

Development of Metaphysics

If you can get to the point where you can appreciate that this is a learning place, that is one of the most amazing psychics I ever met, said Edward and Monroe, or the entity speaking through him said, what is the meaning of life? Why is life like this on earth? Why is it so shitty? He said, well, Earth is part kindergarten and part the devil's island of space. All the little Hitlers from all over the universe are brought here to learn some very basic lessons.

Hey, you sinners! Welcome to another interview of the devil here on the Cult of You. I'm Adam Knox, and today I get to chat to Ronnie Pontiac, author of *American Metaphysical Religion*. This has been an eye-opening and interesting conversation. You see, I happen to share a little bit of a personal initiation journey with Ronnie. Not that we went through the same period, location, or anything like that, but we both were vagabonds of the world in pursuit of deeper meaning, where we encountered great spiritual leaders who saw beyond the flesh into our souls and helped us connect to something deeper.

Only difference is, Ronnie's spiritual mentor that he happened to come across was none other than Manly P. Hall himself. For those of you that aren't familiar, Manly P. Hall is one of the great thinkers in the occult, esoteric, and metaphysical movements. His works, like *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, provided a massive framework of the occult worlds and metaphysical bodies in a very comprehensive manner. His knowledge over Freemasonry and Eastern and Western traditions really put together in such deep, deep levels.

Today we get to hear about the man and the story behind him—who he really was as a person—as well as that spawning time of the occult in America and how it formulated into what it is today. Ronnie and my discussion goes over a variety of topics, from the advent of spiritualism in that world, to the Creole practices in Louisiana, to the use of jazz and magic, to everything from the sexual revolutions. We touched on Jack Parsons. We look at the expression in the revival of the goddess traditions. It is a jam-packed conversation, quite a long one, and if you're very familiar with the subject, I recommend skipping to parts that are really interesting for you—especially if you know Ronnie's work. If you don't, however, sit back, relax, and remember to live deliciously.

Ronnie, it's an absolute pleasure to have you on *The Cult of You* at last.

"It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for inviting me."

I simply had to, because not only was I a lover of your work—this amazing tome of knowledge and experience and journeys—but I have to admit, I have a deep kind of soul bond with your story. I was a young, lost, troubled, mischievous expression of life—what some would almost call criminal in certain ways—and in a quest for deeper meaning and for higher discovery, I wandered into a spiritualist center where a séance was going on.

Surprisingly enough, they led me through the doors. I was led to meet a spiritual mentor who became a spiritual father for me. He wasn't necessarily as articulate as yours, but he looked into me, and I felt my soul completely revealed. In the most humble way, he expressed my trauma and my fears, my insecurities. And I knew there was a deeper awareness here. That really started my path. And I believe you had a similar start to yours.

I did. I started out as somebody who had very little interest in these matters. Although I was naturally psychic, I was a really feral kid. I did not have any sense of social contract. My parents were traumatized war survivors. I was an only child, got beat up at school all the time, just not connected to the world around me. By the time I was a teenager, I was pretty hateful. I had a band in my late teenage years that was dedicated to nihilism. We had a big following of bikers, a lot of violence around me, and a lot of petty crime.

I got lucky. A girl named Tamara was in trouble at a club, and she picked me, for some reason, as her defender. Being looked at that way was transforming in itself. We fell in love. But I was still aimless, still claustrophobic in my mentality. As a kid, I'd run into a book called *Atlantis: The Mother of Empires*. It was an oversized volume that I desperately wanted to shoplift because, for some reason, it just felt important to me. It was way too big to steal, so I left it. But it stuck in my mind.

Later, I had a little money—meant for a haircut—and instead, I went to the Bodhi Tree Bookstore in LA looking for it. They didn't have it, but I found this massive book: *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, the sixth edition. I couldn't afford it outright, so I put it on layaway. I remember reading it chapter by chapter, feeling like my brain opened with each page. I had no direction, no meaning, and that book changed everything. I discovered people had risked their lives to preserve and share these metaphysical truths—encoded in symbols, in language, in mystery.

And then I found out Manly Hall was still lecturing—not far from where I lived. At first, I was terrified to go. I thought someone like me—my past, my chaos—would have no place there. But Tamara said, "He's in his eighties. You'll regret not going." So we went one Sunday. The building was this beautiful Mayan-Egyptian church. Inside, an auditorium filled with mostly older people, and then he walked out—this old man—sat in a chair, and delivered a 90-minute lecture that shook me.

He looked right at me and spoke about people who irrationally fear earthquakes due to guilt about how they've lived. I'd been terrified of earthquakes, influenced by friends reading Edgar Cayce and telling me California would collapse into the ocean. I was spooked. And then this man looks at me and names my fear. Later, when I worked for him, I realized he did that a lot. For Tamara, he spoke of flowers that bloom through concrete—exactly what she was thinking as she approached the building.

And the kicker? That *Atlantis* book I'd been obsessed with as a kid? It was written by the architect of the building I was sitting in—someone who had been close to Manly Hall. So in a way, I'd been reaching for Hall since childhood.

Working with him, I saw firsthand what it meant to age with soul. He was sharp, multitasking constantly—writing several books and articles at once, running the organization, delivering lectures, mentoring people. His office was filled with stunning Asian art, and he loved museums, stories, jokes, and sports. He lived with joy and grace.

He had a terrible memory for faces and names, and yet, he could describe the exact book he needed from the library—its color, shelf position, even alternate placements. His recall was unbelievable.

The biggest gift, though, was that he made me believe in the sacred. He didn't meditate formally—he *was* meditation. His whole life was a walking Zen. When we asked what his spiritual practice was, he said, "I don't need to meditate. My daily life *is* my meditation." That rocked me.

It also changed my idea of what aging could look like. I had grown up thinking aging was decay, suffering, misery. He showed me aging could be wisdom, joy, generosity. He lived simply. He could've been famous like Crowley, but he chose humility.

There are five key transformations I underwent during that time:

- 1. Radical honesty.** I had been a skilled liar, a thief. I even considered stealing books from his library. But through subtle humor and a gift of trust—he once told me, "Take any books you want, keep them indefinitely"—I changed. That trust healed me.
- 2. Astrology.** I mocked it. I thought it was nonsense. He laughed and said, "You don't know enough about it to judge. Study it, and then we'll debate." I did. And I saw the patterns. It blew my mind.
- 3. Trust in Nature.** Hall said life and nature are our teachers. He wrote *The Secret Teachings* for the rational soul of the world. He believed the Dao would bring the right people to him. And somehow, I showed up at the right time.
- 4. Experience of the Divine.** I was raised atheist. I hated organized religion. But I began to feel the sacred—not from doctrine, but from presence. That's when the real initiations began.
- 5. Simplicity.** Manly Hall had lived through a golden age. He could've done anything. But what he valued most at the end was simplicity, humor, kindness. That humility became a map for my life.

There's so much more: the rise of spiritualism, women's rights, jazz, sex, magic, Creole rites in Louisiana, and the shifting currents of metaphysical America. We talk about the frauds, the healers, the charlatans, and the saints. We go from the Fox Sisters to Edgar Cayce, from séances and sex scandals to the purity of Betty and Stewart White's spirit work.

And underneath it all, we're trying to answer one question:

What does it mean to live a spiritual life that's grounded, embodied, and real?

This episode will take you through rebellion, transformation, mysticism, and revolution. It's a history, a memoir, a philosophical initiation.

And there we learned about what was going on and the way that the judicial system and the police were corrupt and how they were preying on the local communities. And the Black Panthers, who we had been raised to think were these vicious, violent, communist criminals, were people that were giving breakfast to local kids, collecting books so kids had something to read, and trying to tell the gang members to stay out of prison. They were teaching people about the law and about their history. They were completely different and wonderful people. I met some of the most beautiful people in that scene.

But then as I was working on this book, I found there was another shadow of America—a third shadow. And this one was very exciting. You could call it, I guess, America's esoteric shadow. And here were a whole bunch of people and organizations and communities that were so different and yet so typically American. One of the best examples is Thomas Morton. This is a guy who was sent out when he was about 50 years old by the Royalists to be competition for the Puritans. The Puritans—the pilgrims—were not popular in England. They wanted to get rid of them. They were judgmental and always trying to change things. The English attitude at that point was more Cavalier. They liked drinking, wore big codpieces, loved Shakespeare and poetry, and were fascinated by Plato, paganism, astrology, and the beginnings of science and alchemy. The pilgrims were against most of that. You couldn't laugh too loud or walk too fast. Everything was so controlled. The Royalists didn't want the pilgrims to have the only foothold on the American continent, so they picked Thomas Morton to travel across the Atlantic and start a new center—not a colony, but a trading post.

He chose this beautiful green round hill right on the Atlantic and named it Marymount. It was a pun on several levels—a mountain named after Mary, but also "merry mount" as in let's have fun, and even a Latin pun for the male genitalia. Morton has the distinction of being the first American to publish a fart joke. He threw the first wild party that got shut down and was the first American to be foreclosed on by a corporation—because the pilgrims were actually a corporation.

Morton's trading post was different. The pilgrims built a wall around their settlement, terrified of the wilderness, dealing with indigenous people with violence. Morton needed no fence. He was open and kind. He held a massive May Day party with a maypole, a bawdy poem, and an invitation extended to pirates, trappers, indigenous tribes—even the pilgrims, who refused and labeled it an orgy of fornicating drunkenness. But Morton said the parties were wholesome, and indigenous women were more moral than the average English girl back home.

He opposed the slave trade, risking his life to help people escape. He wrote descriptions of the land, sacred springs, and America's nature with love, while the pilgrims feared it. Eventually, they attacked him, arrested him, tried to starve him to death, sent him back to England, and he fought them in court. He initially won, but ultimately lost. Many of his own community assimilated into the Puritan way to survive. In Morton's failure, there was a symbolic loss of this other vision of America—but it didn't truly die.

Later, Harvard and Yale had alchemy labs. Presidents of those colleges were alchemists and astrologers. One Yale president declared every college in America should teach Kabbalah. Rosae Crucian, Paracelsian immigrants formed communities like Ephrata in the Pennsylvania wilderness. Americans kept moving to establish places where they could believe and practice as they wanted.

The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor emerged, mysterious and layered in identity. Connected to Blavatsky? Perhaps not. Possibly tied to a Hasidic Kabbalist named Max Theon, whose ideas were mystical, not religious. Paschal Beverly Randolph was undoubtedly an influence. A Black man with Indigenous and white ancestry, he was a spiritualist, occultist, advocate for birth control and sexual pleasure, and famously hosted ecstatic parties with hashish, white women, and Black men. He claimed Rosicrucian authority to be heard but later admitted he invented it.

The Brotherhood had both East and West coast lodges—led by women like Aldridge and men like Thomas Johnson. Despite scandals (like a jailed fraud in the East), it endured. Johnson, a translator, Theosophist, and Sufi writer, published *The Platonist* and guided the Brotherhood with ads requesting \$1 and a birth chart. Accepted members received mailed lessons on astrology, magic mirrors, hashish sex rituals for married couples (to conceive spiritually elevated children), and other esoteric subjects.

It foreshadowed the 1960s hippie culture—drugs, sex, and spirituality as transformation. Randolph even taught orgasmic manifestation techniques—sexuality as a magical technology. Ideas now seen as "New Age" were alive in 19th-century America.

The "pursuit of happiness" transformed Christianity in America. Instead of renunciation, it embraced prosperity, pleasure, and personal fulfillment. This shift began in the same places these secret schools emerged.

Music also carried these occult seeds. Congo Square in New Orleans allowed enslaved people to dance and drum one day a week. These gatherings birthed jazz, R&B, and rock. Marie Laveau danced there. Rhythms from Africa—each spiritually significant—merged with gospel and field songs to form American music. "Cool," as a divine, calm quality, entered culture from Yoruba philosophy.

Jung observed America's infatuation with enslaved people, even as it tried to suppress them. He noted Southern aristocrats mimicked African speech and behavior unconsciously. A classic shadow compensation.

Cross-pollination continued. *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, possibly white supremacist in origin, became foundational for Black Muslim movements like the Circle Seven Koran. American spirituality is filled with paradoxes and hybridities—appropriated, reimagined, revived.

Today, some push for a Christian theocracy. But America's real spiritual story is diversity, mysticism, feminine power, and revolution.

The revival of goddesses like Sekhmet reflects that. Once nearly forgotten, now her image is everywhere—from punk tattoos to feminist altars. Goddess of justice and war, healer and destroyer, she leads the Pharaoh into battle and protects women. Her name means power. Books, art, and the internet spread her mythology. Some call it dangerous—awakening a war goddess in unstable times. Others say, if gods exist, they choose their worshippers. Sekhmet festivals were music, sex, and celebration. Today's spiritual youth, especially women, revive these archetypes.

TikTok witches, online teachers, and spiritual influencers carry this wave. Some lack deep experience, but peer learning has value. Depth comes with time. True teachers don't brand themselves aggressively. When you're ready, the teacher will appear.

Manly P. Hall taught: study psychology before diving deep into metaphysics. Understand your psyche. Know your motivations. Urgency and "chosen one" mentalities are red flags. Spirituality should feel like a peaceful walk, not a frantic sprint.

Ceremonial magic, spiritualism, even yoga—if used to gain sex, wealth, or power—can backfire. Tranquility allows truth to arise. Don't agitate the waters. If your inner mirror is still, the heavens can reflect.

A nightly practice: Pythagorean recollection. Review your day backward. Learn without judgment. Be aware. Seek healing, not domination. Connect, don't isolate. Use astrology, art, and music to map your inner terrain.

Remember, this is your birthright. You don't need initiation to access Spirit. Just your sincerity. Just your willingness to grow.

Let us build communities again—physical, grounded, and wise. Let us use the internet as the library, not the temple. Let us walk with reverence, with humor, and with wonder in this strange, beautiful mystery.