



Divine Love spans the dark passage of sin, disease, and death with Christ's righteousness,—the atonement of Christ, whereby good destroys evil,—and the victory over self, sin, disease, and death, is won after the pattern of the mount. This is working out our own salvation, for God worketh with us, until there shall be nothing left to perish or to be punished, and we emerge gently into Life everlasting. This is what the Scriptures demand—faith according to works.

Mary Baker Eddy, *Message to The Mother Church*, 1901

Fern Lodge Focus

July 2002

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Working with people, — what if it's difficult?

Often we face behavior, another's or our own, that suggests that those we work with have personalities that can annoy or frustrate us, or that we have a personal ego that may feel annoyed, hurt, enraged or offended. At a recent nurses' meeting, we discussed our reactions to what we perceive as unreasonable actions, confusion, fear, feelings of hopelessness, self-condemnation, or apathy. We identified the more aggressive forms of thought that could cause us to react: self-centeredness, willfulness, controlling or manipulating others for personal gain or comfort, rudeness; complaining and criticizing. And we shared ideas on how to handle aggressive physical pictures of disease or pain which might cause some to react with a lack of grace. What can we do when our best Christian efforts to help others are rejected, and we feel hurt, embarrassed, or angry? Here are some excerpts from the nurses' comments.

First, we must pray daily for ourselves as Mrs. Eddy instructs us, "mentally, meekly, and importunately," (Mis 127:9). When we confidently affirm man's identity as spiritual and perfect, we can spot suggestions that would keep us from seeing God's perfect creation. If we feel overwhelmed or angry over a situation, we can recognize these are not really our thoughts. All suggestions of evil come from mortal mind, acting through animal magnetism.

In the glossary of *Science and Health* (583:26), Mrs. Eddy equates these terms: "animal magnetism; so-called mortal mind controlling mortal mind; error, working out the designs of error; one belief preying upon another." If we hear bitter or sarcastic remarks, or comments that sound cynical, insulting, unkind, uncharitable, or unfriendly, or if we feel wounded, stung, or victimized in any way, we need to remember that these are merely suggestions of animal magnetism. It is important for us

to understand that any ill effect we feel is caused by character faults in someone else, is actually a result of the undetected and unhandled influence of animal magnetism in our own thinking: our feelings of pride, self-will, egotism. Jesus was confronted every bit as blatantly as we are with undesirable or even harmful character traits, and he showed that handling them is part of the healing Christian ministry. This is the cross which must be taken up by everyone who claims the title "Christian Scientist," and especially "Christian Science Nurse."

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We are not off the hook because someone out there is doing something we perceive as wrong. When error is presented to our thinking, our job is to seek the understanding of Christ, which enables us to handle our own response to impersonal error with genuine healing. Jesus handled presentations of error so effectively because he had first healed these issues in his own thought. In working with the ideas of disposition and predisposition, we find the dictionary defines disposition as, "the final arrangement of things; a prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination; the tendency of something to act in a certain manner under given circumstances." Predisposition is simply the arrangement ahead of time of these

things. We should ask, "What is my disposition? Am I predisposed to healing, or to irritation and conflict?" If our answer is the latter, then we need to be handling our own tendencies, not those of a patient or another nurse. We need to approach Jesus' example. We need a disposition so transparent to God's qualities that we are predisposed to healing, not to getting drawn into error.

Clearly, we must have patience. The biblical word for patience is "longsuffering." Actually it's always mortal mind which suffers, because mortal mind has no capacity for handling anything graciously or with healing. Irritation, anger and conflict indicate that we are tuned in to mortal mind. When we are attuned to divine Mind,

(continued on page 7)

Life in the wilderness, excerpts from a talk by Mary Jane Chapin

The definition of “wilderness” in *Science and Health* includes the word, “vestibule.” You go *through* a vestibule on the way into a building. So a wilderness is a place to move through without delay. But what if that isn’t possible? Let’s think about exploring the time we are *in* the wilderness. I don’t think there is a better model for living in the wilderness than the children of Israel, who spent forty years there! What were they to learn from this experience? And what can I learn from them that will be helpful in my own wilderness encounters?

The children of Israel go quickly from reveling in a phenomenal escape from Egypt to being in the wilderness, feeling exposed and vulnerable. It’s a step to go from bondage to freedom, but that’s just one step. Now they had to figure out how to live. These people will have a lot of needs, and this is the story of how these needs were met. Some may feel that all of life is a journey through a wilderness. Sometimes we go forward with great excitement; sometimes it’s more like dread. Sometimes we go quickly and make great progress; other times we plod along or seem to stand still.

The Israelites have just set out, and, far from being in a land of milk and honey, they go for three days without water. When they finally arrive at Marah, the water is bitter. What do they do? Complain to Moses. Moses, in turn, cried out to God. Immediately, God answered. He forgave their murmurings and met their needs; the water was made sweet; the crisis was over. This sets the pattern that will be repeated time and time again. The people murmur and rebel; God forgives, rescues, restores, and heals.

Moses then outlined God’s expectations for their daily lives. They must listen to Him and do that which is right in His sight, and must give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes. They were freed from Pharaoh in order to serve God. But now they are in the

desert, and their provisions run out. They are facing starvation and having more than second thoughts about this whole affair. Again, they complain to Moses, crying that they were better off in Egypt where at least they had enough to eat. Even slavery was preferable to slow starvation in the desert. This time, however, Moses doesn’t even have a chance to ask before the Lord tells him that He will “rain bread from heaven for them.”

It was an amazing thing, this manna. Its real importance lies in what it means—bread from heaven!

It shows how God is involved in the most ordinary aspects of their lives. He isn’t just for the big moments, the catastrophes or the miraculous events. He sees to it that their simplest needs are met, and for as long as the needs last; presumably they ate manna for forty years. God feeds them in ways Moses or they themselves could not have done. This foreshadows Jesus feeding the multitudes. It is a demonstration of God’s power and care.

But let’s face it, life in the wilderness is hard. Even though they have manna every morning, they also need water. And when they can’t find it, they complain *again* to Moses. This must have been so disheartening for

him. God is caring for them on a daily basis, but they still accuse Moses of taking them out of Egypt only to kill them. It’s as if they were proposing a deal with God — show us the water, and we will accept that You are with us. No water, no faith. Their position culminates in the summation, “Is God with us or not?” The answer is a resounding, “Yes.” God doesn’t waste a moment. He hears, instructs, commands, and gives. It is as though God is trying to show them what kind of a God He intends to be. He gives them life-giving water. He instructs Moses to strike a rock, and water flows out of the rock. Not only that, God’s presence is tangibly felt. Despite the murmurings of the children of Israel, God is a God of grace and of glory.

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Life in the wilderness

Three months to the day after the exodus, they arrive at Mount Sinai. Much of their future will be determined in the eleven months they spend here. Now God reminds them of what He had done for them — how He dealt with the Egyptians, how He had carried them on eagles' wings. He then invites them to obey His commands, to keep His covenant. First, we have unconditional love; then we have commands. If they can do this, they will be His "treasured possession", and a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:5, 6)

The scene is set for the Ten Commandments, the making of the covenant. A covenant is an agreement — I'm going to do something; you're going to do something. At that time covenant agreements were typically written by an overlord with a conquered people. A covenant began with a preamble that identified the initiator of the

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treaty. The Ten Commandments start with, "I am the Lord your God." That's the identification. Next there was an historical review, which included benevolence as the foundation for obligations. "I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." The next section was called the stipulations, or obligations. Those were the Ten Commandments.

Moses was on top of the mountain forty days and forty nights, receiving the Commandments from God. Perhaps the people thought Moses had perished in the thundering and the cloud. He had been their leader, the mediator between them and God, the one who kept them on the straight and narrow. Now he was gone. His absence made them very anxious. They knew they were due to leave Sinai soon. What should they do? How would they get along? They turned to Aaron, asking for a visible image of a "god that would go before them." (Ex. 32:1) They wanted something to look at, to

remind them of their experience at this mountain, to feel God's presence in their midst. The terrible irony, of course, is that this is exactly what God and Moses had been talking about as well.

The Israelites, however, had a solution for their problem. Prior to leaving Egypt, they had "borrowed" silver and jewels from the Egyptians. Now Aaron asked the people to bring the gold and jewels to him, and he fashioned a molten calf. God tells Moses to "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them, and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' I have seen these people and they are stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." (Ex. 32:7-10)

If we have problems with the way God is depicted here, let's remember that people wrote this story. People use words and metaphors with which they are familiar. When a promise is broken, we tend to get upset, and we may say more than we should. Later we can repent, change our minds and soften our stance. Here this scenario is foisted on God, saying that He can change His mind. But other biblical passages specifically state that God does not change His mind because He is not like a man (Num. 23:19). God is immutable, unchangeable. God never changes His desire to save His people. If He will show mercy in order to avert judgment, that is good. He is God. God will not destroy what He has saved.

The incident with the golden calf is an example of how we get ourselves into trouble. First we complain, having forgotten what God has done for us. Once God is out of our thought, we look around for a replacement, something of our own invention. Maybe we try to convince ourselves that this is merely to help us remember what God did. But it's usually not too long before

the replacement becomes the object of our worship. Some draw the analogy to the conclusion that humans really are wicked after all. But once again, let us remember the main character in this story is God. No matter what these people do, God forgives and restores them. The story does not end with the golden calf.

When the Israelites reached the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to send men to explore it. Their instructions were plain: learn all you can about the land, the people, the soil, and the towns, and bring back whatever fruit you can find. They explored the land for forty days. They found enormous grapes and figs and brought them back to the people, and they pronounced that this land really "does flow with milk and honey." The land was everything it should be. That was the good news. The bad news was that the land was fully occupied, and the people were very strong; the cities were fortified and very big.

The response of the people is explicit and stark. They screamed and wept all that night. Of course, you can guess whom they took it out on—Moses! The complaint is the same one they've had since they left Egypt. "If only we had died in Egypt... Why did the Lord bring us here to die? Wouldn't it be better to return to Egypt?" In a matter of a few short sentences they have rejected everything they have been promised. We may wonder how they could have forgotten the mighty acts of the Lord they had witnessed with their own eyes. But forget they did!

The people turned down God's offer. They chose not to trust Him to make good on what He has promised. They said no, when they should have said yes. This is also an example of choosing between two forms of leadership: one based on fear and doubt, the other on trust and love. The opposition initially claimed the land was all they had been told, flowing with milk and honey. The people living in the land were worrisome, however, and the opposition clearly felt any attempts at a takeover would be unsuccessful. Their own fear impelled them to give "an evil report," the text says. Their word pictures

were so frightening that not even Caleb could counteract them. Caleb, of course, represents leadership based on trust and love. He is not put off by the odds; he remembers the mighty acts of God and trusts Him to stand by them again.

The people chose to follow doubt and fear. They talked of choosing a different leader, one who would take them back to Egypt, another rejection of God. God chose Moses for them; they didn't like the choice. Once again, God threatens to destroy them and make of Moses a great nation, saying, "Let me strike them down. Let me make of you a great nation." It would be akin to saying, "Let me alone while I do this." Moses replies, "I will surely not let you alone." This conversation indicates how important intercessory prayer really is. Moses appeals to God's great love and asks Him to forgive the

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sins of the people. Moses is probably not asking God to forgive in the usual sense, but to bear with these people in spite of their failings, to carry them along, maintaining the covenant with them. Moses can ask this based on God's steadfastness and fidelity, not on anything that the Israelites have done to deserve it.

Moses' prayer is successful. God agrees to forgive them, but adds that those who have denied Him will not see the land of promise. All the scouts except Caleb and Joshua later died of a plague. Moses told the people all this, and once again they were overcome with remorse. They decided to go ahead and do as the Lord had originally suggested, go into the land. Caleb warned them, however, that their window of opportunity had passed, the Lord would not be with them, and they would not prevail. But this was a stiff-necked people and they tried anyway, with no success. They were soundly defeated.

It was time to move on again, and 38 more years of wandering would pass. When they finally came again near the Land of Promise, the Israelites sought God's help and defeated the Caananites. They called the place Hormah, where they had been defeated earlier. In a sense, we have come full circle, encasing 38 years of wilderness living. Their first victory is at the site of their first defeat. So even though the older generation will not enter the Promised Land, they do have the satisfaction of knowing that God's promises are in the process of being fulfilled.

A series of victories brought the Israelites to Moab, on the border of Palestine, and the story of Baalam and Balak shows God watching over and protecting His chosen people. Balak brought Baalam to curse Israel, but through God's influence, Baalam could only say a blessing over them. But once again, while God was working on their behalf, some of the Israelites were getting involved with the local women and joining in worship of other gods.

The irony couldn't be starker. God is actively engaged on the mountaintop working to ensure a blessing for His children. At that very moment those same children are falling into idolatry below. We can hear echoes of another time when God was actively engaged on a mountaintop trying to establish a covenant with them while they were down below worshipping a golden calf. In a sense then, what we really have here is a natural framework for the beginning and the end of our story. The Israelites are struck by a plague, and the generation which commissioned the golden calf and refused to take possession of the Promised Land when they first came to it, ends here. The people now are in position to look towards their future.

The new generation is defined by hope and is faithful. The first generation was rigid in obedience, yet

they rebelled against God's authority. They never fully trusted God's plan, and they were not sure He could deliver on His promises. The new generation is different. They have a healthy respect for authority but aren't afraid to make suggestions. They are willing to compromise while they maintain the traditions of their elders. Their world is not a series of dead laws but of a living spirit. God's presence is very much part of their lives.

What can we learn from this story? One conclusion is that we have a choice. We can grumble and complain at difficulty, or we can trust and do whatever it takes to work things out. But the greatest lessons have less to do with our actions than what we learn about the character of God. There are moments when the transcendence of God is highlighted. But mostly, God is shown to be very close at hand, to respond to our needs, and restore us to Him even when we have rejected Him time after time. And one message that comes through very clearly is the immediacy of God's response. Their every need was met. They had everything they needed, when they needed it. God never abandoned them, no matter what they did. God provided for them every step of the way. God was at hand. Plus, He gave them the tools to do better and when they still failed, He tried again and again. He told them *how* they could live in a community with Him and with each other.

After listening to this story, we would never consider these forty years to be a honeymoon period. But it is a beautiful example of God's faithful commitment to His children, regardless of what they did! In like manner, regardless of what we do on our wilderness journey, God will always be faithful and committed to *us*. We know this is true, because He is a God of "compassion and grace, who is slow to anger." All God asks is that we "listen to His voice and obey His commandments."

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God, we are patient. True patience is a state of equanimity which relieves suffering of all sorts, and it does not run out or expire.

Our Leader assures us, "Science is working changes in personal character as well as in the material universe," *S&H*, page 237. Mrs. Eddy includes the article "Taking Offense," in *Miscellaneous Writings*. The paragraph starting on 224:11 gives a good self-examination test for the nurse, a checklist for keeping her/his thought prepared for Christly healing.

Are we going "forth into life with the smallest expectations, but with the largest patience?" Or are we insisting that the patient live up to our own expectations for their healing? Do we have a "keen relish for and appreciation of everything beautiful, great and good?" Are we predisposed to witnessing the good in others, or are we always wrapped up in what they do wrong? Do we have "a temper so genial that the friction of the world shall not wear upon our sensibilities?" Certainly then we can handle the seeming friction between one patient and ourselves. Do we have "an equanimity so settled that no passing breath nor accidental disturbance shall agitate or ruffle it?" Or do we treat accidental disturbances as though they were intentional offenses? Is our charity "broad enough to cover the whole world's evil, and sweet enough to neutralize what is bitter in it?" Do we even have enough charity to cover all the evil presented to us in one patient's room? Do we even consider it our job to neutralize bitterness through our own sweetness? Are we "determined not to be offended when no wrong is meant, nor even when it is, unless the offense be against God?" Or, are we rather holding our irritation out there like a sore thumb for everyone to bump up against?

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"Nothing short of our own errors should offend us," the article says. Having the privilege of being a Christian Science Nurse implies that we demonstrate Christliness. At very least we should know how character faults are to be handled, and regularly engage in the work. How can we be alert to suggestions of animal magnetism and protect ourselves from its false influences? We cannot emphasize too often the need for us to pray daily with the models given in the Church Manual, Article VIII, Sections 1, 4 and 6, "A Rule for Motives and Acts," the "Daily Prayer," and "Alertness to Duty."

The Lord's Prayer is especially helpful. "Our Father" helps us see we are all on the same side, the side of spiritual creation. Each one of His children is harmonious and adorable, a reflection of the only adorable One. God is always the supreme Ruler, on earth as in heaven, and man is subject only to unselfishness, goodness, mercy, justice, health, holiness, love. God enables all His ideas to know that only He is omnipotent and omniscient. He gives sufficient grace to meet the demands of each day in thoughtful, loving ways. He causes us to forgive, even when others indulge mortal mind's suggestions, because we ourselves need forgiveness for any

temporary lapses in our patience or judgment. We must forgive mistakes, harsh words, and lack of grace, for who of us always performs perfectly in thought and deed? Who of us has not at some time been a difficult person for another to deal with?

With the ever present adorable One as our conscious, constant companion and guide, we cannot be tempted to believe anything other than the best of God's loving and loved idea, man. God's kingdom is within all, and is all there is. This is a powerful force from which to base our thought and actions. Our work is always in the Kingdom of Heaven, in our consciousness of God's ever-presence and care.

A talk to the Fern Lodge nurses — Nancy Gunnison, C.S.

In an inspiring talk to the nurses, Nancy Gunnison, C.S., shared some valuable perceptions. She reminded us that how we get along with other people reveals our own character. In Mrs. Eddy's article, "Love Your Enemies," she defines the enemy as our own creation, as "that which defiles, defaces, and dethrones the Christ-image that you should reflect." We really make ourselves angry or hurt our own feelings by how we choose to respond to what another person has said.

We set ourselves up to feel hurt and deprived because we look to other people to make us feel good. They fail us and we fail people. The obvious solution is to become like God. He doesn't have any problem with difficult people. He sees right through to the pure spiritual idea. It takes a tremendous amount of work. Edward Kimball taught early classes in the Metaphysical College. He became very ill one year after selecting the class. He thought it was because of the thoughts of those he had turned down. As he prayed, he realized it was not their thoughts but *his thought* of their thoughts that was producing the inharmony. All he needed to heal was his own thought about the harmfulness of others' thoughts. "...the mind of the individual only can produce a result upon his body." (*Christian Healing*, page 6)

Jesus said, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." There was nothing in him to respond or to react. Our consciousness is where we live, is our house. If we don't like our furniture, we can change it! There's a lot more justice in this world than we think, because we live inside our own thoughts. If our thoughts are filled with grace, humility, compassion, honesty, wisdom, goodness, generosity of spirit, integrity, strength, dedication, and resolve, then we live in heaven. Jesus' experience was tougher than any of us will have. Yet Jesus stood up to difficult people, would not let himself be used or taken over. We don't just roll over when people treat us badly. We learn from God how to have the appropriate response. Jesus suffered—every step of the way in Gethsemane he felt the backlash from people. It forced him to go up higher and have increased and exalted affections until he could forgive the crucifiers, from the cross. It enabled him to ascend. The only way out is up, to ascend.

Nancy closed her talk by reading, "He who has named the name of Christ, who has virtually accepted the divine claims of Truth and Love in divine Science, is daily departing from evil; and all the wicked endeavors of suppositional demons can never change the current of that life from steadfastly flowing on to God, its divine source," (*Mis* 19:11).

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