

**MANLY PALMER HALL
MY PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE**

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(CONFERENCE)

A mature philosophy of life originates in natural reflection. To live without thinking is to fail in the proper use of the powers and faculties with which we have been endowed. To think without applying our thoughts to the conduct of our affairs is to substitute intelligence for mere intellectualism. It is rare that a personal philosophy can be perfected without study, through which we become familiar with the deepest and noblest convictions of humanity. We must also draw upon the experience of each day, in which we can convince ourselves of the reality and integrity of certain basic principles, always present and true. Beyond study and experience lie the inner faculties of the soul, and these should grant the final certainty regarding our convictions. If, therefore, we live simply and wisely, seeking first the improvement of our inner life, keeping an open heart and mind, we will be guided and directed according to our needs and understanding.

Each person must discover their own philosophy of life, and it is neither fair nor right to impose our codes on others. However, it is also our responsibility to share experiences that may have common value. We do not wish, therefore, to convert or convince, but rather to invite sharing with the sincere hope that some common good will be achieved.

My life has been dedicated to considering the essential doctrines that represent the most advanced state of humankind. However, it would not be entirely fair to say that I have borrowed my convictions from antiquity, or that I am addicted to the words or thoughts of the famous or the illustrious. Rather, I have chosen a moderate course through observation and experience, and matured through reflection. Weighing all things, I have decided to hold fast to what was good for me and most useful to those who

have sought my help and guidance.

From my search for the good and the necessary, I have arrived at the following convictions: I believe in a supreme and absolute power at the source of life; the cause of all living things; and that this ineffable principle may justly and truly be called "The One" and "The Good." Whether people call this Universal Divinity God, or Allah, or Brahma, or Tao, is of no great importance. For such terms and titles reveal differences in language, but not a divergence of ideas. Humankind has come to know this sovereign good through the search of the mind and the yearning of the heart. It seems to me, however, that by believing in the good, in a God existing everywhere and forever the source of wisdom, justice, truth, and love, we must, in the end, conclude that all the labors of this creative power are necessary, beautiful, and virtuous.

The universe in which we live is one of the many manifestations of Divine Will. The world, therefore, must be essentially good, because it is inconceivable that a principle would create contrary to its own nature. If, then, injustice, inequality, and calamity were to appear in the world, they must not originate from Divine intelligence, but from the

Human incomprehension. If we are not given to know all things and solve all mysteries, we must seek through faith, hope, and charity, through beauty and goodness. The will of the Eternal Power is revealed to us through the laws that govern the formation, generation, growth, development, and improvement of created things. Through reflection, we can experience the reality of these laws and discover them so that we may be both wise and kind. We venerate the eternal principles through obedience and joyful acceptance of the lessons of daily life. The end of all learning, the fruits of all labors and efforts, and the consummation of the deepest and most devoted instincts and intuitions of our souls is that we come to honor and obey the

rules of the vast plan of which we are conscious and of which we are separate parts. All arts, sciences, philosophies, religions, and crafts can enrich our inner lives, and as we realize ourselves through them, the sovereign laws of existence are revealed and manifested in various ways for our advancement and enlightenment.

I believe that human consciousness is a separate entity from the body it inhabits, and that this consciousness existed before incarnation and will survive the disillusionment of its physical form. I am convinced of this not only by the authority of religion and philosophy, but also by a natural sense within myself. This belief is reasonably supported by the circumstances of life. It is difficult to rationally maintain that man is born, suffers, and dies without reason or purpose; nor is it conceivable that experience, knowledge, and understanding, which are obviously and undoubtedly the richest fruits of life, should cease and vanish because of this.

complete because of the phenomenon of death. Nor can I accept the doctrine of an eternal judgment with eternal rewards and punishments imposed at the end of a fragile and imperfect period of years in this world. In the economy of nature, and in the enduring benevolence of Providence, all creatures possess within themselves the life of the Creator and have an eternal continuation of themselves or in the Universal Being. Life as we know it must therefore be an episode in a greater existence. For this and other reasons, I believe in the doctrine of reincarnation as a more dignified model of life for humankind, more suited to the things known and seen, and better designed to reveal the eternal goodness of the Sovereign Being.

I am willing to accept the challenge of growth, to believe that I have lived before and that I will live again. My present situation is the sum of my past lives, and I am endowed with the faculties and potential for improvement, so I can advance in my destiny according to my successes and merits. I do

not seek forgiveness for my mistakes, nor applause for my achievements, but rather to take refuge in a law of eternal good that gives me the right to work diligently for my salvation.

I do not believe in a principle of evil, because I cannot reconcile this doctrine with the eternal good that governs the universe with absolute power. However, I must explain, to the satisfaction of my own conscience, those appearances of evil that surround me. Through experience and observation, I have become convinced that evil is another name for ignorance. Through ignorance, humankind becomes selfish, critical, and destructive, and from these abuses and misuses of its natural and divine resources, corruption and [the following appear to be unrelated and possibly from a different source]:

Discord is inherent in the way of life that humanity has created. When humankind violates natural law or disobeys the code of its own species, it brings upon itself certain retributions that seem to it an irrational punishment. In the grand scheme of mortal existence, discord reveals the need for harmony; selfishness, the need for altruism; cruelty, the need for kindness; and ignorance, the need for the relentless pursuit of truth and beauty. Thus, what we call evil is a servant of good, for it ultimately leads us away from error and toward reality.

I believe in the inalienable right of every man and woman to worship their God and to seek truth according to the instincts and inclinations of their own heart and mind. Careful study has convinced me that all the great religions of the world, past and present, teach the same essential code of conduct. They all believe in the existence of a Sovereign Power or Being. They teach, in one way or another, the immortality of the soul and affirm the ultimate victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and truth over error. It seems to me that just as the earth has many climates suitable for the

development of living beings, so faith can have many names, but by name or without, it comforts and encourages the sincere spirit that seeks the solace of devout faith. I would not, therefore, attempt to convert a person from their faith to another, but rather assist them in every way I can to find the richness and fulfillment of their own religion. In time, you will realize that just as light can manifest itself in many colors, so too can truth be sought and found through the various colors of sincere belief. It may happen, however, that different religions possess certain advanced and specialized aspects, principles, and doctrines of the one eternal religion.

Therefore, I believe that through the study of comparative religions, we draw closer to the complete truth, which is the one eternal faith. Conflict between beliefs, therefore, confuses and obscures humanity's natural instinct to worship the Supreme Good. For the same reason, I believe that all races and creatures are part of one plan and should not be considered in any way as separate or distinct from it. All people, regardless of race or nation, color or living conditions, share one life, exist in one world, and are children of one Creator Power. Therefore, I will judge a person not by their physical appearance but by their actions, and I will refuse to hold any attitude that discredits them because of circumstances arising from their birth or social status. I am certain in my own conscience that if I cannot find the good in myself and my fellow human beings, I will certainly not find it in space and beyond the stars.

I sincerely believe that I have been endowed with faculties, powers, and perceptions to use, for which I am morally responsible. It is my duty to myself, to my world, and to the Eternal Power by and in whom I exist, to govern my temper, subdue my appetites, perfect my emotions, inform my mind, and increase my understanding. Failure to advance in these endeavors must leave me a victim of my own intemperances and expose me

to the just censure of my associates. Because I am a conscious being, and not bound to follow the immediate instincts and impulses of my character, I can be kind, just, Kind, forgiving, compassionate, and self-sacrificing even in the harshest and most difficult circumstances. Through observation, experience, and the testimony of time, I can distinguish right from wrong, and good from evil. An absolute definition of these terms is unattainable, but I understand them as they apply to me and my own conduct. I cannot, therefore, claim to be wise, virtuous, or devout unless my actions bear out such claims.

I believe the purpose of philosophy and psychology is to guide me in moderating my conduct. They teach me to be strong in good works because they have given me an understanding of the Good. Philosophy is not merely a branch of knowledge, but a way of life. Unless I practice that path, I have no part in philosophy, or in true science, or in pure religion, because they all teach the same thing. I, therefore, will judge that person to be good, to be wise, and to be devout, who, according to their own abilities and limitations, strives to live well and brings their own thoughts and emotions under the control of enlightened understanding. Words without deeds are dead. And a beautiful belief that does not lead to gentleness of spirit is useless. We may all fall short, but let us count on a hero to do their best. For we know that their sincere effort will be rewarded with greater understanding.

I believe it is right and proper to venerate the Good, as revealed through those who have served it with love and well-being. Therefore, I respect and admire the great philosophers, spiritual leaders, sages, and saints who have gone before us. I do not worship them, nor do I wish to emulate any of them. For I believe that each person has their own destiny to be developed and perfected. If we are to respect our parents, who are the source of our

being, should we not also respect the sages, who are the source of our well-being? Therefore, I am grateful to the good men and women who have lived, and I will gladly grant them the recognition and appreciation that was denied most of them in their lifetimes. I believe we can surpass our teacher, but it is always our duty to remember them with gratitude. I find great comfort in the thought that these good and great leaders were mortal like us, with flaws like our own. Through these facts and signs I realize that it is possible for an imperfect man to dedicate himself so much to the truth in order to serve others and contribute to the spread of eternal realities.

I believe it is fair and appropriate that we should take full advantage of all new discoveries in every field of knowledge. I cannot condemn science, education, or modern philosophy because of their shortcomings. I know they must be attended to by imperfect mortals who, like me, seek to grow and explore the mysteries of life, time, and space. I believe it would be unwise to criticize or condemn them, whether I cause others to copy my attitudes or feel justified in agreeing with me. I have learned from experience that constructive words, kind appreciation, and well-intentioned acknowledgment contribute more to the growth of others than pointing out their errors and belittling them. I am therefore inclined to remain silent if I cannot recommend them.

A good life must involve communion with one's inner self. It is right and fitting that we cultivate stillness and set aside time for reflection. I believe that the eternal Being within us reveals its purposes most immediately and fully through a peaceful heart and a tranquil mind. It is, therefore, most beneficial to experience the presence of the Eternal Good as a blessing upon the spirit, naturally inclining us toward peace of soul. There can be no peace without faith; through faith we can discover the truth and reality of peace.

I believe that a philosopher should be a law-abiding citizen and uphold the

statutes of the nation and the community in which they live. And if they cannot accept and acknowledge these statutes, they should depart for a region more suited to their inclinations. Advancement in learning leads us to question the goodness of things and to appreciate growth and progress. This does not mean, however, that we should ignore failures and shortcomings. It is better to be inspired to correct a condition than to become mere critics. As we cultivate integrity within ourselves, we gradually strengthen and enrich society, making all reasonable reforms possible.

I have observed that those of a cheerful disposition, well-disposed toward others, naturally slow to anger and quick to forgive, tolerant and inclined to cultivate peace and harmony, are more likely to enjoy good health. Happiness and security must be earned through conduct and are reserved for those who deserve such rewards. Thus the laws of the universe are affirmed, and the divine plan is made known to humankind. Moderation is a virtue; for abstinence Possession and indulgence are extremes, and nature requires a middle ground. I believe that possession is an arrogance of the human mind. We are not here to possess, but to accept a certain stewardship. We cannot possess other people without harming them, and it even harms us more. Having more than we need is a burden on the soul and a constant temptation to excess and extravagance. Those who have many worldly goods have little time or little motivation to cultivate character. They become servants of their own possessions and delude themselves with a false sense of security.

Work is good for everyone. The love of religion or philosophy, or the striving for spiritual grace, should never prevent an individual from being a self-sufficient member of society. To be skilled in an art or craft, one must participate in the experience of creativity, uphold honor, and preserve

personal dignity. I cannot conceive that one useful job is nobler than another, or that humble effort should be looked down upon or despised. Honest endeavor is as much a part of religion as the most elaborate ritual in a church or cathedral.

I believe that love is an eternal power and a natural part of the Sovereign Good. If all things are created with wisdom and supported by strength, they will be perfected by love. The redeeming power is present everywhere in the world, and by working on the mysteries of regeneration and redemption, we will find love. It is a medicine for the sickness of the mind, the weakness of the soul, and the weariness of the body. Through love, all Things are tempered and subdued, and His perfect works are revealed. For man, there can be no proof of love except by loving. By the power of love, one is induced to sacrifice oneself and to place the happiness of others above one's own. If one truly loves, one will act nobly. One will find no excuse for cruelty or discord, one will forgive one's enemy, and one will sustain one's friend. There can be no peace in this world, no tranquility in man, and one cannot partake of the grace of eternity without love. Through love, wisdom will be enlivened, knowledge will be used for the common good, science will become a servant of progress, and religion will put an end to its doctrine of fear. Love should not be declared, pronounced, or spoken, but should be manifested by deeds. Through love, we are moved to do things that bring joy to those we love. True love cannot be selfish, but gives itself totally and completely.

Furthermore, I have observed that it is more difficult to apply wisdom to simple things. It is easier to explain the universe than to understand the behavior of a friend. It is easier to plan the reform of society than to build a good home or bring laughter to the eyes of the afflicted. Therefore, I believe that one who seeks truth must first put in order what is closest to him. He

immediately discovers the wisdom and folly of his beliefs if he tries to live them. If, on the other hand, he ignores his own life and seeks out vast fields of activity, he may live for many years addicted to false doctrines of truth without them being evident to him. Nor should he expect others to love and respect him if he does not love and respect them. Two wrongs never make a right, and we go against what is good.

The greater the discord among us, the better. I firmly believe that religious experience is good and necessary, but I will not tell anyone which faith to follow. We all need the comfort of the Spirit, which comes to those who humbly acknowledge their debt to a Sovereign Power. The form of faith is less important than its reality, but through forms, people seek the formless source of all things. Likewise, therefore, it is good to pray, not for the things we desire, but for that depth of understanding we need. Let us pray, then, that we may live without offense, that we may serve good, that we may be kind in all things, and that we may finally know our God.

I believe that those who keep the law will be sustained by the law. In due time, the human soul, clothed in righteousness and abundant grace, will return to the Eternal Being from whom it came; it will remain in constant permanence and know the peace that surpasses all understanding. I do not believe that souls can be lost, that ultimate evil can obscure good deeds, or that any place within the nature of being is a source or cause of pain or terror. I also believe that the world in which we live, with all its creatures and parts, is a being that grows and develops, and that in due time, the grace within humanity will shine forth so that we can build a beautiful society in which we can live in peace, joy, and harmony. In those days, there will be good government, free from crime and misery, and humanity collectively will realize its purpose and gloriously and joyfully serve that purpose. Until then, I will do what I can, according to the means I possess,

to make this possible without any expectation of immediate reward.

I believe it is both the duty and the privilege of those in specialized professions concerned with the essential growth of humanity to be honest, sincere, and honorable. I believe they cannot, without harming themselves and others, allow selfishness or self-interest to influence others. It seems to me that we must be especially attentive to the education of lawyers, doctors, statesmen, theologians, philosophers, and psychologists, doing everything in our power to help them understand the natural divinity and dignity of human life. Because they exert a great influence on the public mind, they must realize that it is within their power to attend to the inner as well as the outer needs of those who depend on them.

I believe in the greatness of knowledge and wisdom guided by faith, and that without faith, knowledge is folly and a burden to the soul. I believe that if I follow the path of wisdom as revealed to me by my professors, by the instincts and intuitions of my conscience, and supported by life's observations and experiences, I can live in a way that is acceptable to the truth. If I live this way, I will earn and deserve the right to greater knowledge and understanding, but I am not entitled to more than what my conduct warrants. Furthermore, if I dedicate myself to acts of kindness, abstaining as much as possible from destructive actions and thoughts, I can face the future with serenity of spirit. I will live and die without fear, for I will have justified my faith.

Believing in a universe of beauty and truth, I will find myself every day without questions or doubts. I will remember the past without regret or Remorse. And I will look to the future for the fulfillment of all good things. Beyond this, I do not know and cannot do. But I have faith that when the time comes, I will know, and I will be able to do. I ask for no more, and I accept no less.