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## Stepparenting: A Spiritual Perspective By Elise L. Moore

The challenges of being a stepparent can spur us to spiritualize the concepts of family and home. Conventional parenting techniques and other efforts to mold a harmonious family unit from fragmented parts may often be inadequate. Different life styles, habits, expectations, parental loyalties, even varying religious beliefs, can pose difficulties. Sometimes jealousy, envy, bitterness, revenge, frustrate attempts to progress beyond the past.

But if stepfamilies have one characteristic in common, it is the yearning of each member to feel the presence of a constant, unchangeable, unshakable source of love. This comes only from a spiritual approach. Its starting point is “Our Father which art in heaven”<sup>1</sup>-the dear Parent of us all. Being divine, all good, God is the perfect Parent. There is no evil or incompleteness in God. He is both patient Father and wise Mother. And God, divine Love, governs all masterfully and tenderly.

In Science and Health Mrs. Eddy gives a definition of God, which helped me see the present activity of God as the one true Parent. It reads in part: “God. The great I AM; the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-acting, all-wise, all-loving, and eternal...”<sup>2</sup> What child wouldn't be thrilled to have such a wonderful Parent!

Realizing God as Father-Mother also relieves the parent of a burdened sense of responsibility in raising children. Through Christ, the true idea of Love, God “raises” each of us by uplifting our thoughts and motives above limitations into the realization of our true selfhood as the spiritual image and likeness of God.

Children yearn to be good and to be accepted as good. When we hold to the spiritual view of children as possessing such divinely derived qualities as innocence, kindness, joyfulness, intelligence, patience, they respond by manifesting more of their spiritual nature, their inherent goodness.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:9

<sup>2</sup> Science and Health p. 587

We express more of the parenting qualities of God as we raise our view of children and see them clearly as God's beloved offspring. Then we can patiently and trustingly nurture this higher nature in ourselves and others until the seedlings of spiritual awakening take root and blossom in character.

Coincident with an uplifted view of God as Parent is a spiritual conception of home. God has already provided our true home. It is the kingdom of heaven, harmony. As Christ Jesus indicated in the Lord's Prayer, heaven is where our Father, God, dwells. Where else could His creation, man, live but in the presence of God?

As we abide in the conscious awareness of God's presence and power, our family home becomes a holy place filled with serenity, joy, and inspiration. We realize that it is not our task to create peace or willfully to force ourselves or others into a preconceived notion of how family should be. Our struggle to "make" a happy home yields to a realization that true home already includes harmony. We find that we truly already belong to God's harmonious household. And this household gently enfolds all as family members.

When stepchildren or relatives visit, we can expand our concept of home by seeing those who enter as the guests of God. And God will provide for all the individual needs of His guests. The Psalmist says: "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God? Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures."<sup>3</sup> We express this abundant outpouring of good as we faithfully rely on God's ideas for inspiration-whether to harmonize meal planning and family activities or to set rules and encourage sharing of chores.

If fear or friction or difficult personalities threaten, our growing spiritual sense of home as God's refuge will shelter us. The alert stepparent recognizes these challenges as having their source in the carnal mind-that which denies God's parenthood. It would frustrate the unfolding spiritual conception of home and family.

Because God is indivisible, the infinite One, there has never been estrangement in God's kingdom. Father-Mother God cannot separate, divorce, or die. Father-God and Mother-God do not split up. Likewise, man cannot be divorced from God,

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<sup>3</sup> Psalms 36:7, 8

separated from his origin, divine Life, or from God's omnipotent love and care. Therefore, we can and must consecrate our entire affection to loving, appreciating, and obeying our heavenly Father-Mother.

Christ Jesus declared that the first, great commandment is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."<sup>4</sup> The text of this commandment as given in Deuteronomy continues, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."<sup>5</sup>

Awakening to the vital importance of placing God first in our affection, and embracing spouse, family, or others in this love, soften and remove overzealous, domineering, or selfish tendencies. Loving with all one's soul leaves no room for subtle jealousies, possessiveness, or fear of rejection. When one's thoughts are devoted to praising God (acknowledging His perfection), disruptions or eruptions increasingly fail to penetrate one's God-derived spiritual poise.

We demonstrate heaven as home when we obey the second "great" commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."<sup>6</sup> Surely fulfillment of such universal and unconditional love is heaven on earth!

The "self" we need to love in ourselves and others is the spiritual image and likeness of God, filled with the fruits of the Spirit-love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness. Expressing spiritual qualities in ourselves frees us to affirm the spiritual identity of all God's children.

The sincere application of absolute spiritual truths does not, however, mean that we ignore ill will, temper tantrums, or unpleasantness of any sort. A Christian practicing God's laws is not a doormat submitting helplessly or hopelessly to the abuses or emotional outbursts of another. Because God is supreme over all, we have a basis for facing evil fearlessly. We insist on man's spiritual innocence and know the powerlessness of the carnal mind to upset God or His reflection, man. The supremacy of God, good, is inescapable and inevitable.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 22:37

<sup>5</sup> Deut. 6:6, 7

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 22:39

We do need to resist the temptation to be self-righteous-convicted of our own rightness in contrast, perhaps, with the approaches used by a former spouse. We should strive to express true righteousness, acting in accord with the divine law of loving all our neighbors as ourselves.

I have found that the spiritual approach to family relationships brings immediate solutions to the daily challenges of a stepparent. One such opportunity arose one Sunday morning when my husband went early to our branch Church of Christ, Scientist. We all agreed his two visiting children would leave at the regular time with me. As the time to leave approached, I discovered one youngster had locked himself in the bathroom and refused to come out. From behind the door came defiant silence, then a stream of angry accusations crowned with the ultimate barb, "You're not my mother! I'm not going to Sunday school, and you can't make me!"

I knew our mutual Parent was present with us both, that God was actually this boy's Mother and Father, and that as I yielded to His control, He would resolve this situation harmoniously. Before I could say much, the door flew open and there stood a three-foot-high Viking ready to do battle.

As I thought of him as the son of God, innocent, loving, and intelligent, I couldn't help smiling. The defiance just wasn't any part of his Godlike nature. I affirmed God's presence, silently, and knew that God speaks directly to His children. I didn't need to say anything or find some magic words to remove resistance. God communicates through the heart and thoughts, and He was doing so at that very moment. I felt the atmosphere of Love surrounding us.

Within moments he broke the silence and with no manipulative persuasion or cajoling on my part agreed to join us for church. When we arrived (on time), he proceeded to attend Sunday school. That was the end of the emotional outbursts.

God, divine Love, never fails, gives up, or ceases to care for His offspring. Once our natural capacity to understand God as infinite Love is awakened and actively expressed in daily living, we grow to depend on God for affection, guidance, wisdom. Our approach to family relations becomes inspired and peacefully confident.