

The Mysteries

(This is edited from a lecture by Paul Solomon, It is not a reading)

The Planetary Mystery School

Hidden in a forest or on a mountain where nobody could find it unless he knew it was there, were what the ancients called Mystery Schools.

In these very special school were Masters, those who had extraordinary knowledge of the arts and sciences and spiritual cultures and who had perfected their character beyond anyone else on the planet. These were places where only a few chosen students were taught the secrets of life and death, knowledge and wisdom. The descriptions said that no one could even make application to such a place. The only way you would find the school was to handle your experiences in life so well that one of these Masters would discover you, and through his influence, you could be accepted. In that special school, your consciousness would be molded through a series of initiations, and you would have the opportunity to grow as fast as a human could grow because of the way the lessons were presented.

Nothing has ever intrigued me more than the concept of such a place as a Mystery School. From the moment I heard about it, more than anything else, I wanted to discover one of these schools. Everything in the literature referred to the schools of centuries ago, in the time of Pythagorean in Greece or Hermes and Ra in Egypt. Yet, there were sometimes hints that The Mystery Schools still exist today.

I did everything I could to get myself ready. But how do you know when you are ready? How can you be sure that the talent scout is going to find you? As impatient as I was, it was not easy to leave these things to blind faith.

With this constantly in the back of my mind, I went about my work with The Fellowship of the Inner Light.

One day a woman I had helped through a crisis was doing volunteer work at the Fellowship. She told me of a man she called a Zen Master who taught bonsai, the art of cultivating miniature trees.

"I have a feeling that what he is teaching is a lot more than the bending and wiring of little trees," she said. "I do not know what he is really teaching, and he will not say. You should see what he is doing."

Hidden World Discovered

I was not really interested in bonsai, but she convinced me to pay a visit. Although I had directions to the school, I drove up and down a narrow country road several times

before I found it. There was no street sign. Finally I saw a small building, hidden back in the woods so you would not see it unless you knew it was there.

I knocked on the door. There was no response. I walked behind the building and entered what appeared to be a magical world of miniature trees and forests. Some of the little trees looked like pine trees you might see on a cliff beside the ocean, the branches snarled and windswept by sea breezes, bare and white from salt spray on the side facing the sea.

There were tiny flowering wisteria trellises and groves of the tiniest orange trees you could imagine. I could see little forests with scores of trees, their tops reaching toward the sky. One forest appeared to be growing out from stone. Another grew around a circular grove, and I began to imagine that white-robed Druids were entering their sacred place of worship among the trees. Still another forest seemed to include a mountain, a lake and a cliff, a miniature world by itself. Several men and woman, students of bonsai, I presumed, worked intently with tiny trees.

A very slim, unassuming, quiet little man suddenly appeared. Though I had not been able to reach him by telephone, he seemed to expect me, and invited me to walk through the garden. As we walked, I noticed some peculiar things about him. He was never in a hurry. I was so excited with all that was around me that I would ask three questions before he could answer one. As I moved faster with impatience, he seemed to move even more slowly. The slower he moved, the more impatient I became. He didn't seem to notice my frustration. His attention was fixed on the living world around him, communicating with the trees in much the manner you or I would speak to each other. Before we had finished our tour, I felt he was apologizing to the garden for my presence.

It was then that I began to realize this man was teaching me something, but not by pointing it out to me. I even had the option of not noticing the lesson. We sat down to talk about his School of Bonsai. He spoke as slowly as he moved and leisurely sipped green tea from a tiny cup, and all the while he didn't seem to notice the students going about their work of potting trees. He continued to sip long after I had finished my little cup of tea.

Then a startling thing happened. I noticed that suddenly he was not there anymore. He had caught the hand of a student who was about to clip a large limb from a tiny tree. He had literally moved so quickly that I did not see him leave his seat before he was touching the woman's hand. "You must warn the tree before you cut," he said, "or it will bleed. Speak to the tree. It must know your intention or it will think you mean to harm it with those great big pruning shears."

Then to another student, he said, "Don't you see, if you put a rock there, it will conflict with the direction of the branch. You are creating conflict with this plant. You will not create conflict in the plant if you have no conflict within you. Just be quiet for a moment and resolve your inner conflict." And to another he said, "Don't think of this as just a

plant. Think of it as a soul that needs to be molded in a particular direction. These training wires are like karmic experiences that mold its nature into a more beautiful expression."

As I listened to the bonsai Master giving these spiritual truths, it suddenly occurred to me, "He is not really teaching horticulture or botany or even bonsai. He is teaching spiritual growth and the Laws of the Universe. What a brilliant mind! So slow and understated, acting as if he were not brilliant."

As he sat again, I said, "I know you are not going to tell me you are a teacher of spiritual growth, but I can see that you are and I want to learn from you."

He looked at me with a gaze that could melt steel. For a moment I froze, not knowing what to do. Finally, he said, "I am not a spiritual teacher. I do not believe in spiritual lessons."

A School of Life

"How peculiar." I thought. "I wonder what he does believe in." But I didn't quite know how to ask. Hesitantly, I questioned him again. "What do you mean? I know that you are teaching more than how to torture these little trees."

"If I were a spiritual teacher, I would be separating spiritual lessons from the lessons of life. That suggests that I would separate spiritual life from its expression. That produces death. This is not a school of death. It is a school of life. I do not rip things apart. Growth is growth. I do not believe there is any such thing as a spiritual teacher. If a person separates spirit from body, he would be teaching an error from the beginning."

Duly impressed, I asked him if he would teach me.

"Let's work with a tree for a few minutes," he said.

He gave me an ugly rag-tag little pine tree that didn't look like a bonsai at all. It had thousands of little brown needles, tiny needles because the tree had been miniaturized. He gave me a pair of tweezers and told me to pick out the brown needles. I am not so dense that I can't recognize a lesson in patience, so I took the tweezers and thought, "I'm going to do it if it kills me."

Plucking Pine Needles

I picked out the little brown needles one by one wondering all the time if I really had to do it for the tree or if he had thought it up just for me. As I kept plucking and plucking, I kept thinking of all of the things I needed to do back at the Fellowship. The more I plucked, the more my thoughts raced. "He should be talking to me," I thought. "He could be teaching me fantastic lessons, and here I am sitting here plucking these damn little needles."

He let it go on for hours, and I didn't think he would ever get back to me. But when he finally did, I had developed quite a relationship with that little tree, and I was beginning to see it in a completely different way. Finally, he sat with me and began to comment on my work. "If you were going to shape that tree into a more beautiful shape, what would you do?" he asked.

I looked at some of the other trees that the bonsai master and his students had shaped, but I did not see how I could work this poor scraggly specimen into anything resembling one of his masterpieces. "If I bent these branches or cut them back...it still doesn't seem like it would do anything. I just don't know," I said.

He just stared at the tree. He seemed like he wasn't ever going to say anything, so I started talking again. "Well, maybe it's a windswept because most of the branches grow in one direction..."

He just looked at me with that look that could melt steel, and with his eyes still focused on the tree, he said, "Why don't we just work on it for a while and see what happens."

I watched him push the branches around for a few minutes, peering at the tree from every direction. Then he took the pruning shears and began cutting. When he finished the pruning, he wrapped some wire around the main trunk and twisted it sharply, forcing the tree to hold a snarled, windblown appearance. Seeing the general direction of the pruning, I took the shears and started to cut a branch.

He jumped so fast that I thought for a minute that he was going to attack me. "Don't cut that yet! You did not ask permission," he said.

With the jaws of the pruning shears frozen at the base of the branch, I stammered, "What do you mean?"

"The tree is alive," he said. "Talk to it. You must explain your intentions before it will cooperate. Its spirit will tell you what direction to go in."

"Oh, you're going to teach me how to talk to nature spirits, devas," I thought. The idea really excited me. "What do I do?"

His eyes narrowed. "Just talk to it," he said.

I looked at that scruffy old pine tree and drew a blank. I did not have any idea how that pine tree was going to talk back to me. It is very difficult to try to talk out loud to a tree when you feel it is just a tree, but I tried. I felt ridiculous. The bonsai master's face remained blank, yet behind his disciplined composure, I sensed his amusement at my obvious discomfort.

Finally he said, "If you could see that tree as a human being, what would that being look like?"

Girl With Combat Boots

I began to describe a dirty, skinny little girl with combat boots and uncombed hair.

"Close your eyes," he said. "See the little girl standing before you." That was easy enough. I closed my eyes and I could see the little girl.

The bonsai Master leaned close to me and whispered, "Now talk to her. Don't talk to the tree. Talk to the little girl. Ask her what she wants."

The thought that came was, "You've already washed my face. Take your instruments and comb my hair."

"Could that have been the tree saying that?" I wondered. I canceled out the possibility in my mind. "No! impossible!" I said to myself.

But when I opened my eyes, I saw the tree from a whole new perspective, and I almost could see a little girl standing there. It was a different tree altogether, and it was as excited as I was. The spirit of the tree no longer feared for its life when I cut her branches. It was more like a girl who is getting a haircut, and when the stylist is finished, she knows she is going to look beautiful. By the end of the day, what was once an ugly duckling was now an exquisitely beautiful windswept pine with the bark missing on one side. We painted the bare trunk with lime so that it looked as if it had been bleached with salt spray. Looking at it, you could almost smell the ocean. I was thrilled. I felt as if I had seen the transformation of a soul, taking something wild and out of control and creating living art, beautified by nature itself.

Shaping The Consciousness

Afterwards I said, "I have always wanted to be a student in a Mystery School. I have an idea that you can cause me to learn more in one year than I can learn with my spiritual group in ten. Will you take me as a project, shape my consciousness like yours and mold me as the Masters did in the ancient Mystery Schools?"

He looked at me straight in the eyes and said, "Paul, could you leave your Fellowship, close its doors, and come here as my servant, wash my teacups in my kitchen, make my bed, sweep my floors and pick the needles off scruffy pines? Could you do it even if I never say anything wise to you?"

The question hit like a ton of bricks. The Fellowship was my child, a living being, something that was a part of me. To close its doors would be like ending a part of my life. But as I thought about it, it seemed to me that the Fellowship would continue even if its doors were closed.

"Yes," I said. "I will come and be your servant."

Looking away, he said, "That being true, I cannot teach you."

I wasn't expecting that reply, and with tears running down my face I said, "Why?"

"For one thing," he said, "you're too emotional. Secondly, if you could close your Fellowship and come here, then I have need to learn from you. I couldn't close this school and come to study at your Fellowship."

I figured I had messed it all up anyhow, so I asked, "If you won't take me as a student, will you introduce me to your teacher?"

In hindsight it seems to be a ridiculous question under the circumstances, but he answered it seriously. "If he wants to meet you, he will."

Story of Annie Besant

I learned more in that short exchange than I might have in a lifetime. I had touched the periphery of a Mystery School, and it had affected me profoundly.

I went home to think and to meditate. I didn't know quite what to do. I just knew I didn't want to miss the opportunity to learn from this man. I reached for a book to quiet my mind and just happened to pick up a story about Madame Blavatsky, founder and leader of the Theosophical Society, and Annie Besant, her student, who later became her apprentice and successor.

Annie Besant wanted to become a student of Madame Blavatsky. She had written letters to her over and over asking to be accepted. She had approached her with the request many times as well. When Madame Blavatsky finally responded, all she said was, "No. I will not accept you." She didn't give a reason.

Finally, Annie decided she wouldn't take no for an answer, so she packed her bags, arrived at Madame Blavatsky's house, and let herself in through the great teacher's back door.

"I have come to study with you," Annie said. "If you won't take me as your student, I at least will be near you, and I will listen to everything you say. I will cook and clean for you. I can take a load off of you. Just show me where to put my bags, and I'll begin in the kitchen."

Madame Blavatsky didn't argue with her. She showed her to the guest room, and Annie went right to work. She fixed a grand meal, placed it on the table which she had beautifully arranged, and proudly called in the teacher. Madame Blavatsky sat down, took one taste of the food, pushed it back, and said, "It's terrible." Annie burst into tears and ran out of the kitchen. The scenario continued between them day after day with little variation. Annie would do everything to make the meal special. Madame Blavatsky would insult her, and Annie would end up again in tears.

Until one day Annie decided it was going to be different. She planned the same sort of very special dinner that she had before. However, she focused and prayed over each thing she cooked, putting all of her love into the meal. She spent extra time to make sure the meal was perfect, spent a few moments to put extra love in the food, and placed it on the table. She knew that she was serving a masterpiece. She called in Madame Blavatsky.

As usual, Madame Blavatsky sat down, took a mouthful, "That's garbage," she said, and spit out the food. "Take it away," she said.

Feeling calm, confident, and showing no emotion at all, Annie looked directly at Madame Blavatsky and said, "That food was made with a great deal of love. I prepared it myself with guidance and direction. The meal is perfection itself. It is a lovely meal, and you can eat it or you can leave it."

Madame Blavatsky looked back at Annie and said, "Now we can go to work."

Annie had finally overcome the uncontrolled emotion that stands as a barrier and denies a lesson. She would now have the ability to learn from the great teacher, and that day Annie Besant became a student.

The story gave me my answer as well. "I won't take no for an answer either," I decided. "I'll just show up."

I called a friend who worked with me at the Fellowship and said, "I am going away, and I do not know when I will return. Just take care of things the best that you can." I packed a few things and early the next morning, let myself in the back door of the bonsai teacher's little house in the woods. To my surprise, I found a note in the kitchen with instructions on how to make tea and prepare breakfast. After a few weeks, the teacher sent me back to the Fellowship.

Tree in Training Wires

A few years after we had moved the Fellowship from Atlanta, Georgia, to Virginia Beach, I received a telephone call from a man at Norfolk Botanical Gardens who said he knew the bonsai master with whom I had studied. He asked if he could show me a tree he had been working with so that I could make some suggestions.

I said I had some time that afternoon, and he said he would come to see me. A tiny oriental man came and brought a beautiful little tree that was still in training wires. We sat together and looked at it for a bit. We talked a few minutes about bonsai techniques, and then he left asking that I care for the tree.

I thought the tree was a gift from my bonsai teacher in Atlanta, so I called to thank him. When I spoke to him he said, "I did not give that tree to you," he said.

"Then who did?" I asked.

"He did. The man who came to see you gave you that tree."

"Why should one of your students want to give me a tree?" I asked.

"That was not my student. That was my Teacher," he said.

I had spent ten minutes with a Master and had not asked him a single question. I had waited years to meet this teacher, and when I did, I didn't have sense enough to recognize him.

I immediately phoned Norfolk Botanical Gardens and told the teacher I was not quite sure how to care for the plant and asked if I could see him again. I did not tell him that I had discovered he was the teacher. Very graciously, he consented to come to see me again.

Sitting with the tree, he said, "As I was training this branch, instead of easily bending in a new and beautiful direction, it was stiff and ready to break. That was the period when you decided to teach instead of publishing your work."

"How did you know about those experiences in my life," I stammered.

He quietly replied. "This tree was put in training wires at the time my student told me about you, and since then I have watched you in the branches of this tree. Everything that you did was reflected in this image of you. If I had resistance from a branch, I knew that you were having resistance in what you were doing in your life."

I realized that every branch of the tree had been a point of communication between the teacher and me, and that he had been teaching me for more than three years. Prior to the day he had given me the tree, we had never met, yet he was participating in every experience in my life. He never forced me to learn anything. He never manipulated me through the branches of the tree, but he did very gently suggest to the tree, and to me through the tree, that I shape myself in more beautiful, harmonious directions.

In awe, I ventured to ask a question that was still in my mind. "Is there really a place in China or Japan where priests teach disciples how to respond to every situation in life? Do the Mystery Schools still exist?"

You Are Enrolled

"There may be such a place as a Mystery School, but you already are enrolled in the highest of Mystery Schools on the planet," he said.

He told me a story of a young man at a School of the Mysteries waiting for classes to start. As he left his room and walked down the hallway to the dining room, he noticed a

broom leaning against a wall with some dust in the hallway. "Someone has not finished his work," he thought. "This place is a mess. This is no way to run a Mystery School."

The young man had his meal and came back through the same hallway. He noticed that the dirt and the broom were still there. He went back to his room and meditated, still waiting for the classes to start.

After his afternoon meditation, he went again to the dining room for dinner. The broom and the dirt remained untouched, and now there was a mop and bucket parked against the opposite wall. "How careless," he thought, "and I thought this school was the best available." Irritated, he went to eat. As expected when he returned, the mess in the hallway remained. "I am going to tell somebody about this," he muttered. "In fact, I am not sure I want to stay here. If the Masters of this school do not have it together any better than this, they cannot teach me very much." And he is still waiting for the lessons to begin.

You are enrolled now in the greatest of all Mystery Schools, the Planetary Mystery School. It is not possible for you to need a lesson without the lesson appearing. The next lesson is always before you. Teachers can help you see the lessons. That is their purpose. But teachers come in many disguises. No waitress was ever unkind to you in a restaurant without a reason. No cashier ever was impatient or short with you without a purpose. No husband or wife or child ever put you through trauma when you did not need it. You already study at the feet of a perfect teacher. Listen to what life is saying to you. The mop and bucket are before you.

Notice The Mop and Bucket

You have a lesson before you wherever you are. Whatever the lesson, it is in your path, and you have one of two choices - to pick up the mop and bucket or to push them out of the way. Whatever is directly in your path is your next step.

You entered this Planetary Mystery School when you were born. You have no choice about whether or not you are enrolled. The only difference between people in the Mystery School is that some are asleep and some wake up. You do not have the option of leaving the school. You do not have the option of eliminating the lessons. The only options you have is whether to participate consciously or not. The lessons will be placed in front of you, and your second option is whether you want to learn them and grow through them.

There may still be Mystery Schools hidden somewhere out in the deserts or forests of a remote land, but you already are enrolled in the greatest of all Mystery Schools, The Planetary Mystery School. The lessons will not become greater or lesser.

When we make the decision to participate in the lessons consciously, the lessons become more effective and life takes on a new meaning. We become more and more

awake, more and more conscious. Know that and grow to be consciously what you already are - a child God growing up to be what his Father is.

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