patterns of life that he has not experienced, levels of understanding that he has not personally known. As a result of the absence of practical fact to assist him, the person must depend upon theoretical fact. He must depend upon advice, the opinions of those more learned than himself, experts in various fields.

Sometimes these experts are really helpful, particularly on practical levels, but no expert can contribute to us his experience; he can merely apply it to our problem, and sometimes this will add further confusion, inasmuch as he is applying to us a perspective that belongs peculiarly to himself. He has not experienced our problem, any more than we have experienced his. Practice and familiarity and constant work may give him certain advantages, but these advantages also have their limitations.

So far as is possible, it is important for each of us to experience as wide an area of life as is feasible or practical for us. Our blind spots are nearly always in areas where, for one reason or another, we may have refused to live, or refused to think through or accept certain ideas that have appeared distasteful or unimportant.

Today, in the general broad confusion of our time, it is easier than ever to be disoriented. One evident fact is that more is demanded of us than ever before in the evolutionary life of man. It is assumed that we know many things that we actually do not know. It is assumed, for example, that in our search for spiritual consolation, we are adequately informed on the principles of religion. This is usually not true. We do not have as much groundwork as we might wish. Today, especially, inter-religious and inter-denominational knowledge is very important to us. We must have greater breadth of thinking in order to meet the challenges of other minds.

On the level of a personal philosophy of life, it is assumed that we have sufficient available material upon which to build a working philosophy. The material may be available, but are we able to use it? It is assumed that we understand the principle philosophies of mankind, and can recognize these ideas as they come to us in fragments from the lives of those with whom we are associated. Yet unless we are intuitively able to sense the direction of a person's thinking, we probably will not appreciate, understand, or even tolerate it. Thus philosophy, which could help us, does not always serve its purpose.

On the level of more material things, we are assumed to be ethical and moral creatures. We are assumed to know right and wrong, and it is further hoped that we will have the courage to do that which is right. All this should be and might be true, but in many instances it is not true in practice. In moments of stress, we become panicky. We lose the power to think things through, to reason them along their proper courses, and to improve and protect ourselves through this type of understanding.

Every instant in life is a challenge; every moment something new happens; and we must meet all this change from within ourselves. If this inner life is not strong enough, integrated enough, calm enough to face various critical situations, we lose control of the processes and techniques that are necessary to us. The tendency to meet difficulty with stress almost always reveals that we are not meeting the problem with natural kindliness of understanding. Kindness, acceptance, and an intuitive effort to see the good in something, or the proper reason for something—this type of thinking gives us internal relaxation. It causes us to meet a situation with a full measure of our own integration. The moment, however, we react violently or impetuously, or when we react too inflexibly to a situation, we confuse it more, and we again lose control of our own participation. We sort of fall in to a situation, whereas we should stand beside it and study it and try to understand it.

These processes can be cultivated in ourselves if we will give our lives the opportunity to grow in their proper way. The first and foremost important relationship that the individual can establish with his own inner life is quietude. This does not mean negation, but implies a kind of watchful waiting, together with a determination not to pass opinion until all the evidence is in. Most of us do not like to be interrupted in the middle of a sentence to have someone pass an opinion or give a conclusion without waiting to hear the full story. Such remarks are often totally irrelevant, and would never have been made, had we been allowed to finish the sentence. This situation frequently arises in conversation; how much more does it arise in thinking?

Usually our mental processes begin with the first word of a sentence, and long before the sentence is complete, our

decision is in. This decision is usually not adequate. We have not listened, and in life listening is a fine art. It is an art that permits us not only to understand others, but to receive education or knowledge most completely and sufficiently. It prevents us from jumping in before the facts are known. This type of jumping in is so often the cause of becoming unwisely involved in a situation, and losing all capacity to help that situation. Once we have made a series of basic errors, it is our natural egotism to defend them. If we have said something, we must stand by it even though perhaps five minutes later we wish we had not said it. Thus, in an effort to defend our own intellect, to prove that we are thinkers, we try to defend biased or inadequate attitudes.

The human psychological construction is such that the most difficult thing for the individual to understand is the mainspring of his own life, the dynamic behind his own personal attitudes. It may be said, without too much danger of contradiction, that the source of all our pressures is the emotional center. We move not primarily from the mind, but from the instincts and emotions. These blaze up very quickly and we find it difficult to control them. Emotions have caused us trouble from the beginning of our lives. Yet they seem to break through almost any defense that we build against them and at the very moment when we realize the importance of the kind word, we emotionally blurt out an unkind one. The emotions seem to press forward beyond the boundaries of our self-control.

Knowing, therefore, that the emotional factor is the most pressureful, we also realize that it is the most personal, and that our personal reactions are nearly always emotional. This in itself is not bad, but if these emotions escape control, the result can be excess, and this is nearly always bad. There is

a moderate ground, and if we depart from it, we are lost; we inevitably fall into confusion.

This mainspring of emotional reaction, from which we are all to some measure sufferers, leads us gradually into situations that become so involved that we lose perspective. We begin to be sorry for ourselves, and the individual who is sorry for himself can never be truly honest about himself. Yet the moment we turn to strangers, or to the world in general, we are no longer under this tremendously pressureful personal psychic intensity. Of course, some persons can be very emotional about distant things; they can become tremendously worked up over impersonal problems. For the most part, however, we view these things with a certain degree of mental distance that enables us to be wiser in handling them.

Thus, it would seem that we can be thoughtful about things not relating to ourselves; and we can sometimes be so thoughtful about things relating to ourselves, but usually only during those periods, and under those conditions, in which our emotional intensity is not stimulated. In the quiet times of comparatively peaceful life, we can be quite thoughtful about ourselves and other people.

We can, in the quiet evening, sit down and meditate upon the mystery of our own soul with considerable advantage. But about that time, the phone rings, and a problem is dumped in our laps; and in that very instant, the placidity disappears. Little by little, we begin to be aggravated, concerned; we become personal. Someone says something with which we disagree intensely, and to the degree that this intensity increases, our judgment decreases. The more we fight these other opinions, trying to force people to agree with our position, the more they will defend their own; and the end is open conflict.

After it has all simmered down—the next day, or a week later—we realize, again in the quietude of our own meditation, that we were very foolish. By that time, however, the damage is done, and we may just have to live with it. These wonderful “forethoughts” that come behind do not seem to prevent us from making the same mistake the following day. We simply cannot control this upsurge of pressure in ourselves.

To meet this need, man has evolved a wonderful field of esthetic expression, and all the arts that we know are channels for the release of our emotional natures. Thus, through normal release, we reduce pressure, and when the time comes for mental decision, we are not so likely to become involved in emotional tension. Through the arts, we accomplish something the mind can never achieve—the education of emotion. Emotions cannot be educated by the obvious facts of things; they resist statistics; they are not concerned with the philosophical approach to life.

The emotional nature of man is naturally mystical, and the emotional life responds to the experience of beauty. Thus, to have a really rich emotional life, we must begin to mature our appreciations. The emotions must find in the things around them a certain sense of rightness. If they do not achieve this, they cannot be serviceable to us when we need them in a personal experience.

Emotional expression follows two general fields. One is participation, and the other is appreciation. Both have a great deal in common, but there are differences. Appreciation is our ability to recognize emotional challenge. It is the power of the person to enjoy, to relax and see beauty in the landscape around him, in the flowers in his garden, in the eyes of his children—to see beauty everywhere through

an appreciation factor natural to himself. He may find in music an outlet for appreciation. He may go to a gallery and appreciate great art. He may go to the theater and appreciate great drama. He can appreciate in many ways—art, architecture, religion—all these different civilizing and cultivating forces in his life and environment. And if his appreciation is maturing, he will reject that which is not worthy of appreciation.

Participation is more than this. It is an appreciation leading to action. The individual who admires certain artistic and esthetic achievements may wish to attempt, likewise, to achieve; he may feel the drive to express himself creatively. He may find numerous ways of doing this—perhaps in writing poetry or stories, or in the planting of a garden, or in any activity in which he does something himself to satisfy his natural instinct for participation in beauty.

The Japanese have achieved a very simple and wonderful way of working with this particular problem—flower arrangement. Here, both participation and appreciation are given an opportunity for expression. Appreciation must come first. Naturally, the individual will not arrange flowers unless he finds beauty and pleasure in them. Having found this, he may then wish to add the artistry of his own creativity. So he gradually learns to arrange these blossoms, twigs, plants, stones, and other elements into pictures that please him, and which, if they are well done, will also please many other people.

Thus there is emotional expression through some form of creative, constructive activity. Many persons like to have such activity, but they are afraid that it requires a long and arduous learning of a difficult art. This may be true, but there are many ways in which emotional appreciation and

participation can be enjoyed without any great amount of studious application. It is essentially a matter of feeling.

We sometimes wonder who taught the first artists, and there is only one answer—they taught themselves. They received a certain impression. They had a certain creativity in themselves that came through into manifestation. Once they had established their ways, they had students, and many came to study with them, but the history of great art is always that the student must sometimes rebel against the master. He must create his own way. Unless he does this, he is not a great artist and never can be.

Art expression and emotional release will not only give comfort to a person, but they also naturally cultivate a kind of special sight. Sometimes, perhaps, we may say it is hearing that it cultivates; but it is an insight, whether it is seeing, hearing, or any other sensory perception. This art not only makes beauty more important, but reveals it to be everywhere present. The artist going out on the side of the hill to paint, sees in an old tree hundreds of colors that the untrained eye will never observe. He realizes that black is not black, that green is not green; actually these are a mass of colors. He sees that in everything there are elements, and to comply the most simple design in nature, he must become aware of the lights and shadows that play upon that design.

Little by little, therefore, we can develop artistic sight, which is a certain power to see into things. We also develop artistic discrimination. As we sit down to paint those trees on the side of the hill, it comes to our mind that for our purposes, there are too many trees. Therefore, when we paint the picture, we leave out the trees we do not want. In this way, art has an advantage over photography, because art

permits the individual to discriminate, to choose, to make certain modifications in the name of beauty, or at least in the name of beauty as he understands it.

There are two schools of thought on this, naturally, as in everything else. Some feel that the number of trees that is there is the number that should be on the painting, but the creative artist feels that there is always something that he can contribute to make things more beautifully; and in life he feels the same way. There is something that he can contribute to the life-pattern which will make it more beneficial to all.

This gradual discovery of beauty, this instinct to put things in order, is not intellectual. It is a gradual education of man's appreciation. It is the emotional life itself recognizing the laws of its own existence. It is a kind of religious acceptance in which the person, internally at least, becomes humble and adores the beauty that *is*, placing himself in a subservient position to the realities around him.

If a person so disciplines his own emotions for a time, not so much by any force, but simply by permitting good taste to have its perfect work, he will be able, in another type of situation, to have less tension. He will find that his emotions will not escape from him so quickly, and that he intuitively and instinctively begins to search for the colors and shades and values in daily experiences.

He will then no longer see situations as he did before, merely upon the surface. His training has taught him that there are other dimensions that he must at least sense, even if he cannot actually convey them into mental order. If he can do any of this better than he does it now, he will find that as personal problems come in, he will not be so easily disintegrated or disorganized. He will become more artistic in the acceptance of experience.

The experiences that come to us, perhaps like the trees on the hillside, suggest that there are things we can do to make these experiences either more meaningful or more immediately useful to our own consciousness. Here, again, art begins what every artist must achieve—the ability to distinguish essentials and to divide them from non-essentials. If we paint pictures of everything that we see, they will be greatly cluttered. Our emotional lives can be cluttered in the same way, but by the process of discrimination, we discern what is essential. We realize how non-essentials can destroy the center of interest, and how confusion can ruin the design and cause us to fail to convey the impression we intended.

This process of the elimination of non-essentials, if we ever apply it to conduct, will pay off with tremendous dividends. This kind of discrimination will help us to realize that there are in the pictures we see in daily living many confusing elements that are present but do not belong. They are inevitable where masses of living things are heaped together, whether it be as rocks and stones and trees on a hillside, or as the personal associations of community existence. There are things that must be preserved, and other that may only obscure value; and to learn to discriminate between these degrees of value, is a very important discovery.

There is an Oriental art technique that can teach us a helpful lesson, and that is the technique of *notan*. It points out that nothing is essentially unimportant, but that each thing must be brought into true focus to be important. For instance, suppose we are out with an easel and canvas, and we decide to paint one of those rather nostalgic New England scenes of the side of an old red barn under an oak tree. We have to try to determine what is valuable. In this particular picture of the barn, do we need the cow? The

cow is there; but do we need the cow? Or are we painting a picture of a barn? An amateur will get them all in. He will have everything there, until the picture will have somewhat the quality of one of those masterpieces of Grandma Moses. It will gradually take on the element of folk art.

The Oriental artist, with his *notan* concept, says, "This is not good. Do not forget one important point: a cow is a picture, but it may not be a picture necessary to a barn." Each of those chickens can become a masterpiece if it is painted by Sesshu. Each chicken is a work of art; but if we have a hundred works of art in one picture, we have no picture. The problem is to discriminate, and sometimes it may be necessary to realize that we do not even need to orient the barn. If we leave it alone, the individual who sees the picture will orient it himself, because he knows the kind of place the barn will be in. If you leave the background blank, the view is not going to put a subway behind it. He is going to sense—perhaps through one tree, or one little line for a hill, or a suggestion of a sloping meadow—that the barn is in the country; and he is going to fill it in with the country as he understands it. This will give him a great deal of pleasure, because now *he* is creating, and the artist has given the person who sees the picture a chance to be a creative artist also.

These art concepts are valuable lessons, and they are just as valuable in a discussion over a back fence or in the problem of giving advice. Everything becomes a matter of discrimination, of selectivity, of the gradual education of our understanding, and the discovery of relative values. You cannot really explain these things in terms of cold philosophy. It has been attempted, but it is useless. The person has to feel it. He has to know when his picture is finished, and even the greatest artist has not always succeeded in this. Sargent

once said that it took two men to paint a picture—one to do the painting, and the other to shoot the artist at the right moment, before the artist himself spoiled the picture. It is this way, also, in giving advice. We need that second person who will stop the individual when his advice has reached its maximum usefulness.

If we can make a maximum artistry out of each step of life, and use fully all that we possess at any moment, we will discover that our blind spots in consciousness are areas that are obscured by pressure. They are not necessarily areas in which we may be totally deficient, but areas in which we are unable to escape some association mechanism by which the values are distorted.

The unknown is not, or should not be, the cause of disquietude. What we do not know should not cause us to be unkind or critical or suspicious. We should assume the unknown to be merely an extension of the known. We should realize that the meadows that we have never seen are not different from the meadows that we have seen, and that just as surely as the familiar landscape is beautiful, so the landscapes that we do not know are also beautiful. Some areas have mountains, and others have seas; but each has its own beauty. And the same is true of humanity. The people we do not know are not mysterious; they are just like the people we do know. Sometimes that is a disturbing thought, but we must accustom ourselves to it. The basic emotions of all persons are essentially the same.

Therefore, that which we do not understand should not cause us to suddenly pause and tighten. We should approach these things with a desire to understand and an expectation that what we find will be natural, reasonable, and proper. It may not be exactly what we want, but then, what we do

understand is not always what we want either. We gradually adjust ourselves to the things that we know, and we can assume that we can also adjust to the unknown.

The creative artist longs for the unknown because he is continually hoping that it will extend his own appreciation and understanding; but the average person resists the unknown for fear that it will interfere in some way with the small, snug pattern into which he has locked himself. To be locked in too small a pattern is a disaster, but we seem to regard such disasters as comfortable. Actually, they are the reason why, in an emergency, we are inadequate.

We must not be afraid of growth or of change. We must not fear the broader vistas. Of course, we have a right to choose what is most suitable to ourselves, but we should also recognize the right of others to choose, and the fact that everything is important, valuable, inspiring, helpful for someone. We may admit that tastes differ, but it is very hard for us to really accept this. We have lived so long in the concept that there is only our own good taste and everyone else's bad taste. Yet, to others, we are among those with the bad taste, and we may as well adjust quietly and happily to this realization.

If, then, by emotional education, so to say—not through schooling as we know it, but through experiencing—we gradually gain the instinctive power to accept, we are much better equipped when the time comes to make an important personal decision. When an emergency arises, we will not be deluged with a flood of blind intensity or criticism. Because we have understood, we will be able to approach the problem more factually.

When we can do this, we give the mind an opportunity to achieve whatever is possible for it to achieve. Relieved

of the tremendous flood of uncontrolled feeling, we are no longer forced to use the mind as a soldier or policeman to defend our feelings. Once we become too emotionally involved, we elect the mind to prove that we are right; but if we do not demand this of the mind, there is a great deal more probability that the intellect will discover what is actually right.

We are all endowed, upon our own levels, with a mysterious sense of perception called "common sense." Our trouble is usually that we will not permit it to function. We have distorted it. Any person who is able to use the faculties he already possesses, can find reasonable answers for any problem that arises in life. The problem is itself the result of a chemistry involving his own nature; therefore, in his nature will be sufficient knowledge and understanding to face the problem constructively. If, however, he panics first, he will not be able to use these faculties or command this common sense to serve him in his emergency.

Without the obstruction of the tremendous demoralizing effect of negative emotion, the mind is probably capable of its own intellectual sense of beauty. The mind is not without emotion, but it is a more reasoning thin, depending very largely upon the emotions for its color and its overtones. Give the support of the emotions, the mind will lead, usually, to a kindly and constructive solution to the problem. Deprived of emotional support, the mind will be brittle; and if afflicted by negative emotional pressure, it will become intolerant and despotic.

Thus the mind's power to solve, which is often the principle consideration of the individual, depends upon the support of the rest of the psychic nature. We will not find as many blind spots when we are relaxed as when we are

under tension. If we do find blind spots, we will also discover something else. We will learn that these blind spots invite us to self-improvement. They inspire us to a new understanding and estimation of our own character. In the presence of a blind spot, without psychic tension, we look squarely at ourselves and say, "In this area I am not adequate. Here I know nothing; and this is not good."

The moment we can view ourselves with a certain detachment, we no longer find it necessary to deny to ourselves the weaknesses that we have. We can say, very factually and frankly, "I have not the experience, nor the understanding, nor the wisdom to solve this problem at this time." This is an important discovery, for at least it does not further complicate the problem; whereas trial and error, with too much error and too much trial, will often make a simple problem into an unsolvable crisis.

Whenever we discover an area in which we are obviously not adequate, the problem of becoming adequate suggests itself. The first thing to do is to settle down to a calm, fact-finding approach toward areas where our knowledge is not sufficient. We must never substitute unsupported theory for something that needs facts. We must never try to talk fast enough or loud enough to cover up what we do not know. It is not humiliating not to know. It is far more humiliating to be continually wrong in what we think we know.

Blinds spots may result from too limited a field of personal activity, and sometimes this limitation is even held to be a virtue. There was an opinion long ago that in order to be loyal, we had to reject all forms of knowledge or thought that differed from those of our group, or our clan, or our kind. We made a certain virtue out of never going to any church other than our own. That was loyalty. We made a

virtue of always voting for the same political party that our parents voted for. This was loyalty.

This type of loyalty has stayed with us, psychologically, in our daily living. We have considered it good to restrict ourselves. We have considered it a waste of time to go afar into things we did not believe in. It has seemed more important to spend our time within the narrow circle of the familiar. And one of the reasons why progress has turned out to be a dangerous thing is because no one was prepared for it. No one was really prepared to grow, so when growth came, it came in the form of a general disaster.

A hundred years ago, areas were small by necessity. Opportunities were fewer, educational facilities were more limited, travel was more difficult, communication inadequate, and the individual lived a more or less isolated existence. Today, the person with an isolationist psychology suddenly finds himself in a complex condition in which isolation is no longer possible. He is confused by this, for he discovers that there are many things that he should have known that he has never bothered to find out. It becomes imperative, therefore, for him to enlarge his understanding.

There is another interesting aspect of this which we must not overlook. Surrounded as we are today by so many challenging circumstances, we are apt to develop the Aristotelian discouragement of never being able to know it all. Actually, we do not need to. All we really need is to preserve and protect this common sense center. If we can reach a reasonable degree of personal integration, we will have at our disposal the rudimentary principles of practically all forms of knowledge. After all, even the most complicated legal problems are essential problems of common sense and the discovery of value, and a person untrained in law may

have just as clear an insight into the values as the one who is trained.

Thus a broadening, deepening personal foundation will enable the person to adjust his own consciousness to a wide area of particulars. He will find that he will be a little better informed on many subjects that he has not directly studied. His entire sense of value will cause him to come to the conclusion that certain things have to be a certain way because there is no other reasonable way they can be; and later he will discover that he is right. So a broadened background gives him greater control of the foreground. He will discover that his own judgment, as it becomes better, can guide him just as successfully as the judgment of specialists.

The main problem is to get this background more or less filled in. One way to approach this is to make a list of the several things in life that you most heartily dislike. One by one, write down these things, and then go over the list and revise it with one other thought in mind. Normally, our dislikes divide into two groups. The first is that group of dislikes which we reject because they offend conscience, or they offend the deeper basic values in ourselves. We do not want to associate with that which is bad. We do not wish to do what we know is not good, even though we may be invited to do it. Some of our dislikes, therefore, are related to conditions that are simply not likable, which are basically not for us, and perhaps should not be for anyone, except as sources of experience, and painful experience at that.

The other group of dislikes cannot be justified. They are dislikes arising from the fact that we do not know. There are things we dislike because we *do* know; there are others that we dislike because we *do not* know. Then there are borderline cases of things we dislike because we are misinformed

about them. At any rate, in our list of dislikes, we are almost certain to come upon some that we cannot face rationally. Perhaps we dislike a certain group in society; but can we conscientiously, honestly, and sincerely say that group is bad? Probably we cannot. We may very well be forced to decide that we really know very little about these people, or that group, or that belief, or that line of activity.

We can gradually correct our tendency to make these generalities. They do not hurt the persons or the groups against which we direct them as much as they hurt us. The great danger of a generality that covers a vast area without any penetration, and comes finally to a negative conclusion, is that it is continually talking us out of learning. It is making us reject the challenge of that group or situation. Feeling that we have come to a conclusion, we do not even look. This is wrong, and will apply itself in many ways to our discomfort.

Having decided that there are things we do not like simply because we know nothing about them, or perhaps because we have mistaken one or two solitary instances for a complete picture, it comes time to review the whole situation. We know, for example, that today we are having trouble internationally partly because small groups of visiting tourists from this country have behaved miserably. They have gone out as ambassadors and representatives, and have betrayed their country as far as maintaining any dignity or prestige for the homeland is concerned. As a result of this, we will now find in some small town in Portugal or someplace, the typical Portuguese who does not like Americans. He may also be in Spain, Italy, France, Germany, England, Scandinavia, or any part of Asia or Latin America, because they all feel the same way. To him, we are an extravagant,

impolite, disagreeable, fault-finding, critical, snobbish group, and he knows it. After all, he has met six of us.

The same kind of things happens right here. We do not like a certain religion. We just know it is bad, because we knew two people who belonged to it, and neither one of them was pleasant; therefore, we have all the facts. Facts about what? Not about the religion—about two people. But we have never been able to keep the points clear. So wherever we have prejudice, we must look a little deeper.

If our prejudice is directed against religion, for example, we must try to understand why this religion, with perhaps four hundred million followers, can survive with our disapproval. Somebody must like it. Some people must find good in it, or they would not believe it. People are not that foolish. Therefore, it is up to us to go a little deeper. We do not have to join the religion, but we cannot allow it to be a blank area or prejudice in our own consciousness because if we do, it may sometime cause us to work a terrible injury upon a perfectly honorable member of that faith. We will not have a natural honesty when we come in contact with that person, and this lack of honesty, arising from ignorance, will also hurt us because that person might have become a valuable window into a larger world.

It is the same with every field of learning—art, sciences, industry, politics—all these things have to be understood. This does not mean that we take the Pollyanna attitude that everything is right, but we should take the attitude, to begin with, that everything is interesting. In everything, there are probably values that we should understand, for we are not even entitled to criticize unless we understand; and usually understanding ends criticism. We have a right to choose what is good for us, but we have very little right to condemn. So

blind spots can be areas of misjudgment, and if they are too numerous, the individual will have no balanced judgment on anything, and is certain to be miserable.

Sometimes the causes of our dislikes can be explained, if not justified by our environment and the qualities of our associates. There are, however, strange intensities that arise out of the depths of our own inner natures, which we cannot explain even to ourselves. We instinctively react with pleasure or displeasure, and feel no natural inclination to resist these instinctual reflexes. We go so far as to accept these spontaneous reactions as proof of powerful intuitive insight. Sometimes we are right, sometimes we are wrong, but the mistakes are quickly forgotten.

Associationalism, as advanced by the brothers Mills, explains many of the mysterious choices which we constantly make. Every person we meet, every incident that arises, and every condition in which we find ourselves, reminds us of some previous circumstance that has affected our living. There is something about the features of a perfect stranger that reminds us of an uncle we greatly admired when we were children. The face of another man, however, revives the imperfect memory of a school teacher who was more of a disciplinarian than suited our inclination. As a result, we instinctively favor the one and regard the other with a shade of resentment.

Many facial symbols lurk in the subjective parts of our memories, and each of these faces has become associated with a quality of temperament, or an incident, or a grievance. We are not intentionally remembering these things; they are just there as impressions that refuse to die.

As we grow from year to year, we leave behind various states of ourselves, which can also rise to haunt us. I know

many persons who have been unable to escape the memory of some critical period or event of early living. One man was blocked by a tragedy that occurred in his sixth year. He related every event of maturity to this incident, which he exaggerated out of all due proportion and used as an excuse for perpetual self-pity. He closed his character and his career to any influence which, by the broadest interpretation, could be associated, even symbolically, with what he regarded as calamity.

Everyone who is suffering from pressures is suffering in some way from his own mistakes. Until the individual realizes this, recover is impossible. We cannot cultivate weeds, and then gather a good harvest of ripe grain. I have talked with many persons who are tired, worried, harassed, irritable, and even sick, but always someone else is to blame. Yet the world in which we live is an extension of ourselves. If we see it as a miserable and forlorn sphere of tragedy and misfortune, it is because we have not achieved the integration of our own faculties.

So one area in which our judgment has to develop, and where we have to make rather clear and strong decisions, is this dark mystery of the undeveloped attitude that we have toward ourselves. One of the great blind spots in each of us is our inability to see ourselves, to stand aside and watch ourselves walk by. If we could do it, our lives would probably be enriched by many a hearty laugh; but we are so deadly serious about ourselves. We cannot get a separate look at ourselves; we cannot see ourselves as we see other people; and gradually this leads not only to isolation, but to an exaggerated sense of self-importance. It causes us to assume an essential difference, always with some advantage to our own position. We are different, and always in terms of being a little better.

This inability to get any kind of detached perspective about ourselves causes us to suffer untold agonies that are totally unnecessary. We become easily offended. We become constantly stress-ridden because we are so intensely personal about our own natures. We find ourselves instinctively forced to defend every part of our own life. We have to defend our mistakes just as enthusiastically as we defend our virtues. We must emerge with credit in this great pattern of things. This is too much hard work considering the general stress of the times.

We must learn to have a certain amount of detachment. We can begin by recognizing that it is not necessary for us to stand as a mountain in the midst of every situation, to try to be a pillar of strength at all times. Actually, it is not needed, and the effort to maintain this sense of our own rightness enables us to perpetuate our own wrongness indefinitely.

I would recommend strongly the definite effort to get a separate look at ourselves. One way to get it, of course, is to look in the mirror. We shall then observe, in all probability, that we are not marked by Heaven with any particular symbol by which we are superior to other creatures. Under ordinary conditions, even if we are slightly sensitive, our haloes do not show in the mirror, and they do not show to other people.

Also, we observe, as we look at ourselves, that we have a somewhat reminiscent similarity to a creature called a human being; that we are just like people; and in the discovery of this is our greatest joy in life. We are people with all others, striving to learn. We were born as they were born; we grew as they grew; we suffered as they suffered; we achieved as they achieved; and in due course, we will depart as they departed.

Therefore, there is nothing about us that demands that we regard ourselves as a peculiar and sacred creation apart from everyone else. We have a perfect right to learn, and to grow, and to share, but there are very few persons in this world who have the right to dominate. It is not necessary that other people agree with us. It is not necessary that others cater to us, or that they should keep their tempers when we lose ours. The thing that is essentially necessary and right is that we shall grow up in the world together, enjoying our own individuality and enjoying the individuality of others—not trying to create conformity, but trying to help people to be themselves.

This is real helping, and it means a larger foundation in our own thinking. In order to help many people, we must *be* many people. We must have in ourselves an availability of general knowledge, understanding, and appreciation. We pass completely that point where the difference is unpleasant. We must grow beyond the tendency to criticize or condemn. We may not agree, but we can understand; we can sympathize. We can realize the circumstances and conditions that cause other people to be what they are, because we are gradually learning to appreciate the conditions that made us what we are.

As we begin to develop this kind of thinking, the blind spots begin to vanish. We discover that they are simply neglected areas—areas in which we have never felt the need to develop. And the only reason that we have not felt the need is because we have never really felt the plan or purpose of life. We have assumed that the purpose of life was that we should go on through the years doing as we please, with as little inconvenience as possible to ourselves. We have gone along assuming that it was our right and destiny to just

keep on making the mistakes that we always made, and expecting other people to understand them. This is not the destiny of man, and as soon as we begin to wake up to the values, we cast light upon the dark parts of our own psychic integration.

There is no need for darkness inside. There are final answers that we do not know and will not know, but there can be light enough in every area of life to make that life valuable, and to make it possible for us to make valid contributions to the lives of those around us. Where we are crippled internally by blind areas, we lose a certain usefulness. The person who is physically blind is deprived of many privileges, and is restricted in his area of usefulness. He can still do wonderful things, but he is restricted. We can still do many wonderful things although we are restricted by psychic blindness, but we cannot do as many things or serve as easily and quickly as we can if we have the full possession of our faculties.

Thus, blind spots react into disposition as bad character traits, and no matter how much we try to help other people, there is an interval between us if our own conduct is poor. No one expects us to be perfect or never to make a mistake. We may be exonerated and excused for many mistakes; but we must let it be evident that we are at least trying to be the kind of person we would advise others to be.

It is important, in the waking up of these blind areas, to realize that the larger our internal life, the greater will be our success in trying to control our conduct. As we grow inside, we become more pleasant people on the outside. We begin to convert and influence not by words, but by our own graciousness, which is one of the most powerful converting forces in nature.

The blind spot, then, represents an area of challenge—not a big challenge, not a terrible thing. Blind spots have been cleared up in a single day. Sometimes it is done by sitting down with a person whom we do not understand and having it out with him. Let him do the talking for a while, instead of ourselves. We may learn a great deal. Perhaps it is solved by a good book. Perhaps it is cleared up by attending another place of worship. If our blind spot is in the field of exact knowledge, we must enlarge in that field—perhaps by returning to school for study of the subject. If it is simply in a field of personal relationships, we can clear up a great deal of it ourselves if we want to.

Always, our problem is that every day we live, we should not only strengthen strong points of character, but also redeem weak points. Every day we should have the experience of clearing up some part of blindness, and we will know when we have achieved it simply because there is suddenly light where previously there was darkness; suddenly there is friendship where previously there was a stranger.

By simply working, day by day, to understand and to share, and refusing to permit prejudice or criticism to limit our search for knowledge, we can move along rather graciously. And since a large part of the average person's blindness is not technological, it can be cleared up without a great deal of technical procedure. It is just a matter of expressing natural friendliness and permitting it to invite us to share in the understanding of other people; to learn something from them instead of relentlessly trying to teach them.

We learn most sometimes by relaxing; we teach best by listening; and we help others, in many cases, simply by gradually coming to understand the total pattern of their kind of life. This gives us skill in counseling, and it also

gives us friendliness. It creates bridges of understanding, and blind spots are places where these bridges are necessary. Thoughtful students therefore go to work on this problem of bridge-building, realizing that it is the source of their adjustment with society, but even more, it is the source of their own security and peace of soul.

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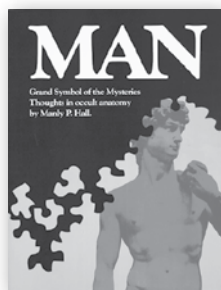
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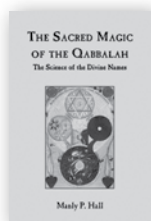
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Manly P. Hall founded the Philosophical Research Society, Inc., a non-profit organization in 1934, dedicated to the dissemination of useful knowledge in the fields of philosophy, comparative religion, and psychology. In his long career, spanning more than seventy years of dynamic public activity, Mr. Hall delivered over 8000 lectures in the United States and abroad, authored over 150 books and essays, and wrote countless magazine articles.

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