

## Chapter 4

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# The Uses of Pleasure and Pain

**O**f all the motives, those arising from the power urges are the most persistent and the most insistent, as Chapter 9, Course 14, *Occultism Applied* explains in detail. These are the urges which ever impel intelligences to desire to be important, to be unique, to express individuality, and in man to gain and retain self-esteem. The power urges are at the base of all those human actions which have for object the attainment of honor. Honor heightens the self-esteem, because the individual feels important in having the admiration of others.

Within the present economic system the commonest rewards offered for excellence of service are money and honor. People exert themselves to the limit of their powers in the hope of increasing their earnings. But it is found that other people will exert themselves even more strenuously to obtain a position of honor than they will for the rewards of wealth. A public office, a name lettered on a company door followed by the word, President, is even more attractive than an increase in salary to many men. People like to feel important.

Self-esteem, however, may be heightened and maintained through other methods than gaining the approval of one's fellow man. Some men are far more interested in attaining self-approval than in gaining the approval of the multitude. They find satisfactory nourishment for their desire for importance through doing important things. Instead of being dependent upon what others think to gain satisfactory self-esteem, they depend upon what they do, regardless of the approval or disapproval of others. Many a man in public life does the thing which he knows will win the disapproval of the multitude in the assurance that what he does is really the right thing to do. He feels better doing the thing which wins his own self approval, than in doing the thing which loses his own self-approval even though it wins the acclaim of the crowd.

Recognizing the strength of the motive of self-approval, as well as that of the approval of others, certain economists have proposed a system of government in which people do not make greater effort for any material thing, but in which each individual contributes all he can to the common welfare for the same pay or physical reward. The theory is that people should work as hard for the good of others as they do for increased pay. These economists hold that the satisfaction men get from being important should weigh heavier than a fuller pay envelope.

**The Most  
Satisfying  
Reward**

Disregarding any discussion of whether mankind has evolved far enough to dispense with greater physical rewards for greater services rendered, it is undoubtedly true that the most important work in the world is accomplished by those who do it for the sake of self-satisfaction and not for the sake of wealth, domestic success, health, or the honors bestowed by others. The great discoveries, the great inventions, the great works of art, the great literary productions, the great examples of statesmanship, are not activated by the desire for any material gain, but by the joy the individual finds in his work and the satisfaction he feels in its superior performance.

I am convinced that those who thus work for the joy of accomplishment and the self-importance derived from superior accomplishment find the satisfaction they thus experience as a result of such superior performance is a higher type of reward than any material thing could be. If, therefore, we were to judge even by human standards how God should reward those who live according to His Plan, and if we were to use the higher human standard, instead of the lower human standard, we would conceive such rewards to be in the nature of the joys of accomplishment and the subsequent self-satisfaction, rather than rewards in terms of health, money, position and domestic felicity.

I am sure that Michelangelo, who lay on his back through long day after long day painting the ceiling of St. Peter's, must have suffered terribly. Exacting work performed from such a position, almost incessant toil, being deprived in the meantime of the pleasures common to other men, must have induced many an ache and pain. Yet I am sure that Michelangelo, when his work was finished, counted all the unnumbered annoyances which hindered his work, and all the pain connected with its accomplishment, as naught in comparison with the satisfaction he experienced at the excellence of its completion.

Any accomplishment worth while, whether playing a piano, painting a picture, writing a book, or directing the policies of a nation, requires years of painful preparatory labor and training. It is common experience that to learn to do anything well enough to warrant a glow of self-satisfaction one must deprive oneself of the things one might enjoy during the time spent in training and go through an arduous education in which painful experiences are abundant. For, after all, grueling toil, forced application, and the emotional reaction to mistakes are painful.

**Nature's Educator**

This brings us to a point where, instead of theorizing, we should observe life as it exists in its numerous forms on earth. For any place we observe any form of life we find it undergoing education at the hands of pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain, in some degree, are common to all forms of life on all planes. And everywhere we observe their effect we find that they conduce to education.

Even to the child who is compelled by his parents to stay indoors and arduously practice some musical instrument while his playmates, free from such painful experiences, shout and frolic on a vacant lot close by, the pain he undergoes is not a punishment. It is a means to his education. And because his education, for his own ultimate satisfaction, requires more pain of this kind than his playmates get, does not signify that his parents are unjust, or that the society under which he lives is unjust. It simply signifies that the position he is ultimately to occupy requires in his education for it that he undergo this particular kind and quantity of pain.

Furthermore, if we observe the lives of plants and animals closely, we will

observe that the pain they undergo, as well as the pleasure, is a necessary part of their education. A tree, for instance, if it is to withstand a gale when mature, finds it advantageous to be beset by winds while it is growing. Through these painful experiences early in life, which nearly uproot it, it learns how to build a root system that will anchor it securely and permit it to perform the functions of an adult tree without being torn from its moorings.

If you will trace any pleasurable or painful experience undergone by any life-form, you will find that it contributes to the education of the intelligence occupying that form. Such a life-form might complain it was unjustly treated because it had more pain than a neighbor, in the same way that a child who must practice on some instrument while his fellows romp and play might complain of the injustice of his parents. Such a life-form might conceive that this pain came to it in the manner of punishment, and the child might consider that his music lesson was due to the parents, desire to get even with him for something. But unless we can trace the pain to its ultimate effect, and discern how it adds to, or detracts from, the ability of the individual ultimately to do something that gives self-satisfaction, any such conclusion is unwarranted.

On the contrary, any worth while accomplishment, whether of man, of animal, or of plant, is the result of overcoming great obstacles. If there were no difficulties to be surmounted it would be an easy thing to do, and not a worth while accomplishment. If you will notice the lives of men, you will find that only those who have had much practice in overcoming difficulties, thus getting a thorough training, ever rise to a point of superior accomplishment. Superior accomplishment means overcoming obstacles; and man and other forms of life only learn to surmount difficulties through encounters with them.

Disregarding, for the moment, the question of justice and injustice, anyone can learn from observation that education is only acquired through pleasurable and painful experiences, and that every painful experience and every pleasurable experience contributes to the education of the intelligence experiencing them. That is, by observing living things you can prove for yourself that they are being educated by success and failure, by gain and loss, by wealth and poverty, and by the various other forms of pleasure and pain.

Whether or not pleasure and pain are dispensed by God as favors and punishment to those who conform to or depart from some conventional standard of morals, anyone through observation can at least be sure that pleasure and pain, in their various forms, such as those mentioned, are used to educate souls, and are the only means by which any soul can be educated to accomplish anything.

Evidence of the response to pain by both plants and animals is given in Chapter 1, Course 9, *Mental Alchemy*. Here, I shall not again present this evidence, but shall instead endeavor to indicate that wherever life exists pleasure and pain are responsible for the education which enables it to gain its objective.

Already, in Chapter 5, Course 14, *Occultism Applied to Daily Life*, I have gone into the details of the development of the human personality under the influence of agreeable and disagreeable stimuli as demonstrated by the experimental work of Mandel Sherman and Irene Case Sherman. This work indicates that the human infant is born with a few reflex activities: ability to swallow, closing the eyes when the cornea is irritated; sneezing and response to deep pressure. These reflexes are inherited, which means that they are abilities already learned by the soul, either through experiences before birth

as a child, or through other experiences handed on to it by the heredity genes which transmit racial characteristics.

A new born infant is capable of random movements. When a disagreeable stimulus is applied, such as pricking it with a pin, it tenses and threshes about. When stroked or fed it relaxes. A plant or an amoebae performs similarly under the same conditions, except that a delicate instrument must be used to detect the magnetic shudder which the plant experiences when in pain, as it is incapable of violent physical movement. Any amoebae, or other animal, however, which possesses the power of movement, shrinks away from the painful object. But in the presence of pleasurable stimuli, both plants and animals relax.

As the child grows older, and has more experiences with painful stimuli, its activities grow more coordinated, and it gains in ability to move away from the painful thing. This withdrawing from a painful stimulus is accompanied by an emotion. And it soon learns to distinguish the thing which causes it pain and upon seeing it, or apprehending its presence through any of the other senses, to experience a disagreeable emotion. Such is the inception of the emotions which when further differentiated express as remorse, worry, sorrow, disappointment, fright, timidity and self-consciousness.

All other forms of life also learn to recognize painful conditions and respond to them by disagreeable emotions. Such disagreeable emotions vary in their complexity as the scale of life ascends. We can hardly say that a tree worries or expresses self consciousness, but we can say that a tree feels an unpleasant emotion, for such responses have been mechanically recorded. Yet we need not hesitate to say that a hen which has hatched ducklings and these take to the nearest pond, experiences worry. And we need not hesitate to say that certain dogs experience embarrassment.

According to the experiments cited, when an infant is restrained so it cannot move away from the disagreeable condition, it ceases to try to do so, and instead tries to push the disagreeable thing away. If the restraint is continued it stiffens the whole body, slashes about freely with hands, legs and arms, and then the breath is held until the face turns blue. The fear reaction has vanished, and there has developed in its place an aggressive response which is accompanied by an emotion that is the commencement of anger. From this anger response later develops the emotions of courage, initiativeness, combativeness, and destructiveness.

And we find the same kind of response developing, only in different degrees of complexity, in all forms of life. An oak tree unable to run away from the insects which deposit eggs in its twigs or leaves, secretes substances, in the endeavor to resist invasion, which grow into oak galls. Roses bear thorns, nettles have bristles, cacti grow spines, and the amanita mushroom secretes poison, because they cannot run away, and do not supinely submit to being destroyed. Almost any animal, when cornered, will fight, because it cannot get away.

### The Function of Change

The great fight, however, of all life is against changing conditions. When the ponds dried up, certain algae, which had hitherto lived only in the water, not being able to run away from this disagreeable condition, struggled aggressively to prevent being destroyed. And this courageous struggle resulted in the first little roots in the world being formed. These followed the water down into the drying mud, and gave rise to something similar to present-day liverworts. Thus the first land plants developed in the world.

Environment is ceaselessly changing. The forward pulse of cosmic cycles brings ever new conditions. Because they are not adapted to these new conditions, forms of life already developed have a difficult time of it. Regions that were once arid become flooded with water. Regions that once were well watered become burning deserts. Where plains have been, mountain chains arise. Glacier sheets move down from the north. Cold regions, by reason of shifting ocean currents, become warm. Winds develop where before was comparative calm. Food supplies are diminished by a too rapidly developing population. New enemies appear. Throughout the existence of the earth, as recorded in the rocks, such changes have been taking place and forms of life have had to meet the changing conditions or perish.

How the chief forms of life on earth have met these disagreeable stimuli, and have conquered them, although other forms have suffered defeat, is set forth in ample detail in Course 12-1, *Natural Alchemy: Evolution of Life*. The point I here wish to bring out is that, in order to survive, either individually or as a race, when conditions arise that would destroy it, a life-form must learn how to avoid or overcome the condition. It must run away or defeat the environmental menace, whatever it may be, or perish. Pain is the prod by which Nature compels life-forms to learn to accomplish tasks of greater and greater difficulty.

But we must not overlook pleasure. Instead of demanding the fight or flight reaction that is aroused by pain, the life-form learns to seek those things which are pleasurable and to relax in their companionship. At first the infant merely relaxes when petted or fed. Later this relaxation becomes a smile. And it soon learns to reach for those things which it has found give pleasure.

All the emotional reactions of an infant are conditioned by the pain or pleasure it experiences in association with various circumstances. What it likes and what it dislikes depends entirely upon its experiences with these things. Thus one person comes to like something that another person just as strongly dislikes. Because behavior is based upon such likes and dislikes, upon such emotional responses, the actions of people, as well as the actions of all other life-forms, depend upon their experiences with pleasure and pain as associated with definite things or situations.

In view of these considerations, instead of adopting the orthodox notion that pain has its origin in the desire of some deity or some law to punish the individual, let us ask the biologist what pain is and how it came to develop:

He reveals to us that the normal function of pain is to inform an organism that it is failing in some measure fully to adapt itself to environment. If a life-form had no perception that it was being destroyed, it would take no measure to prevent destruction. If it had no feeling akin to hunger, for instance, it would not eat, and would consequently die. If it had no sensation to inform it that heat was burning its tissues, that enemies were eating into its vitals, that it needed moisture, that it was being destroyed in any manner, its life would probably be short. Unless some method were present by which it could become aware of the destructive forces that were depriving it of life, it would have neither the fight nor the flight reaction; it would neither combat its enemies nor run away.

Women who worked in watch factories during World War I, and since, where the dials were painted with radioactive paint, felt no pain. They had no knowledge that the radioactive substances they used were slowly burning up the tissues in vital parts of their bodies. Not until years afterward were

## The Function of Pain

they aware of this, when the destruction then contacted caused the death of some, and made invalids of others. Had their nervous systems been sensitive enough to have registered pain when their internal tissues were attacked by the invisible rays, they could have reacted to this menace either by flight or fight. That is, they either could have secured other jobs, or could have continued the work unharmed by using proper insulation.

Biologists tell us that pain is not due to punishment, but was developed, little by little, as organisms became more complex, for the sole purpose of informing them that they were being destroyed. As an organism advances, its sensitivity to pain increases; and this increased sensitivity to pain is one of the most valuable acquisitions, because it keeps the life-form well posted as to its success or failure to meet the requirements of life. And, because hesitancy, or great delay, in fighting or running away from a destructive condition, is apt to result in death, it was most valuable to a life-form that the consciousness of the presence of something destructive should be so energetic and insistent that it would compel the necessary action to preserve the life.

Had the algae, which, I mentioned, not had some kind of consciousness that it was being destroyed by being deprived of moisture, a consciousness of discord such as in higher life-forms we call pain, it would not have struggled to overcome this menace, and there would have been no land plants on earth. A still more definite type of pain informed the dinosaurs that they were being frozen, when the climate where they resided changed from warm to cold. Of course, they did not analyze the cause of their discomfort; but they felt it. And some of the little ones, more aggressive than the rest, not being able to run away, in the course of some generations converted their scales into fur, and others converted their scales into feathers. And thus it came about, because of pain, that creatures with fur and creatures with feathers now inhabit the earth.

### The Function of Pleasure

As to pleasure, the biologists tells us that it likewise was developed, little by little, as life-forms became more complex, from the consciousness that the life-form was being successful.

The babies, in the experiments of the Shermans, when they were fed, when they were petted, and when they were given harmless objects that they reached for, relaxed, and later on, learned to smile. It is valuable for a tree or bush, for a fish or mammal, to know when it is being successful. While it is prospering in all ways if it were not conscious of this condition it probably would attempt the equivalent of the fight or flight reaction, and thus deprive itself of the very things which otherwise would bring it health, wealth (in terms of food supply), family success, and honor (in terms of prominence among its fellows).

The lack of this consciousness of when they were well off, in 1929, caused some twenty million people in the United States to become investors, many of them bold speculators. This lack of a proper consciousness of well-being caused them to take actions that brought them financial loss, with its mental agony, and in millions of cases actual physical deprivation.

If a creature does not feel pleasant when it has been properly fed, it may continue to eat until it feels pain. Furthermore, just as the child learned to reach for its bottle, because of the pleasure it had on previous occasions derived from it, life-forms move toward, or at least are attracted to, the things which give them pleasure. Thus pleasure is a sensation which has developed, little by little, to inform the organism what things it should seek, and what things it should tolerate. And as the sensation of pain, in order to be effective

in causing actions that would preserve the organism from destruction, became intense, so, in order to cause beneficial actions without too great delay, the sensation of pleasure also developed to a high degree of intensity.

One can take any living organism and show that the sensation of pain normally operates to inform it of those things which are discordant to it, of those things which are inimical to its welfare. Because the reaction of the organism either in terms of fight or flight was developed along with the sensation which informed it of the inimical condition, pain commonly results in such attempted activity. Also one can take any living organism and show that normally the sensation of pleasure operates to inform it of the things which are beneficial to it; and commonly pleasure is accompanied with an attempt to gain or retain this beneficial thing.

I say that pain normally discloses to the life-form the presence of discord, and that pleasure normally discloses the presence of harmony. Yet through the association of a beneficial thing with a painful experience, the organism may react to the beneficial thing as if it were a discord. And through the association of an inimical thing with a pleasant experience, the organism may react to the inimical thing as if it were beneficial.

This process, which is called conditioning a response, can be used to call out any type of emotion and action from a given condition. The method, and its use to enable the individual to learn to like something that he previously disliked, is explained in detail in Chapter 5, Course 14, *Occultism Applied to Daily Life*. It is merely the application of pleasure along with an experience that otherwise would be painful. And if this is repeated often enough, the mind associates the pleasure, which may not have been derived from the experience but from some association with it, with the experience. Thus the experience, itself, comes to be considered pleasant.

Then again, a lesser pain may be associated with a greater pleasure, and thus the whole experience seem pleasurable. The prize fighter, for instance, may suffer physical pain, but the pleasure he takes in trying to vanquish an opponent, or in the money he is to receive, may be so much greater than the physical pain, that he likes fighting. Or, to make a still more general application of this principle, work is painful. Yet, because of the things which become associated with work, such as honor, money and the satisfaction of accomplishment, people learn to love their work. So much so that it is the common thing for business men to work as strenuously at making money after all need of the money has ceased as they did in their younger days when money or the lack of it meant having or doing without both necessities and luxuries.

But these various results of associating painful and pleasurable experiences to build up a desired emotional response, and the occasional similar associations that take place in Nature, do not vitiate the general rule that pain warns of destruction and pleasure informs of well-being. On the contrary, all these conditioned responses depend upon this normal function of pleasure and pain.

According to biology, therefore, pain has just one function, and that is not punishment, but to inform the organism that something is present which is inimical to it. And according to biology, pleasure has just one function, and that is not to reward, but to inform the organism that something beneficial to it is present.

Furthermore, all sensations, in lesser or greater degree, are pleasurable or painful. That is, the organism has developed various sensations which in-

## Conditioning Processes

form it in different ways that things are harmful or beneficial. Some of these sensations are not very pronounced in yielding pleasure or pain, but every sensation is fundamentally a measure of harmony or discord in reference to the organism. Thus it will be seen that the soul is dependent for all its experiences upon the various gradations of pleasure and pain; all its knowledge is derived from contrasting and comparing different kinds of pleasure and pain which it has experienced.

### The Ego

Observation of living things will soon convince you that back of every organism is an energy which causes it to struggle for self-preservation. This energy, an emanation of the Divine Mind, it is customary to call the ego. Associated with every life-form is an intelligence, or soul, which is capable of recording pleasure and pain in certain gradations as experience. Yet back of the soul is the ego, which is a potentiality, or energy, that constantly drives the soul forward to gain and record experiences. Due to the energy imparted to it by the ego, the soul attracts about itself a form, molds this form as an expression of its present abilities, registers various gradations of pleasure and pain while associated with this form, and then repels the form; later to be attracted to and mold a more complex one.

Under those conditions which favor the life of the form it occupies, the reports received by the soul are those sensations and emotions which we call pleasure. The function of pleasure is to inform the soul that things are going well with the form it occupies. Health, wealth, domestic felicity and honor all favor the life-form, and normally register as pleasure.

When, however, as commonly happens, the environment changes in a manner which tends to destroy, or hamper the activities of, an organism, this condition is reported to the soul normally in terms of pain. Yet because the ego has given it the unquenchable impulse to live and press forward, the organism experiencing pain does not placidly permit the new condition to destroy it. Instead, the perception that discord is present is a signal for the life-form to run away from the destroying condition. But if it cannot run away, as illustrated by the baby experiments, and by the common observation that almost anything will fight when cornered, it does it utmost to overcome the destroying condition.

Pain has only one purpose; to inform the soul that a destructive condition is present. But the soul, thus informed, sets about, to the best of its ability, to avoid, destroy, or otherwise overcome, the menace to its organism.

Pleasure, likewise, has but one purpose; to inform the soul that a favorable condition is present. When, therefore, the soul has triumphed over the condition which threatened the life of its organism, it experiences pleasure.

### How Ability Develops

Now bear in mind that ability consists in the power to overcome difficulties. The man who performs some work that another person cannot is able to overcome the difficulties which the work presents, difficulties that block the other person's efforts. A man can reason, because he can exercise his mind in a particular way; but the difficulties of using the mind in this manner are too great to be overcome by a tree or a butterfly. A statesman is so considered because he can overcome difficulties that a savage cannot. Any accomplishment is merely the overcoming of certain difficulties; and the greater the difficulties overcome the greater the ability necessary.

Difficulties, however, are such conditions as normally occasion pain. When the water holes dried up, the fish that were in these water holes experienced



pain. The difficulty that confronted them was to obtain an oxygen supply adequate to support life. The pain experienced informed the soul that a destructive condition was present; and as the organism could not run away, it struggled to overcome the destructive condition. And this struggle, upon the part of generations of fishes, in time bred creatures which could obtain oxygen from the air. The gills of a fish require water flowing over them to supply oxygen; but the fight to get oxygen when water was no longer present converted the swimming bladder into lungs, and resulted in amphibians, such as the frog, which can live out of water.

Trees the world over are beset by insects and endangered by fire. Insects boring into a tree constitute a destructive condition, and the consciousness of this discord by the intelligence of the tree registers as pain. Fires that periodically sweep through forests also cause trees to register pain. As trees cannot run away from insects and forest fires, they must often suffer destruction from such forces, or through their struggle against such destructive agents learn how to overcome them. Very few trees have learned how successfully to combat these two conditions. But our California redwood trees have. They have developed a sap which is inimical to insect life, and thus they are almost entirely free from insect pests. And they have developed a very thick, felt-like bark, which does not catch fire. It is only under exceptional conditions that a redwood tree is seriously injured by fire.

Now in obedience to cyclic law, the environment occupied by a life-form is subject, from time to time, to considerable change. The life-form has, perhaps, met the difficulties presented by the old condition in a successful manner. Within the old environment it has lived mostly in comfort and pleasure. But the change that now takes place threatens to destroy it. This destructive influence registers as pain. Aware, because of pain, that a destructive condition is present, it struggles to overcome the difficulties presented. If it succeeds in triumphing over them, the sense of well being following the triumph is recorded as pleasure. And the pleasure thus becomes associated with the process of overcoming the difficulty.

The experimental psychologist would say that it has become so conditioned to the difficulty that it experiences joy in meeting it and triumphing over it. The pleasure experienced in the triumph is greater than the pain experienced during the overcoming process, and therefore, it finds enjoyment in the exercise of this ability.

A few years ago the Tenth Olympiad was held in Los Angeles. Athletes from all over the world gathered here to compete in a wide variety of contests. They did not compete for money; because only amateurs were eligible. Yet these competitions called for tremendous endurance, effort, stress and activity. Some contestants fell unconscious at the finish, some were injured, and all made terrific calls upon vital reserves. Such exertion of itself is decidedly painful. Yet these athletes felt joy in entering the competitions, because the pleasure they experienced in the effort to triumph over the difficulties offered by opponents was greater than the pain of physical exertion.

Furthermore, each of the hundreds of athletes who entered the competitions had back of him long periods of grueling and painful training. Day after day he had been called upon to perfect his technique and to exert himself to the utmost. Terrific work and strain, which in itself was painful, but which, because associated in his mind with the hope of excelling, the hope of overcoming difficulties, registered chiefly in his consciousness as pleasure. The ex-

**Ability is Developed  
Only Through Effort to  
Overcome Difficulties**

perimental psychologist would say that he had become conditioned to find joy in competition.

And whether in man or bird or plant, whenever there is ability to accomplish something you may be sure that ability has been developed through effort directed at overcoming difficulties. That is what ability consists of, the power to overcome difficulties. And only through experience in overcoming difficulties does ability develop.

A difficulty, however, is a painful condition. Even such a difficulty as successfully conducting an international conference is a painful condition; although the pain is mental rather than physical. When, however, a painful condition is overcome, either by destroying it or by running away from it, pleasure results. And through the association of the resulting pleasure with the process by which it was obtained it comes about that the activities which go into overcoming a difficulty in time themselves produce pleasure. Even though these activities at first are decidedly painful, because of the pleasure resulting from the triumph, or from the effort to triumph over them, they become pleasant.

Through this conditioning process people who engage in sports learn to enjoy them even when they are losers. Not merely conquering, but even the effort to beat an opponent, thus comes to afford greater pleasure than the pain occasioned. Although severely wounded in a fight, a dog usually shows in an unmistakable manner that he took pleasure in the fight. He feels pleased with himself that he had the courage to do battle. He feels exhilarated by the excitement of the struggle.

Due to the inevitability of changes in the environment, all life-forms at times are confronted by difficulties. These difficulties may threaten to destroy the life-form, or they may merely block the path to the realization of some desire. But in either case they are discords in the life of the organism; for the thwarting of a desire, as well as the destruction of the body, registers as pain.

Desire normally is in the direction of pleasure and away from pain. But due to the conditioning process, by which a thing painful of itself, through association with a thing which produces pleasure in time also produces pleasure, desire may be cultivated in any direction. But whatever desire is attracted to, that thing at the time registers as pleasure, and any blocking of its attainment registers as pain.

The blocking of desires gives rise to the emotions of anger, fear, worry, sadness, sorrow, grief and all other discordant emotions. And the attainment of desires or the hope of their attainment gives rise to the various harmonious emotions.

Difficulties, thus as threatening destruction, or as blocking the realization of desires, cause the soul to register pain; but when triumphed over and the threatened disaster averted, or the desire realized, they cause the soul to register pleasure. Or if the soul, through repeatedly overcoming difficulties has become conditioned to finding joy merely in the effort to triumph, as in the case of the sportsman who gets pleasure in competitions even when he loses, the mere attempt to overcome a difficulty causes the soul to register pleasure.

The only method by which any life-form learns to overcome difficulties is by encountering them and trying to triumph over them. That it frequently fails to overcome the obstacles in its path is to be expected. The athlete who finally makes a world record, in his early training fails, time after time, to give a remarkable performance. The child who becomes a good speller, at

start makes many mistakes. Even the most successful business men very frequently have had drastic failures early in their lives. People or lesser life-forms only learn through effort.

Even though the physical form occupied by the soul perishes in the effort to overcome some difficulty, the educational value of the experience is not lost; for it is retained in the finer form. Difficulties lead to the effort to overcome them, prompted either by pain or pleasure. Pain, which is the consciousness of discord, drives the soul to effort; and pleasure, which is the consciousness of harmony, attracts the soul to effort.

The various efforts which a life-form makes to overcome difficulties may mostly arise from the consciousness of discord. It may thus be driven by pain. Or, if it has been so conditioned, its efforts to overcome difficulties may mostly arise from the consciousness of harmony. It may mostly be led by pleasure. And as explained in Course 9, *Mental Alchemy*, and in Course 14, *Occultism Applied to Daily Life*, this pleasure technique can be employed by man greatly to his advantage.

The most important difficulty every individual is called upon to overcome is that of getting his thought-cells to work for the things he desires rather than for the things they desire as shown by the birth-chart and progressed aspects of the planets mapping these thought-cells. Within the finer form of every individual are thought-cells which have been conditioned by the experiences which built them to feel disagreeable and thus to work from the inner plane to bring unfortunate events into the life. And when discordant progressed aspects form to the planets mapping these discordant thought-cells, and they thus gain the energy to do so, and the increased desire, these thought-cells will bring unfortunate events into the life unless they have been reconditioned to find pleasure in working to bring into the life events of their particular planetary type which are beneficial to the individual.

The thought-cells mapped by each planet have types of desires, and express in activities, which are characteristic of that planet. But belonging to each planetary type there are desires and activities which are detrimental to the individual, and other desires and activities which are beneficial to the individual. What the desires are of each planetary type of thought-cells, both beneficial and detrimental, are set forth in Chapter 7, Course 14, *Occultism Applied to Daily Life*. And in relation to the thought-cells mapped by each planet it is indicated that instead of expressing through certain characteristic activities which are detrimental to the individual, the desires of the thought-cells should be led into other definite channels, and habit-systems of expression cultivated that will permit their energy to express in a manner characteristic of the planetary family to which the thought-cells belong, but at the same time in activities which are beneficial to the individual.

We find, for instance, that while the Saturn thought-cells may express through greed, self-centeredness, worry, fear, sorrow, despondency, or envy, that the habit system should be cultivated of taking pleasure in order, system, organization, efficiency, persistence and the carrying of responsibility.

Energy which is spent in some work beneficial to the individual leaves that much less energy of that planetary type to be used by the thought-cells in attracting events which are detrimental to the individual. This is clear enough. The problem is, how to induce the thought-cells which otherwise would find pleasure in attracting unfortunate events to change their desires and find pleasure in attracting fortunate events and conditions. This is perhaps the great-

**The Most  
Important  
Obstacle to  
Be Surmounted**

est task confronting any person; for if he can induce his thought-cells to desire and work for what he wants, good fortune will be attracted.

The most effective method of changing the desires of the thought-cells is through employing the pleasure technique. The individual must cultivate and establish the habit-system of finding pleasure in the beneficial expression of the thought-cell energy. And he must provide ample opportunity that the energy of the thought-cells can express in the beneficial channel, and thus through being drained into this activity be afforded no opportunity to express through the old discordant activities.

But people cannot successfully simply will themselves to find so much pleasure in building something for instance, that their Mars thought-cells find no energy left to express as irritation, quarrelsomeness, anger, or in attracting accidents. Instead, they must make use of association, connecting up in their consciousness the activity to be cultivated with something else in which they already have conditioned themselves to find pleasure.

But whether in this most important of all accomplishments in so far as the personality is concerned, or in the accomplishments of a business, professional or public life, the ability to overcome difficulties can be gained only through experiences in overcoming them.

The people of the United States every four years are called upon to elect a president. In making the selection for so important an office they do not pick just any man. They pick an individual whom they believe has unusual ability. And they gauge this ability almost entirely upon the man's record in the past. If this record shows that he has successfully overcome many important difficulties in the past, it gives them confidence that he will be able to meet the even greater difficulties to be encountered in the presidential chair.

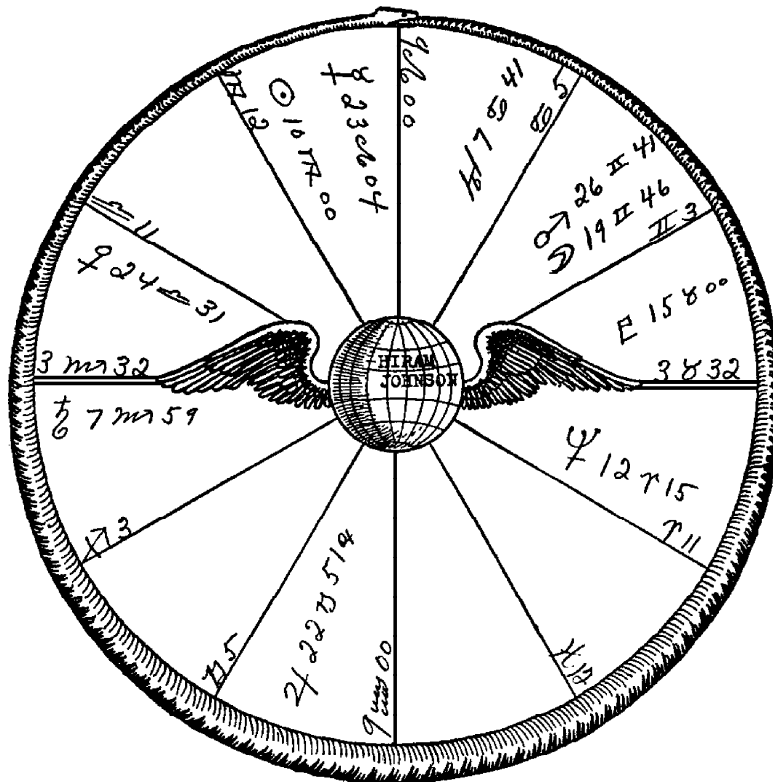
And the organic alchemist, observing that the cyclic changes inevitably place difficulties in the paths of all life-forms, observing that life-forms are educated by encountering these difficulties, and that ability is never developed anywhere except through practice in overcoming difficulties, concludes that the function of difficulties is to educate the soul and develop its abilities. And because to him man is not subject to some special dispensation, he concludes that all the obstacles which man encounter have this same function, the function of developing his abilities.

To the organic alchemist, who becomes familiar with as numerous types of life as possible, pain is not inflicted as punishment, but is the device which the soul has gradually developed to great perfection to inform it that a difficulty is present. Nor is pleasure a matter of reward, but the device which the soul has evolved to inform it that the difficulty has been surmounted. And if the soul, as it often does, can become so conditioned that the effort to overcome a difficulty gives greater pleasure than the pain occasioned by the difficulty, pleasure becomes more important in this education than pain.

Yet a soul, like an athlete, acquires ability not merely when it triumphs, but also when it fails to triumph. Life-forms learn by their mistakes as well as by their correctness. And unless we hold with the orthodox of both East and West that man is under some special dispensation, we are forced to the inevitable conclusion that the joys and sorrows, the triumphs and disasters, the gains and losses, the health and sickness, and all other events of life, serve the important purpose of developing the ability of the soul. Without such experiences it would never acquire the ability to do anything important in the realms of the future.







## HIRAM JOHNSON

September 2, 1866, 10:00 a.m. 121:30W. 38:35N.

Data given by his father.

1886, left University of California in junior year to marry: Venus opposition Pluto r, Sun semi-square Pluto r.

1886, shorthand reporter, studied law: Mercury trine Jupiter r.

1888, commenced practice of law: Mars conjunction Uranus p.

1902, started a long and dangerous fight (an associate was assassinated) to clean up ring of San Francisco grafters: Sun inconjunct Pluto r, Mars sextile Pluto r (racketeers).

1911, governor of California: Sun conjunction Venus r.

1917, U. S. senator: Mercury conjunction Saturn p.

1924, candidate for president of U. S., but defeated: Sun trine Uranus r, conjunction Saturn r.

Did not resign as U. S. senator; still holds that office in 1945.

