



"There is seen, there is being laid out plans for a work that, as given, is to change the thought of mankind in general in many directions."

Edgar Cayce reading 254-37

Reflections

A Commentary on the Edgar Cayce Readings

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DIRECTION, MOTIVATION, AND IDEALS

All of us, at different periods in our lives, struggle with what we should be doing, where we should be going, or how we might fill that special place or niche which God has in mind for us. We often find ourselves searching and aren't always certain what it is we're looking for. Since this state of inner confusion is something we all have in common, you would think that any practical solution that provided insights or addressed an answer to this dilemma would be heralded from the highest mountaintop. Yet, perhaps one of the most frequently overlooked principles in the Edgar Cayce readings is this business of *working with* ideals, and it's this very same principle that can provide us with a first-step answer every time our personal search finds us in a state of confusion.

It's true that most individuals studying the Cayce information quickly become familiar with the word "ideals." After all, Cayce himself challenged people to *first* become aware of their spiritual ideal. During the '60s, '70s, and early '80s, you could hardly attend an A.R.E. program anywhere without hearing ideals discussed at some point. But, unfortunately, the ideals exercise chart can—all too easily—become nothing more than a homework assignment: filling in columns or jotting down notes that are never again wrestled with once set on paper. The chart can become something we simply file away, pulling it out only when we're next asked to work with ideals, or wishing we'd kept it with us when an A.R.E. speaker announces again (to our usual frustration and sometimes boredom) that it's time to fill out an "Ideals Chart."

The readings' approach to ideals, however, is not one in which we're given a one-time assignment to turn in and then be done with it; rather, it's one in which we're challenged, encouraged, even prodded to begin a personal masterpiece created by the soul throughout this lifetime and shared with others through one's interactions and relationships—even picking it up and working with it again the next time around. I'd like to look at ideals from this

second approach, grappling with what they are, discovering why they're important, and discussing how to work with them. Whether we're longtime students of the readings or just becoming introduced to the material, Cayce's insights on ideals can provide much assistance in helping us to map out our life's journeys.

Just What Is an Ideal?

In simple terms, an ideal is the motivating influence that undergirds the intentionality of *why* we do what we do. It's like a North Star that guides us in the dark of night—it allows us to focus upon the direction toward which we wish to be headed. Whereas a goal is something attainable, in Cayce's terminology an ideal is really a motivating pattern that guides our lives. It's not something we're going to pick up and cherish like a prized object; rather, it's more like the rays of the sun that can warm our face when we're pointed toward it.

What may be surprising from the readings' perspective, however, is that everyone works with ideals, even on an unconscious level. For example, one individual (Mr. [323]) was told that the reason he had so many problems and so much confusion in his own life was because he had never really established a *conscious ideal*. He often felt as if he was in a state of confusion simply because the ideal he had established (to be sure, unconsciously) was that of a wanderer. He was encouraged to make a conscious choice and to begin to work with it, because what individuals dwell upon they become. How often have we heard the readings' frequent quotation, "Mind is the builder," and yet have we really stopped to ask ourselves what we are building during our own bouts with confusion?

One way to begin to discover what kind of unconscious ideals we've been constructing in our own lives is to ask ourselves introspective questions like the following: (1) What sort of workplace would my company be if every employee were just like me? (2) What sort of home life would there be if

every wife/husband/child were just like me? (3) What sort of neighborhood would this be if every neighbor were just like me? (4) What sort of self-worth would individuals have if every person had my self-esteem? or (5) What sort of church would my congregation be if every member were just like me? Questions like these aren't meant to discourage us, but instead they can help us realize how powerful unconscious ideals have been in shaping, both positively and negatively, what we've become.

A conscious ideal is one against which we're willing to measure our every thought, word, and deed. For example, if we choose a conscious ideal such as "love," it should establish the criterion for our every action. It could also point us in the *direction* we wish to be headed. Using the five questions above in conjunction with an ideal of love, we might ask ourselves: (1) What sort of an employee would a loving person be? (2) What kind of a home life would a loving person have? (3) What sort of a neighbor would a loving person be like? (4) How might a loving person exhibit self-worth and self-esteem? or (5) What would a loving person be like in a church congregation? By discovering our "best guesses" as to the qualities of a loving person (or whatever quality we've currently chosen for our ideal), we can move toward becoming that type of person ourselves.

So, in answer to the question "What is an ideal?" the following Cayce reading provides insights from several perspectives:

"In entering the present experience this entity (as others) comes to make more manifested the consciousness or awareness of those influences for good and evil in the experience of the soul; and through the application of that set as the ideal grow towards a unison with that ideal.

"Each individual entity, whether aware of same or not, sets before self an ideal in the material world, in the mental world, in the spiritual world.

"The spiritual world is the realm from which all force or power emanates. And through the mind there is built in materiality those things that either make or mar that influence in the experience of the entity in any given activity in the earth [Author's italics]." (1011-1)

First of all, an ideal is something that we apply (consciously or unconsciously) in our daily lives. It is something that influences our every act, our every thought, even our emotions. It is a motivating impulse shaping the substance of who we are as well as who we eventually become. As powerful a motivator as ideals are in our lives, unless we become cognizant of them and take the initiative, they remain largely unconscious. We may have ideals and not even know what they are! Finally, our ideals—powerful enough to mold even material reality—are builded into our experience through the activity of the mind.

Why Are Ideals Important?

In part, the answer to the "what" establishes the "why." Since ideals shape our very lives, our

experiences, even who we're becoming, by definition, then, they must be *extremely* important. But Cayce goes one step further. Oftentimes, people were told: "Then, the more important, the most important experience of this or any individual entity is to first know what is the ideal—spiritually." (357-13) Not only is it very important, it is *the most important* thing we can do.

Essentially, the reason for this importance is threefold: (1) ideals direct and shape the impulse of spirit in our lives; (2) ideals help us deal with (and hold us accountable to) those experiences we need in order to come to know ourselves; and (3) ideals can help us work through the confusion we've come to call "freedom of choice."

(1) Ideals Direct and Shape the Impulse of Spirit in Our Lives

The entire (oft-repeated) "mind is the builder" quote is as follows: "Spirit is the life; mind is the builder; and the physical is the result." Although we might be vastly simplifying the terminology, the word "spirit" according to the vocabulary of the readings is really the Creative Impulse that can be utilized positively or negatively. It is the life force that can be directed through the activity of the mind and will for selfless (good) or selfish (evil) pursuits. The mind is the mechanism through which we decide where and how we'll focus our creative energies, even our attention. The end result of focusing this creative impulse in a specific direction or activity (consciously or unconsciously) is that we draw certain experiences, even people, into our lives. *Our physical/material world becomes the stage (the result) upon which we can see the activity of spirit, directed through the power of our own minds, played out before our very eyes.*

"For whatever there may be is first conceived in spirit. It is acted upon by mind. Dependent, then, upon what the mind of the entity holds as its ideal, or as to what form or manner it would give by and through what spirit it would build in its mental self." (2995-3)

This same individual was told in her reading: "... ye can make thyself just as happy or just as miserable as ye like."

How many of us would ever consider simply walking into one of those multi-cinema movie theaters without even looking at the marquee, purchase a ticket for whatever show the attendant happened to feel like selling us, then simply sit down without even caring what it was we were going to watch? Yet, this is the very experience we encounter in our lives when we lack the commitment to establish a conscious ideal.

(2) Ideals Help Us Deal with (and Hold Us Accountable to) Those Experiences We Need in Order to Come to Know Ourselves

Once an ideal has been chosen, a pattern (a motivating influence) is set in place that will assist us in learning whatever lesson it is we need in order to move toward that next step necessary for our

own personal growth. To complicate our understanding, however, once an ideal has been chosen, our life sometimes draws experiences seemingly diametrically opposed to what it is we said we were interested in building.

Working with the example of "love," if we decided that we needed to be more loving in our lives, we might soon discover that we're suddenly surrounded by individuals who are either unloving themselves or a real challenge to us to try to love. This experience would not mean that we had chosen the "wrong" ideal; rather, it would simply indicate that we were drawing toward us individuals and events that would help us learn how to become more loving. Ultimately, the only way we can experience real learning at a soul level is by our interaction and connection with and service to one another.

The readings challenge us not to give up on the ideal we have chosen once the real work begins. We're accountable for our choices, and we'll see some results if we stick with them.

"This is the unailing, the unfaltering principle, the law—love . . . forsake *not* those principles that make for the satisfying of that thou hast set . . . as an ideal! Be *patient* and . . . thy efforts . . . will not . . . go unrewarded . . ." (802-2)

(3) Ideals Can Help Us Work Through the Confusion We've Come to Call "Freedom of Choice"

Ideals can be wonderful tools for making decisions. Whenever we find ourselves in a state of confusion because we're unable to make a choice, whether it's a major decision such as a change in careers or a relatively unimportant decision such as how to spend the afternoon, our ideal can help. Simply weigh each choice against the ideal; for example, if our ideal is "love" and we're suddenly presented with the unbelievable prospect of two job opportunities at once, we could ask ourselves which one of these jobs is most in keeping with what a loving person would do or which one of these would help an individual become more loving.

But more than helping us to make simple choices, our ideals can lead us out of the confusion of what we should be doing or where we should be going or even what God would have us do with our lives. The ideal helps guide us toward the next meaningful step in our spiritual journeys. Two oft-repeated quotes from the readings are: "Line upon line, precept upon precept" and "Do what you know to do and the next step will be given." As we begin working with whatever understanding we possess, our path is made clear: "For as ye apply day by day that ye know, then is the next step, the next act, the next experience shown thee." (262-104)

How Can I Work with Ideals?

"First, know thy ideal—spiritually, mentally, materially. Not so much as to what you would like others to be, but what may be *your* ideal relationships to others! For he that is the greatest is the servant of all—as the law of cause and effect." (1998-1)

Elsewhere we read: "For, [the] *ideal* is not so much what others may do for you, but what you may do for others!" (1646-2)

The challenge of working with ideals seems to be one where we're encouraged to move beyond simply a personal intellectual exercise to one where we're able to strategically map out how our ideal will affect our interaction with others, ourselves, even our surroundings. The key to making a spiritual ideal practical in our material lives is to again work with the idea that "Spirit is the life, mind is the builder, and the physical is the result."

The first step entails taking a sheet of paper and drawing three columns. Label the first "My Spiritual Ideal," label the second "My Mental Attitudes," and label the third "My Physical Activities." Although we're encouraged to choose a *challenging* spiritual ideal, it's recommended that we choose something we can understand, work with, and see progressively manifested in our lives.

Ultimately, a spiritual ideal is the highest spiritual quality or attainment that we could hope to have motivating our lives (I might add "right now . . . in the near future"). For some, this might be the pattern set by Jesus, for others it might be a quality such as "love." In order to really begin working with ideals, however, we should choose that quality or attribute currently missing or lacking in our own lives in our relationships with others. For example, perhaps I need to be more "patient" or more "forgiving" or more "understanding" in my interaction with other people. Ideals grow and change as we do, so it's important to pick something with which we can really begin to work.

For the exercise, let's say that our spiritual ideal is currently going to be "forgiveness," so "forgiveness" would be written under the first column labeled "My Spiritual Ideal."

Under the second column, we need to begin listing "My Mental Attitudes"—those attitudes which will help build that spirit of forgiveness in our relationships with others and with ourselves. Perhaps we'll decide "compassion" is an attitude we'll work toward in relation to a frustrating parent; maybe "openness" is the mental attitude we want to begin holding in regard to one of our children with whom we've been having difficulty; and possibly "patience" best describes that attitude we need to use with ourselves. Our ideals chart should list all the people in our lives with whom we need to exercise this spiritual ideal of forgiveness, plus a positive mental attitude suggesting how we'll begin working with each one.

The third column is the most detailed, the one where we list all those physical activities we'll begin doing in relationship to specific individuals. "My Physical Activities" should simply reflect the mental attitudes to hold in relationship to the spiritual ideal. For example, in the case of ourselves and the mental attitude of "patience," perhaps each of the following could be appropriate activities to help build that same attitude: "stop saying (or even

thinking) 'I can't,' "make a list of every instance where I myself have been forgiven for something," "begin praying that I will have the determined endurance to go forward," etc. Each attitude and person should have next to it a list of multiple activities with which we'll be working. These activities should map out ways to bring the spiritual ideal into the material world.

We'll know that progress has been made with our spiritual ideal when the mental attitude listed on the ideals sheet becomes our usual state of mind, and our physical activity becomes *our automatic and natural response*. As we really begin to work with ideals, making them a part of who we are, we can then choose a more challenging direction—a brighter North Star toward which we can point our lives. The important thing is to *work* with our ideals, for by working with them we'll discover what it is we should be doing. Then we no longer will have to concern ourselves with the timing.

"Wherever you are! Whether in Hartford or Sing Sing, or Kalamazoo or Timbuktu, it's one and the same! The Lord is God of the universe, wherever thou art! For each soul finds self in that place which it occupies in the present only by the grace of God. Then use that today, that period. If it is used properly, then the next is pointed out." (3356-1)

Ideals Change and Grow as We Do

As we work with ideals, we'll discover that they need to be fine-tuned, becoming even more challenging with the passage of time. For example, if one of our ideals is "gentleness of speech," we would continue to work with it—even across the breakfast table—until it became a part of us. Once our conversation began to match up with "gentleness of speech," we might reword our ideal to "friendliness." Then, "friendliness" would be the spiritual ideal we'd attempt to manifest with others in our mental attitudes and our physical activities. Eventually, we might find that we've grappled successfully with "gentleness of speech," "friendliness," and maybe a dozen others all dealing with some aspect of "service" or "improving relationships" or "unconditional love." For each of our smaller ideals is a portion of something greater that we wish to become, but is perhaps in the very beginning out of our reach.

Ultimately, There Is One Ideal

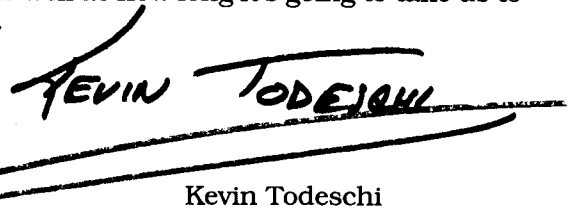
Although the readings encourage us to choose a personal ideal, they also assert that there is only one Ideal. One individual was told, "There is *one* way, but there are many paths." (3083-1) In essence, what this suggests is that each of us is moving toward an ultimate Ideal. Whether we want to label that ideal "perfection" or "Christ Consciousness" or "God Consciousness" or whatever term with which we're personally comfortable, the ultimate ideal is the highest spiritual attainment possible. Therefore, each of our ideals (such as aspects of "love" or "service" or "kindness") really serve as steps or building blocks toward that highest ideal.

Ideas vs. Ideals

Although each of us might have different ideas, plans, or goals about *how* things should be done, the readings advise that—in spite of all our differences—we can share a common *why*. Even during the turmoil and international chaos of the 1930s, the readings gave a type of prescription that could serve to bring all of humanity together. In spite of the fact that each nation had different ideas, Cayce suggested that the world could share a common ideal. That ideal was his "answer to the world."

"The world, as a world . . . has lost its ideal. Man may not have the same *idea*. Man—all men—may have the *same* IDEAL! . . . that can only come with all having the *one* Ideal; not the one *idea*, but 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, thy neighbor as thyself!' This [is] the whole law, this [is] the whole answer to the world, to each and every soul. That is the answer to the world conditions as they exist today." (3976-8)

Repeatedly, the readings encourage us to become aware of what we are building within ourselves, because ultimately we'll have the chance to meet it. As we work with a conscious ideal, not only is our direction made more clear, but the ideal becomes a living, breathing portion of who we are at a soul level. An ideal is like a personal tapestry that we create one stitch at a time. It can be worked with and ironed out and toiled over until the end result is something we can proudly share in our interactions with others. Each of us has the opportunity to decide consciously who we wish to become as well as how long it's going to take us to get there.



Kevin Todeschi

KEVIN TODESCHI began his involvement with the Edgar Cayce material in 1974. A staff member since 1982, he is currently the director of A.R.E.'s Membership Division, which includes all member activity areas for the Association. A graduate of Atlantic University, he wrote his thesis on *The Ark Myth*, which deals with the archetype of the Flood story from various perspectives. In addition to the script for A.R.E. Press's *Remembering Egypt* video (which details Cayce's story of ancient Egypt), he recently authored *The Edgar Cayce Ideals Workbook: Taking Control of Your Life*.

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