

IMMORTALITY

Immortality - what is it? After searching six different dictionaries and several source books, I came up with some twenty-four definitions, besides various specialized uses, all having to do with freedom from death, an endless continuity of life, and indestructibility. I think these characterize the concept of immortality pretty well.

Today let's take this concept of our immortality out of the theoretical someday status. Let's view it as an existing reality and consider its everyday relevance in our lives. Let's understand it better, and rejoice in it as an existing fact – present immortality!

Down through the ages mankind's religions have almost universally accepted the belief that upon death man attains immortality. Only Christian Science asserts man's present immortality. Our textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, states: "Life is deathless. Life is the origin and ultimate of man, never attainable through death, but gained by walking in the pathway of Truth both before and after that which is called death." This fundamental difference is one of the most important metaphysical distinctions between Christian Science and every other religion. And it is, as we shall see, absolutely basic to spiritual healing, for Mrs. Eddy frankly tells us in *Miscellany*: "You can never demonstrate spirituality until you declare yourself to be immortal and understand that you are so. Christian Science is absolute; it is neither behind the point of perfection nor advancing towards it; it is at this point and must be practiced there from. Unless you fully perceive that you are the child of God, hence perfect, you have no Principle to demonstrate and no rule for its demonstration."

Read this passage carefully every day as a continuing assignment. In doing so you will be: (1) Declaring yourself to be immortal; (2) Rejoicing that you understand this; and (3) Arguing from the “point of perfection.”

Work at it. Grow to see what she included in this statement. Be humble and disciplined enough to benefit from this jewel. Remember, it's the ability to “demonstrate spirituality” that we're talking about. In healing this is imperative!

In the textbook, our Leader tells us, “To begin rightly is to end rightly.” Are we beginning rightly in our healing work? She says it clearly: “The great spiritual fact must be brought out that man is, not shall be, perfect and immortal.” (ibid.)

So from what premise do we begin, – matter or Spirit, mortality or immortality? Stop and think – does there remain in thought the subtle residue of mortality that whispers, “Everyone has got to die sometime.” Do we go to our patients with this basic premise in consciousness? Or do we start from the foundation that man, being spiritual, is immortal and perfect this very moment, with nothing needing to be healed or restored, but only an illusion to be dispelled. Let's look at it.

When mortal mind presents its material claims of disease and discord, it does so to all mankind, it seems. Most of the world is ignorantly deceived into accepting these material sense – pictures as reality, and so openly undertakes to heal them in the only way known – materially. But almost the first thing a student of Christian Science learns is that we do not, in the practice of this Science, use material means for healing. Then gradually we come to understand something of why we don't – and how we turn to spiritual means only. This, too, is pretty generally accepted among Scientists. But there is one vitally important area where all too often we go astray. Any experienced practitioner will tell you that nine out of ten patients come to him wanting spiritual help, but to do what? To heal a matter body, a material situation. What does this reveal? It tells us that we too have been deceived by the primary error – the reality of matter! We have accepted the wrong premise: that matter is real and that man is mortal! And this, of course, is not beginning rightly. True, we

are not using material means; but we are attempting to heal matter or a mortal, just as the doctor is – except we are attempting to use spiritual, rather than material means to do it. Is this Christian Science? No, I'm afraid not. It would probably be classified as a form of mind over matter; or psychosomatic medicine Christian Science style; or at best faith healing. In Science and Health Mrs. Eddy admonishes us: "It is mental quackery to make disease a reality – to hold it as something seen and felt – and then to attempt its cure through Mind."

Consider that you are called as a practitioner on a serious case. You are, at the outset, facing the most basic decision that must be made – and it must be made correctly in order to facilitate a healing. In spite of the vividness of any sense – testimony and its claim to reality there is a choice to be made. Which premise will you accept? The premise that matter, the body, is real; that it has substance, life, and sensation, yet is temporal and destructible in nature; and that therefore it is this matter, this body, that must be restored or repaired in one way or another? Or the premise that Spirit is real and that man is totally spiritual, immortal, perfect, and indestructible now; and that therefore matter can only be totally unreal and illusory? Which premise is to be accepted at the outset of your work?

Sitting here in the calm of a hypothetical situation the choice of the spiritual premise is pretty obvious, isn't it? But, as we all know, we can often be partially or completely deceived by the mortal mind picture and find ourselves accepting the material, mortal premise.

When mortal mind gradually or abruptly presents its vivid mental image, its picture of disease or discord, to human consciousness, it always appears to be a material condition or situation. We must be, and remain, alert to the fact that its picture is a deception, a lie –not reality, as Mrs. Eddy's experience shows. Mortal mind, being an illusion, depends solely on deception for its acceptance as reality. So seeking supporting cause or evidence of its substance, its existence, it turns to heredity, conditioning, environment, physical or psychological history, lab tests, x -rays, medical so-called laws, or ignorance for such support.

In no case can we stop with denial of evil: we must go on to see that the reason for evil's nothingness is good's allness!

Another very helpful aid in beginning aright is provided in that wonderful short paragraph in our textbook, familiar to you. "The verity of Mind shows conclusively how it is that matter seems to be, but is not. Divine Science, rising above physical theories, excludes matter, resolves things into thoughts, and replaces the objects of material sense with spiritual ideas."

Let's look more closely at the reminders contained in this statement. (1) That the "verity of Mind" (the Truth) shows us "conclusively" (that is beyond question, decisively, absolutely, categorically) that matter only "seems to be, but is not." (2) That it is "Divine Science" which enables us to rise "above physical theories," to "exclude matter" and to resolve "things into thoughts" – that is, to see that everything which appears to be material is actually a thought, a mental concept. When we see this, of course, it is in the form of a thought that can be dealt with. But so long as one is dealing with things (matter), he's not even in the ball game, but still out in the parking lot! Why is this resolution of things into thought so important? First of all, when you are dealing with thought you are dealing with something that can be changed, replaced, corrected. For whoever heard of an unchangeable thought? So what does this do to the claim of incurability?

Also, it allows us to see discordant things as simply illusions, mental illusions – not as realities or as frightful material conditions. Therefore it keeps us from trying to heal what we recognize now as illusions. Have you ever thought of trying to heal the train tracks that look to you, and everyone else, like they go together in the distance? And why not? Because you have come to know that it is an illusion! We simply don't try to heal merging track or anything that we understand to be an illusion.

So the challenge is to look through the false testimony of the senses, the false mental picture presented, and recognize it to be an illusion. When we see this, then we are in the ball game! In Science and Health we read: "...matter, examined in the light of divine metaphysics, disappears."

We all know these (and hundreds of other) familiar spiritual tools, and have often used them in our healing work. But we need to be alert at the outset, at the first onslaught of mortal mind's picture, so that we begin rightly, from the spiritual premise, and do not think that we are using these spiritual truths to try to heal matter. This is the constant challenge, isn't it? It is summed up pretty well in this: We're not trying to see mortal man as the image and likeness of God. We are trying to see the image and likeness of God instead of mortal man. Doesn't that make our goal in healing clear? And that's beginning rightly!

It doesn't seem difficult for us to accept the proposal that man lives after death. That's fairly believable. History shows that man has generally accepted the prospect of this post-mortem activity, often making elaborate material or spiritual preparation for it. It's the time between birth and death that causes the concern, isn't it? For it is during this period that man generally considers himself to be mortal, destructible, vulnerable, too young or too old, too fat or too thin! Oh yes, he has some wonderful hopes or even plans about his life after he dies and thereby becomes immortal. Too many men and women put off living while they're living! Yet a fear of dying causes them to do everything conceivable to avoid the delights of immortality in the hereafter. Our textbook puts it this way: "When it is learned that disease cannot destroy life, and that mortals are not saved from sin or sickness by death, this understanding will quicken into newness of life. It will master either a desire to die or a dread of the grave, and thus destroy the great fear that besets mortal existence. "

What a change would take place if mankind could only accept, with assurance, one simple fact: that he is now spiritual and immortal.

The great challenge, of course, is to accept the promise of the Bible that man is now immortal. Christ Jesus said, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," and "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." Then what causes this age-old reluctance to accept this promise and to live as an immortal now? The human resistance to the acceptance of present immortality springs from the primary error of mortal mind, doesn't it? – the belief that life exists in matter. It claims that life starts with birth and ends in death, an in sharp contrast to the promise of immortality.

Most of us, with great sincerity, say we believe the Master's promise, "but..." – and then a kind of helplessness seems to bind us. This feeling of helplessness is expressed best, I think, in the Biblical story of the man who brought his son who had a dumb spirit to the disciples for healing. When they failed to heal him, Jesus said to the despairing father: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" And so it is with us. Help Thou our unbelief!

When the disciples later asked Jesus why they could not heal the boy, he answered, "Because of your unbelief" He didn't speak of disbelief, but unbelief. Disbelief involves complete rejection. Unbelief has to do with negative acceptance. Disbelief says, "I don't believe it." Unbelief says, "I believe, but.." It's that "but" that causes the trouble. It testifies of one's materiality, which goeth forth only by prayer and fasting, by the spiritualization and dematerialization of thought. Of course, we can begin this process by seeing the importance of accomplishing it. When the enormous advantages of being presently immortal become clear and acceptable to us, we can accept our real career as expressing God.

We know, of course, that it is mortal mind's suggestion that life exists in matter, that must be challenged and destroyed by consistent prayer. But how, in our everyday busy lives, do we consistently pray, and thereby deal with this suggestion of unbelief and accept our present immortality? In Unity of Good Mrs. Eddy tells us, "that an acknowledgment of the perfection of the infinite Unseen confers a power nothing else can." Can we acknowledge the "perfection of the infinite Unseen," the perfection of God? In just so many words we can start and end our days by acknowledging our oneness with God, our perfection and immortality as the image and likeness of God. We can deny that we exist in matter, by matter, because of matter, or are dependent on matter. We can instead affirm our existence as the beloved, immortal child of the immortal God this moment! We are totally spiritual now! All day long, at every opportunity, we can reverse the erroneous suggestions that we encounter. Each error, reversed, will serve as a "waymark to the one Mind."

As you go about your work whatever it might be, rejoice that you are divinely employed; that Mind is forever imparting to you out of its infinite resources an infinite array of ideas, insights, wisdom, and guidance, and causing every event of your career to unfold in perfect order, harmony, and success. If you're a teacher rejoice that you're not a mortal, trying to teach some other unreceptive-appearing mortals; but rather, you are divinely anointed to bring the truth of being to God's immortal children who are always receptive to the riches of the one infinite Mind. See how this transforms your world, and gives it a holy purpose, a divine significance.

Consider the story of two men digging a ditch. When asked what they were doing, one replied that he was "earning money for his bed and food;" the other, that he was "building a cathedral." Though they both seemed to be in the same ditch, what different worlds they lived in!

If you're a computer programmer, monotonously engaged in churning out mountains of data for a faceless, impersonal corporation, rejoice that you are now, this moment, an immortal child of God, divinely employed in expressing the infinite variety of Mind under the direct control and inspiration of this all-knowing Mind. The product of such divine direction has to be perfectly coordinated, useful, and a blessing to everything and everyone it touches, directly or indirectly; and you, as a part of this divine unfoldment, have to be blessed as well – enjoy fulfillment, harmony, and appreciation – in ways seen and as yet unseen.

But is this approach practical? What kind of job will you be doing? Will your work be recognized and fairly rewarded? What will it do to your boredom and dissatisfaction? Will you be stuck there? Nothing, absolutely nothing, could be more practical and helpful in every one of these areas. But would any of these benefits be your targeted goal? Of course not. These blessings would come simply as unsought side effects. You couldn't stop these wonderful perks because of your divine employer's unlimited provision for His beloved children. You see, it's just that way when you're working for your loving Father. It's the best kind of nepotism!

Don't you think that there is time during your day to acknowledge and rejoice in your present immortality and to deny the illusion of material existence? It's not vain repetition, you know. It's a declaration of divine Truth and as such it carries divine impulsion. Think of this when you declare your immortality and recognize what you're doing. We read in Science and Health, "The evidence of man's immortality will become more apparent, as material beliefs are given up and the immortal facts of being are admitted."

Have you noticed Mrs. Eddy's use of the verse from Isaiah that opens the chapter "Recapitulation"? She quotes Isaiah: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." So it is in our work. Mrs. Eddy writes in Miscellany, "...declare yourself to be immortal and understand that you are so." Never underestimate the importance of the consistency implied in this verse from Isaiah, and in so many other key verses of the Bible. You're all familiar with Jesus' wonderful instruction: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." But what about the verse that precedes it and sets forth a condition to knowing this truth: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."

"If ye continue in my word"! Continuity, consistency are the condition, aren't they? – and so it is in our work. In accepting, declaring, and understanding our present immortality these are of the greatest importance, for we're dealing with the claim of unbelief, which seems to appear as our very own thinking. It isn't, but its subtlety requires a watchful consistency.

In the textbook we find in the "Scientific Translation of Immortal Mind" man defined as, individual, Perfect, eternal." Let's add to this to yet another scientific precept from this book: "The admission to one's self that man is God's own likeness sets man free to master the infinite idea. This conviction shuts the door on death, and opens it wide towards immortality." We can admit this, can't we? We don't just parrot the words that man is "God's spiritual idea, perfect and eternal, His image and likeness" and leave it there. No! We consciously, deliberately admit it, declare it, acknowledge it, – not as a lovely theory, but as an existing fact. Mrs. Eddy tells us, "This conviction shuts the door on death, and opens it wide towards

immortality.” And then she goes on, “The understanding and recognition of Spirit must finally come.” So we go purposefully on with our lives claiming, acknowledging, admitting, rejoicing that we are spiritual and continuing, deathless, immortal, – and that we understand our present immortality because our understanding derives from the divine understanding. It’s how we “pray without ceasing.”