

The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son

(Luke 15:1-32)

Each one of Jesus' parables is a masterpiece, and they are treasure-troves of Science. They show us "more clearly than we saw before, what we already have and are; and most of all, [they show] us what God is" (No.39:22-24).

They show us the real Jesus, who always "plunged beneath the material surface of things, and found the spiritual cause" (S&H 313:24-26), and therefore we must plunge beneath the surface of each parable in order to find its spiritual cause, or underlying Science. We must never be content with the first comforting impressions of the parables, but discern a deeper meaning through the penetration of Soul.

If the parable of the prodigal was merely a story to encourage someone who had gone off the rails and decided to come back, it might be helpful in a good Christian way, but if we realize the character-structure and habit of deep spiritual analysis of the man who spoke it, could *he* have meant just that? The man who spoke these parables was not just a good man; he was a supreme Scientist.

In Chapter 15 of Luke there are two short parables followed by one long one, and the basic scientific point in each of them is that there is no such thing as loss, whether it is a lost sheep, a lost coin, or a lost son. The finding is only a discovering that it was not lost, and this is a matter for great rejoicing. That point is underlined at each restoration of what appeared lost.

Jesus' parables were always aimed at bringing home the Science at the back of everything, and so here the point is not the human relief

and happiness at finding what was lost, but the proof that it was never lost or it could never have been found. It was found because it was not lost! All that was lost was the error, the ignorance, which hid the truth from view. The word "loss" cannot be found in the vocabulary of Principle, for in Principle nothing can possibly be lost, and therefore the true meaning of loss is given by Mrs Eddy when she tells us, "loss is gain" (Mis.389:17).

How often the thing we believe we have lost takes on a greater value to us than before we believed it lost, indicating that this process may be necessary to establish true values and in any case showing that the thing has special value and purpose for us.

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

The scribes and Pharisees misinterpreted Jesus' whole outlook by endeavouring to downgrade his work by making out that he was consorting with sinners. Jesus never saw it that way. He saw individuals with receptivity to the fore of their character who were willing to listen to him and who as a result of actively exercising their capacity to reverse the claims of error doubled the value of the truth

they found. And so he replied to the accusation of the scribes and the Pharisees by showing them by means of these parables the joy he received through contact with those so-called sinners who responded to his reasoning and thus were able to reach the divine fact behind that reasoning and find their own joy.

The Science at the back of these parables is that what we honestly feel we have lost or lack is actually special to us or we would not have felt a sense of loss over it or felt it specially lacking. It is that specialness which is stirring our consciousness to throw out the sense of loss and realize that we have it. Mortal mind is merely reversing the very truth which spells out true wealth and happiness for us. That is why "loss is gain" (Mis.389:17), because what mortal mind says we have not we really have and it is more important to us than anything else and we have it in greater purposefulness than anything else. That is why we want it in its brilliance and feel the need of its expression. So what may seem to us a big problem is something wonderful surfacing. That which is special and unique to us is crying out to us to acknowledge it, be it, and use it.

The scientific fact is that whenever the term "loss" occurs, it is a bugle-call to realize that in that very direction is our greatest gain, and it is ours for the taking. We have only to search diligently to find it, as in the case of the sheep, or sweep out the errors and doubts, as in the case of the silver coin, and it is ours for the taking and we can thereby rise to the full stature of what we are and bring it into magnificent portrayal.

Sheep have always symbolized following the leadings of Principle. The Master said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Mrs Eddy wrote, "I will listen for Thy voice, Lest my footsteps stray; I will follow and rejoice All the rugged way" (Mis.398:1-4).

Jesus uses a man in the first parable (and a woman in the second) because the male element in thought, whether in a man or a woman, finds it hard to follow. The curse on man in the Adam-dream is that he must sweat it out on his own. So the male element wants to be egotistically creative and form its own interpretations of Principle

according to its own opinions, instead of seeing that directly reflecting the one creative Principle and following the flow of ideas which issues from that Principle is far better and brings out the true male, the full stature of manhood.

The devil, or mortal mind, may tell a man that there is something in him which will always obstruct his following of Principle. It tells him that he does not want to learn, from books or from any other individual, but only wants his own opinions. He feels he cannot take a leading from someone else and therefore stubbornly resists accepting anything that he does not believe originates in himself. He must do everything off his own bat without anyone telling him. Not being a good listener, he is not a good follower. This is his "lost sheep." But what is also clear is that the very opposite is true and that his particular strong point is following the leadings of Truth. The one sheep which appears lost always stands for the most valuable facet of our whole individual expression of being.

So many great men have gone wrong when the false male sense took charge and they refused to listen and instead pushed and forced their own way. On the other hand throughout history the greatest men have been those with tremendous creative purposefulness who learnt to accept the leadings of Principle and listened to those sent by Principle. Therefore anyone dogged by feeling unable to listen and follow should realize that he is dogged for the very reason that this ability is the finest point of his character. So his best course is to take up the challenge to his true manhood and say, "Right, I will go straight for this one lost sheep. I will not listen to the devil which says I can't listen and accept. I will know that I am a good listener and accepter. I am open to reason and revelation. I can listen and learn and I will see to it that I do. I love to take Truth from others and make it my own." His finding of the one lost sheep will cause all the other ninety-nine, such as his ability to understand and to clarify thought, to come into line for him. There will be great rejoicing as he realizes that the apparently lost sheep was never lost, but was always there to be released into activity.

Peter was a man with a quick and brilliant grasp of the spiritual,

but he had not learned to follow in complete adherence and loyalty. If he had, everything the Master did would have caused him to praise it and stick by it. He denied him because what he was doing did not seem right to him. It was because of this "lost sheep" in Peter that Jesus showed him how to find what he had mislaid. His request to him in that joyful meeting on the shore of Galilee was fashioned in a threefold manner in order to overcome forever the threefold denial which had previously possessed Peter, but it reveals that Jesus knew that Peter *had* that ability and would find his lost sheep by obeying what he was now asked. Here are his words, so lovingly shaped, so lovingly calling to Peter that later in life he became one of the great founders of Christianity as we now know it: "Feed my lambs . . . Feed my sheep . . . Feed my sheep."

To take another illustration: Mrs Eddy defines "sheep," in part, as "those who follow their leader" (S&H 594:12-13). To the student the "leader" is embodied in the teachings of the Master and Mrs Eddy. The general teachings of Christianity embrace ninety-nine per cent of goodness, but have lost that one important sheep indicated by Jesus in his words, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also" and "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." Therefore we should surely seek this lost sheep and faithfully endeavour to follow fully the teachings of both Jesus and Mrs Eddy with regard to the application of Science to the human need. By so doing we shall find for ourselves that lost sheep and experience the joy of accomplishment. But say we read in "Science and Health" some passage which rouses in us a sense of objection — such as the words "Never record ages" (S&H 246:17), or the paragraph about the washing of babies (S&H 413:12-23), which annoys some people — we have thereby lost the full one hundred per cent following of what this great leader says. This may at first seem unimportant, but we can see the dire consequences of clinging to personal opinions, instead of responding to the divine expression of requirements made by those equipped to make it, when we reflect that if mankind had simply accepted that statement of Jesus, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also," we should

now have a medicine based on Mind; without doubt this would be more influential in the purposes of good and thereby beneficial to mankind than the medicine which we do have today. "We must have faith in all the sayings of our Master, though they are not included in the teachings of the schools, and are not understood generally by our ethical instructors" (S&H 429:27-30).

We should therefore forsake all our other followings, all the other sheep, and diligently find that we *do* accept everything that both Jesus and Mrs Eddy taught or said. In correcting one apparently small shortfall we shall find that the other ninety-nine per cent following comes into its full fruition. A young man being trained to be a soldier may become fully proficient in the methods of soldiery, such as the use of arms and their deployment in battle, but if he felt that he did not agree with walking in step when on the march, that one apparently insignificant disobedience would ruin his career.

Jesus is showing that what appears lost becomes the opportunity of real gain, because we find that it is forever ours as Principle's endowment; and this recognition brings greater rejoicing than the recognition of all those other qualities (the ninety and nine) which we have, but which are not in the forefront of our unique character-expression.

So when we feel keenly what seems to us a loss or lack or inadequacy in the one thing which matters most to us, we should see that it is Principle's way of showing us that we have it fully. The reverse of error is true, and therefore we can reverse the error, seek diligently the truth which is shown us by that reversal, and see that we bring that truth into expression.

If someone comes to the point where he says, for instance, "There is no purpose left in life for me, I have lost everything I most value," let him realize that this would not seem so unless he had a *great* purpose. If that did not belong to him, he would never feel its loss. And because it is his, he can never lose it, any more than a fish can lose the ability to swim. So the right course for such an individual is to say, "I will accept the Science at the back of this and I will follow that Science and see it fulfilled in my finding of that purpose and

carrying it through.”

There can be few masters in the field of the arts, for example, who did not at some time or another in their career become convinced that they no longer had what it takes. They did not lie down under this, however, but went ahead and determinedly searched and found what animal magnetism tried to tell them they had lost. Through this process came an outstanding contribution to their fellow-men in some particular sphere.

In the second parable the “ten” of the ten silver pieces indicates, as it does throughout the Bible, practical application, as with the ten fingers. Silver is a currency, and it has exchange value and purchasing power, and so it is a symbol of man’s ability to purchase what is right and good through his spirituality and his study. If Jesus had lost this silver coin or had not recognized its importance, there would not have been a single healing. We can lose the whole purpose of our study if we do not see that it gives us purchasing power to enjoy health and harmony in immediate experience.

Peter said to the lame man who was begging at the gate Beautiful, “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” What he had was real purchasing power and he demonstrated this to the man. (See Acts 3:1-11.)

In this parable Jesus uses a woman because — again according to false education — woman has been taught to accept suffering or defeat with resignation. The curse on woman in the Adam-dream is “In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.” True womanhood (whether expressed in a man or a woman) sweeps away all such suggestions and therefore leads to the finest demonstrations. True womanhood rejoices in being subject only to Truth. That which would destroy true womanhood is the acceptance of suffering and deprivation and the unwillingness to claim all that man is entitled to in the Science of being.

The female often endures sacrifice without expectation of any reward. The lost coin is her feeling, “I love Science and I value it and know that it is wonderful, but it doesn’t work for me and I don’t

really mind." That is the devil talking, because she does mind and the true womanhood in her is not prepared to lose that silver coin. With the wealth she has built up in spiritual understanding she has the currency through which to purchase the reward of healing both for herself and others. The devil is making the suggestion of loss only because she is better able to demonstrate clearly and definitely the fruitage of her spiritual culture than someone who has not given so much time to it. She should therefore say, "I know that Science is effectual, and I am going to see that it is for me. I love to purchase with my understanding the things I want, such as health, harmony, and the demonstration of freedom, and I am not going to forego such things. I am not merely going to love Science for its spiritual value and loveliness and leave it at that, because health and harmony are its natural expression." She should rouse herself to sweep away all doubts and arguments to the contrary and thereby find that one lost coin to which she is entitled.

We should never allow any female resignation to the suggestion of our own inability or unworthiness to remain in thought, but should rise in the strength of true womanhood (that is, devotion and fidelity) to see that we can and will practise Science in its purpose of healing. We can be helped in this if we make a little demonstration to ourselves right away. If we realize, for example, that an outburst of temper has disturbed our day and possibly brought on some physical disturbance, this realization should enable us to see that we do understand where healing lies and how it is brought about, and if we understand it in that simple instance, we should accept that by devotion to the rules revealed in the simple case we must be able to make similar demonstrations in *every* direction of health and the betterment of the human condition. Mrs Eddy emphasized this point when she wrote, "My conclusions were reached by allowing the evidence of this revelation to multiply with mathematical certainty and the lesser demonstration to prove the greater, as the product of three multiplied by three, equalling nine, proves conclusively that three times three duodecillions must be nine duodecillions, — not a fraction more, not a unit less" (S&H 108:12-18). In other words, if healing is

possible to us through the correct application of the process of Christian Science in some small instance, it must be possible to us throughout the entire range of healing, and therefore we should diligently seek the lost coin on the basis that in truth we have it and need only rouse ourselves to find it.

Mrs Eddy suffered for a great many years and yet she knew it was wrong to do so. She therefore sought unremittingly for the lost coin, because she wanted the demonstration of freedom and knew it to be a legitimate desire. True womanhood liberated her from the female belief of suffering.

“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Angels are “God’s thoughts passing to man; spiritual intuitions, pure and perfect” (S&H 581:4-5), and if anyone lets ideas from Principle sweep away the arguments of mortal mind, he experiences a flood-tide of exalted thinking. In his work he has been “entertaining angels unawares,” and those same angels bring all the joy of victory.

There is more joy in the one person who by entertaining ideas from Principle cancels out and proves the unreality of suggestions of loss he has previously entertained than in someone who has not been working to obliterate such suggestions. But that joy comes to him not because of his own recognition of victory, but because the Principle-impelled ideas he has had the wisdom to entertain and which now possess his thinking are themselves filled with joy and so cause him to experience it. “In Thy presence [in the presence of ideas of Principle] is fulness of joy.”

Now comes the parable of the prodigal son: “A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.”

Mrs Eddy says that the father stands for the perfect and eternal Principle of man. The younger son indicates the more active human thought of the two sons. If an individual has what is called “guts,”

those very qualities are going to try to run him off the rails, but the "yes man" is not always the better man. The elder brother was a "yes man," but he never did anything that "yes" really means and requires.

The special point about the so-called prodigal was that he was not parochial in his outlook. He responded to the instinct of universality which, being the province of Principle, is also the province of man. But here he temporarily misinterpreted it, believing that one can radiate in experience by departing from Principle, whereas (as he learnt) the way to radiate in a universal sense is from the centre of all radiation — namely, Principle itself and ideas derived from that purely spiritual Principle. Jesus expressed this concept when he said, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father," which he continually did. So the true lesson which the prodigal learnt was that his instinct and desire were right, but that he had wrongly interpreted the way to fulfil them by thinking that he could pick up everything from Principle, take it in a bag, and go off on his own.

The sunbeam searches in all the spaces of earth and heaven, but never loses contact with its source, and indeed it would be impossible for it to do so. In the same way man can reach to all things, and rightly, provided he never loses contact with his Principle. The tendency in human nature, and especially with those who yearn for this bigger and truer sense of being, is to endeavour to break away from that Principle which gave them this instinct and which alone enables them to fulfil it. Mrs Eddy says of Jesus, "Out of the amplitude of his pure affection, he defined Love" (S&H 54:3-4). The amplitude was there and he expressed it, but the source which it defined to all men and which it never left was Love.

The younger son's understanding, as far as it went, caused him to think that there was a more attractive mode of expressing himself in a universal way than that set down by the mandate of Principle and its teachings. He tried to turn or correct the universal Science of being into a means of satiating his own egotism and earning worldly esteem. Jesus had proved for himself the impossibility of this when

he rejected the three temptations put forward to his thought as means and methods of being universal. (See Matthew 4:1-11.)

The prodigal was like a student of Christian Science who, after coming to its teachings, learning from them, and being enriched by them, decides that he can give a simpler version more attractive to the senses. Mrs Eddy referred in her 1901 Message to a critic who wrote that he looked "to see some St. Paul arise among the Christian Scientists who will interpret their ideas and principles more clearly, and apply them more rationally to human needs." She said in part in her reply that her works were the first ever published on Christian Science, "and nothing has since appeared that is correct on this subject the basis whereof cannot be traced to some of those works." She also said that she did not know of anyone as yet who had healed hopeless cases, such as she had done in one to three interviews with the patients. (See Message 1901, 27:3-21.) It is wise to remember James' words, "shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works," and apply this measuring-rod to ourselves and all others who may be legitimately expressing their views on Science.

The inclination in the human mind is to make the universality of what is purely scientific, spiritual, and Christlike into something more palatable to the human senses. This tendency has always existed and in every walk of life, and those influenced by it have often gone through a process similar to that of the prodigal. They have turned on their Alma Mater and later regretted it.

The human mind is prone to take what it has been given in Science, then discard what actually gave it and endeavour to put it another way round which contravenes the whole Principle, such as in some way making matter or evil real and necessary.

There have been many individuals in the history of Christian Science who have set out to do better than Mrs Eddy and make her discovery more tailored to human needs. It is animal magnetism which operates through them as a belief that they can improve Christian Science and that by so doing they are benefiting mankind. Before anyone criticizes such people, let him remember that it is

possible that he himself in his earnestness has sometimes wished or endeavoured to translate Christian Science into a form more attractive to himself, more indulgent to his own wishes, thus like the prodigal taking what he has learnt from the wealth of Science and going down to spend it in what from Principle's point of view is "riotous living," or a departure from its normal standards. Who has not said to himself, "*This* doesn't matter very much" or "Principle doesn't apply *here*" as he goes off in a direction which he knows to be contrary to the letter and spirit of Christian Science? Who does not do this every time he tries to twist Principle into what *he* wants it to be? If any of us contradicts ideas which belong intrinsically to Principle and endeavours to take those ideas and translate them in our own way in a direction so different from their true purpose that we go with them into a far country away from Principle, then we shall experience what the prodigal experienced: those ideas will become mere husks, devoid of true inspiration and therefore unsatisfying to man's intelligence. They may possibly just sustain us on the dogmatic path we are taking, but will certainly not yield any real reward.

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want." The areas into which the young man felt he had gone — the areas of defying the facts and methods of Principle which were yet known to him and inherent in his being — were areas where famine was bound to reign. Indulging in any departure from Principle and its established truths is sure to lead to a famine, because all sense testimony is finite, just as everything to do with Soul or spiritual sense as it operates in our immediate experience produces a feast of goodness.

We all make the mistake of departing from the high standards of Principle in some form of human living, but it is when we blatantly challenge Principle and decide to ignore its mandate that we suffer. The lesser mistakes, which are not made of our own initiative but are part of the "suffer it to be so now" of human living, do not cause a disturbance to our mentality and are grown out of as we progress Spiritward. It is the outright evasion, ignoring, or twisting of the established facts and requirements of Principle, as clearly set out for

us by the teachings of Jesus and Mrs Eddy, which leads us to where there is a famine of all joy and the barest ability to sustain existence. Even so, that is only the dream; it never happens in reality and so merely requires our awakening for it and all its claims to disappear.

“And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.” He became a slave to the standards to which he had lowered himself. A man who is not working for Principle, but for methods not founded in Principle, always works harder and with less satisfying results than the faithful follower, and so is a slave indeed. A slave has lost his own free will and is dominated by the particular phase of animal magnetism under whose influence he has allowed himself to be.

“And he [the citizen of that country] sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.” When we try to feed our thought on the husks of materiality and so-called intellectualism, we find in effect that they have no feeding quality at all — we are no better off and they have left us emptier than when we were led to think they had some quality of sustenance.

The prodigal endeavoured to feed himself on that which was impossible food for him, although it was wholesome for the level of thinking to which it belonged, symbolized here by the swine. A would-be universal thinker can find himself coming down to the level of thinking based on the evidence of the human senses to such an extent that he becomes so worried and anxious that he feels worse about the whole situation than before he tried to be universal in his outlook.

The old saying, “One man’s meat is another man’s poison” applies very much to the student progressing in Science. He will find that things of this world which satisfy and give pleasure to others, because they are at that level of thinking, are empty husks as far as he is concerned and give him no joy or sustenance in thought. If pursued, they leave him worse off than if he had left them alone and not tried to come down from levels of thinking which were native to him and from which in reality he could never depart.

The revelation that came to the prodigal was that he just did not

belong at the level where he now found himself. He saw that he had made a mistake in his interpretation of the instinct of universality, and he was not going to hold on to it. That is a wise and healthy outlook for anyone to arrive at, for we can all make mistakes, but they can be turned to true benefit by our realization that we are not at home there and by our quickness in returning to where we already know we are. This, then, is not returning, but finding out where we have always been, the plane of thinking from which we can never depart.

It is the Mind of Science, which makes us and controls us, which causes us to see the emptiness of material thinking and methods and to recognize more strongly the attractiveness of Principle's ways and Principle's world. Hence our apparent return is only the revelation of where we really are and have to be and have always been.

"And when he came to himself [recognized that he had never really left home], he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" He realized that those who are not so foolish as to indulge in means and methods unknown to Principle, but remain in service to Principle, always have plenty to feed their thought and an abundance of inspiration.

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." He no longer wanted merely a privileged position, but wanted to serve Principle in Principle's way.

"And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Often when *we* feel we are "yet a great way off" from "homing" with Principle, Principle is on its way to "homing" with us in the sense that humility, in losing self, has made way for Principle to be expressed in newness of spiritual understanding.

Jesus is showing here the difference between divine Principle and all other principles, which are illustrations to us of that one and only

Principle, but are not in themselves alive or creative and do not embrace the whole of being. We are told that the father ran to meet his son. It would appear that Jesus is bringing out that God does come to man whenever man turns to God and that we should expect this to happen, as he himself did. He had a personal Father in the right sense of Person — “the infinite scientific sense” (Message 1901, 6:22) — and he expected that Father to care for him. Throughout the whole span of his teaching it is unmistakable that Jesus was conscious of God as Father and of himself as His son. It is obvious that he clearly understood that this Father operated in a divine way but with the same love and care that a human father would have for his son. Where could the love and care felt by a human parent originate except in the divine Father-Mother? It is wise to keep the same attitude of mind towards our heavenly Parent as the Master did, for otherwise in the necessary recognition that we have to play our part by learning the requirements of Principle and obeying them we fall into a state of thinking that the divine Principle is as cold and distant as any lesser principle of a subject or science. If we remind ourselves of the conviction held by both Jesus and Mrs Eddy as to the impersonal presence of an ever-loving Parent, we shall receive naturally the blessings which flow from such a conviction. This will in no way lessen our appreciation of the fact that to be a son to such a Father we need to pay continual attention to the requirements of such a son and obey them in our actions and even more in our realization of what this sonship means.

“And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” This was actually his recognition of his foolishness in challenging Principle with regard to his own perfection. There is no greater sin than the sin against the Holy Ghost, against the establishment and development in the individual of his own expression of Life, Truth, and Love. (See S&H 588:7-8.) This expression is forever going on and therefore to endeavour to avoid it is to sin against heaven and against the Principle which fathers us and fathers that whole expression in us. Such an attitude causes us to feel that we are no more worthy to

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be the son of Principle. But as Jesus said of all such thinking, it is "a liar, and the father of it," and we should never indulge one lie unless we want it to breed a family of lies hiding the established truth about us which cannot actually be shaken or moved.

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

The son had merely wanted to serve Principle for its own sake, but it is true that if you become the servant of Principle, you will find yourself its son; you will discover for yourself that no sense of servitude is involved, but only the greatest joy and sense of dominion.

The prodigal had dissipated the wealth of Science by playing with it for personal ends and taking it down to the levels of sensual living where it becomes poverty-stricken. But any man who tries to misuse Science in this way comes to the point where he sees he has been led astray. He wakes up to its true value and begins to serve it, to practise what Principle requires of him. The moment he does this, Principle endows him not with servitude, but with the sonship which has always been his to enjoy.

When the father set the standard of rejoicing because, as he said, his son had been dead and was alive again, he meant that his son had not been alive to the truth of his being, but now had wakened to that truth and found himself in consciousness and experience where actually he had always been. Sin is an illusion, not something that has happened or is happening. If it were a fact, we could never get out of it. Therefore the happy attitude is symbolized here in the rejoicing of the father and in the son finding himself clothed with the garment of his true self.

"The relations of God and man, divine Principle and idea, are indestructible in Science; and Science knows no lapse from nor return to harmony, but holds the divine order or spiritual law, in which God and all that He creates are perfect and eternal, to have remained unchanged in its eternal history" (S&H 470:32-5). That enshrines

the truth of this parable. It is a truth we should hold very much in consciousness if we wish to reverse the claims of the senses that we have fallen from a position which to us was nearer to goodness than our present state, or have departed from a standard to which we now long to return. That longing and the activity towards fulfilling it show that in effect we never left it.

It is not a blind statement of Christianity that man has never departed from perfection, but a fact of Science. A fallen man is impossible to Principle and in Science. Had man once departed from perfection, he could never return to it, any more than the adult could return to the mentality of childhood, the butterfly return to the chrysalis, or the oak to the acorn. No one who has seen that $2+2=4$ can return to thinking that $2+2=5$. Once you have learnt to ride a bicycle, it is hard to fall off. There is no return to a position truly left, therefore the instinct of man towards perfection proves he has never left it, and that is the Science at the back of this parable. This scientific fact should be borne in mind against all arguments to the contrary — arguments which are not scientific and therefore not true. So the return of the prodigal spells out one fact — that he had never left. He woke up to where he really was and had always been.

We may think we have left perfection, but what we sometimes think has happened has no bearing at all on the facts of our being and what Principle is expressing through us. However, if we think we have left a certain level of consciousness and then we find that we never really left, that finding gives us greater joy than if we had not believed we left.

As with all Jesus' illustrations there is the element of comfort, and here in this parable the comfort lies in realizing that more often than not it is only after we have left home (either through a difference of opinion or through some necessity) that we truly seek to return to it and we appreciate its real value. The process of departing and returning, although unnecessary, is nevertheless often requisite to human thought in order to establish true values more permanently than would otherwise be the case. In this manner men learn very surely that Principle is Love. That is why homing is one of the loveliest

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experiences a man can have and why we should allow no sorrow or self-condemnation to accompany our returning, but let our whole thought be focused on the joy of this returning and what we are returning to — the truth which has always been true of us.

As humans we value everything by contrast and so the prodigal's joy in finding his true self was increased in measure and reality by the very depth of the shadows he had now thrown aside. To someone who emerges from a dark tunnel the light is radiantly more beautiful than if (like the elder son) he has stayed in that irradiance without any appreciation and even with a grumble that it is too bright for him.

In responding to the Principle which is universal, the prodigal had merely misinterpreted universality. He had wanted to get out of the parochial home circle, but he had wrongly interpreted the whole meaning of universality by thinking of it as something which can be achieved on a material basis, as when people feel they can help humanity while still believing in the reality of matter. On that basis they may find it initially giving egotistical gratification, but soon it yields them only husks. They find nothing but problems and a dimming of their own spiritual sonship, which becomes confused and weakened. Man has to find universality in order to find happiness, but he cannot find it through that which is finite and small in its very nature. By this discovery the prodigal was awakened to the purely spiritual Principle of universality whence to derive all his ideas and to direct his expression of himself. This Principle gave him the ring, symbolizing the consummation of his marriage to Principle and *its* ways. The fatted calf represented the unlimited spiritual rejoicing which comes to any man who finds and feels his true selfhood and realizes what truly satisfies it in those expanding avenues of thought and expression which are special to him.

Looked at rightly, Jesus' concept of the prodigal was that he was not a repentant mortal but an individual who had discovered the key to progress.

"Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said

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unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

The elder son represents that type of thought which stays in Science, but does not value it and does not compare it with anything and therefore becomes static, until it is roused in envy of those who through experience have a higher revelation and a greater value made known to them. The rebuke of Principle to the elder son was along the lines which tried to wake him to the *value* of spirituality. The elder son never did anything to broaden his outlook, whether right or wrong. Jesus loved the Mary Magdalenes and the tax-gatherers because they *did* something and therefore woke up more quickly to the error of their ways than someone who lives an apparently blameless life. An attitude of self-righteousness is a narrow cell, and you never have a feast in that cell. “Self-love is more opaque than a solid body” (S&H 242:15), therefore if you are enclosed in self-love, you cannot see what is really going on or what there is to rejoice about. With Principle present there is always a feast prepared for yourself and your friends and you are right there in any rejoicing that is going on.

The fault in the elder son was that he was not responding to the breadth of thinking and cognizance which is the privilege and necessity of manhood. “Universal Love is the divine way in Christian Science” (S&H 266:18-19) and to stay too safely in the sanctimonious spheres of our own self and its interpretations can produce the sort of envy and disturbance which came to the elder son. But the father’s reply uncovered the demand on that son and also the fact that he

had the means of fulfilling it, for it was merely lying dormant, ready to be called into being or found as never lost. The father, or divine Principle, said (and says to all men), "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." That term "all" has a universal sweep to it which can settle the restlessness of any man as he feels the necessity to respond to the fact that he is a universal being as the expression of universal Mind.

The parable has this great message for us all — that we should watch diligently that we do not go into a "far country" of personal opinions. The farthest thing from Principle is personal sense, and it is personal sense which makes any of us take the understanding of Science given us by Principle and interpret it with opinions based on personal judgments and theories which are foreign to the nature of that very Principle. Because these have deviated from Principle and are of our own making, they soon become nothing more than "theoretic husks" (Mis.369:22), empty of sustaining quality. But finally all this leads us to recognize our own departure from Principle. When we return with only one desire — to be a servant to Principle — we find ourselves properly robed with a true personality, or expression of individual character.

If we are alert to the danger of egotism overtaking an active mentality, we shall search our thinking to see if it conforms to the rules impelled by Principle and given us in the teachings of Christian Science. Mrs Eddy was emphatic about the need for this. She says, for instance, "Strict adherence to the divine Principle and rules of the scientific method has secured the only success of the students of Christian Science" (S&H 456:5-7). She continually warns of the dangers of being led along a by-path which in some way deflects us from the mandate of Principle — the allness of Spirit and the nothingness of matter. A lively mentality can go off into a "far country" and try to feed itself on theories which allow an infiltration of elements foreign to the dynamic requirements of Principle, but because it is active it will be quick to admit the wrong course and return to Principle with a truer vigour and devotion than when it left.

There is no need to be disheartened when we acknowledge our

departure from Principle, but only a need for a quicker and more certain return to Principle to guide us in all our conclusions. If the "greatest wrong is but a supposititious opposite of the highest right" (S&H 368:1-2), we should never worry about our wrongs, but be concerned to find the highest right; and the highest right for anyone is when he is in full accord with and governed completely by Principle in all his thinking, in all his statements, in all his endeavours.

All three parables bring home the great lesson that there is no loss and that rejoicing comes as we awake to be satisfied with what we already have and are. "Mortals may climb the smooth glaciers, leap the dark fissures, scale the treacherous ice, and stand on the summit of Mont Blanc; but they can never turn back what Deity knoweth, nor escape from identification with what dwelleth in the eternal Mind" (Un.64:15-19).

The encouraging aspect of all three parables is that it was the amount of the positive which the individual expressed in each case which caused him to be aware of the slight shortfall from perfection and to alert himself to make good at once the apparent loss.

A golfer who is a ninety-nine per cent exponent of the principles of golf through his following of those principles becomes very much aware of where he has fallen below standard in some small point in his play. He determinedly seeks that "lost sheep" and causes himself to come into line on that specific point. The elimination of the one small error gives him special joy. A poor golfer would not even be conscious of the imperfection. Keen sportsmen and artists practise to eliminate any small fault in their performance which has become clear to them. They do not do it with any sense of condemnation, moroseness, or dejection, because they are conscious that they have the other ninety-nine sheep. We have all observed this, but we may not have realized that the same thing applies to Life and its demonstration. Jesus is pointing out for us that we feel a loss because of the immense amount (the ninety-nine per cent) of perfection expressed. The three parables underline that it is because we *are* perfect that any slight divergence from that perfection becomes very apparent and very important to put right. It is because of man's actual full comple-

ment of perfection that he feels any loss so vividly; but this also ensures that he can set things right at once with specific attention to whatever needs it. If you lose one sheep, you do not delay, but seek it at once, and then your flock is once more complete.

In the parable the man left the ninety-nine sheep "in the wilderness" while he sought the missing one, and it is a matter of experience that we are in "loneliness; doubt; darkness" whenever we find some apparently little error spoiling the whole picture for us. We feel the loss of harmony and happiness when we are harbouring the least little disturbance, dislike, regret, etc., just as the malfunctioning of one little nut or valve can stop the smooth running of a car, or the bad performance of one player in an orchestra can ruin the whole effect. If we regarded this rightly, we should see it not so much as a stringent demand as a sign of the wonder of perfection. Perfection is the purpose of Principle, and nothing less. Even the slightest flaw shows us that perfection has no flaw. But as soon as we recognize this, the other side of the definition of "wilderness" comes into play, for we are led to "spontaneity of thought and idea" and into the vestibule through which we enter the realm of perfection. (See S&H 597:16-19.) That is where the real rejoicing comes in — not just at the recovery of the one lost thing, but at experiencing the wonder of perfection.

Very few of us realize the profound simplicity of the Master's command, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" or of the statement in "Science and Health" that "perfect Principle and idea, — perfect God and perfect man," — must be "the basis of thought and demonstration" (259:12-14). It is not good enough to have the "ninety-nine" but not the "hundred."

The case of the woman and the one lost coin out of ten illustrates that it is the strength of true womanhood already present in us which causes us to search diligently for the shortfall in acceptance of perfection and gives the ability to bring that search to a fruitful conclusion.

Again, it was the riches of the young son which made him quickly aware that he had wasted them and also made him determined not to

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lower his standard and remain eating the husks of materiality. Had he not had the riches and known their value and also their source (his father), he would not have roused himself. This should encourage the individual when he finds a shortfall in some part of his expression of Principle, for how much he feels that loss defines for him the much larger wealth he has through reflecting the qualities of Principle. In this manner the loss can at once result in a rejoicing of gain and (as with that golfer) a tremendous rejoicing when he has overcome the small point of deficiency.

We should recognize too that Jesus is showing us, as Mrs Eddy puts it, that "the superabundance of being is on the side of God, good" (S&H 201:11-12). It is the preponderance of good in ourselves which can cause us to recognize and correct any shortfall. Therefore there is no place for depression, but a call for rejoicing, first of all in the amount of the perfection given us by Principle and secondly that we can utilize this to come into the full expression which Principle asks. The call upon us is only to demonstrate that nothing has been lost. It is all there to be made manifest, and must be made so. We have the one hundred per cent and have but to demonstrate that we have.

The man must have counted the sheep to find that one was missing, the same with the woman with the coins, and it was the awareness of the naturalness and attractiveness of good which caused the prodigal to see his departure from it. When therefore we take stock of our goodness — for instance, how much we love another or love our family — we may become aware of a lost sheep which often mars that love, such as the expression of impatience at apparent slowness. If then we realize the ninety-nine per cent of love, we shall more easily see to it that we bring into play that one quality of patience which is an important factor in our affection. If in all honesty we would only admit how wonderful we are as the expression of Principle, the showing up of a small shortfall will only awaken the expression more brilliantly of the truth which the recognition of that shortfall brings to light. Rejoice in the ninety-nine sheep, the nine coins, and the naturalness of the home of Science and when as a

result a small deficiency is uncovered, our rejoicing in what we are as Principle's expression will quickly find that apparent lost sheep, lost coin, or lost home of Science and will find it more valuable, more real, and more "us" than ever before. It is wise to count the sheep, the coins, the naturalness of Science as our home, and then how wise to enhance the activity of any little expression of character where a shortcoming becomes apparent through that very counting.

In this human experience the recognition that we have fallen short in character-expression "according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount" — that is, according to the standard of Principle as revealed by Science — is necessary, but it is even more necessary to realize that of the one hundred sheep and the ten coins only a small percentage made up the claim of a loss and so our awareness of a shortfall really constitutes the recognition of some quality so special to us that it is as if error, recognizing this, tries to frustrate us in our expression of it. It should be encouraging that Mrs Eddy wrote in a letter to Calvin C. Hill, "Goodness such as yours is a sure pre-text of success in all struggles to be 'better.' If a single sin remains — and who is destitute of all sin — be of good cheer, for the victory over it is a foregone conclusion" ("We Knew Mary Baker Eddy," Third Series, page 25). How small one sheep is against a hundred, and yet if we believe it to be lost, how precious is the finding that this was never so and that all that has happened is the movement of Principle in us to enhance its value and enhance also our natural ability to express it.