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The Appeal of Spiritualism

By Elise L. Moore

In Nashville, Tennessee, 50 people gather in an upper room of a metaphysical bookstore to hear messages from departed loved ones. In Tucson, the United Spiritualist Church of Mankind advertises "Holy Spirit communication." In a suburb of Boston, the First Spiritual Temple fills with believers in spirit communication. Across the United States, there's a renaissance of interest in spiritualism, or communication from the dead.

Current interest is most likely attributable to Americans' growing search for spirituality outside of mainstream religion. Over the decades, however, attraction to spiritualism has revived after periods of tragedy. It heightened during the post-Civil War era, after each World War, and during the civil rights/Vietnam era, for example. When people are looking for comfort, it's definitely comforting to have proof that a loved one is alive and well. It's also reassuring for people to hear advice and counsel from those they have loved and respected, and who have, one might assume, gained increased wisdom since their passing. Such "proof" also gives a measure of tangibility to the Christian teaching that there is life after death.

Interest in spiritualism isn't surprising, then, since the hope, comfort, and reassurance of "hearing" messages from the departed ring a responsive chord with the religious and non-religious alike. For some, communicating with those who've passed over is a tangible experience. A number of individuals all over the world believe that they have seen departed relatives or other spirits, angels, or ghosts.

Living during a period of heightened interest in spiritualism, Mary Baker Eddy discussed it, and the phenomena of apparitions, in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. Although not a believer in spiritualism, she included an entire chapter on the subject—"Christian Science versus Spiritualism"—in which she explains how some people are able to read another's thoughts after that person has passed on.

After someone has departed (died), seeing an image of or hearing thought from that person could make it seem as though he or she had returned. But a departed person need not be present in order for his or her thoughts or image to be discerned. The way that person looked and acted remains as a strong impression in the mental atmosphere of thought. In much the same way, an author's thoughts remain to be discerned by someone reading his or her book decades after its publication.

After my dad passed on, I yearned to be able to talk with him and hear his views which I had learned to appreciate deeply. No one else was quite like him, and no one could take his place. Quite simply, I missed him. I don't think it's so unusual when you've loved someone to want to feel that person's presence and continue a happy relationship. What I didn't realize at first was that, contrary to the way it may seem, it's not death that obstructs communication with someone. Rather, it's a limited view of God as Life—and of each individual as united in the expression of that one Life—that blocks communication.

It was natural for me to turn to God and to pray for comfort and reassurance after my dad's passing. I prayed to understand better that life is eternal and that God is man's Life. I reasoned that since God is eternal and cannot die, His creation (including my dad) is also eternal and cannot die. But I wanted more than a theological promise that life continues after death. I wanted to feel connected to my dad. So I turned wholeheartedly to the allness of God that transcends time and space, that lives and acts untouched by matter and its limitations, including death. As I did this, I felt my dad's presence assuring me that he was fine. It was as if he were there in the room with me. This greatly comforted me and sustained me for a long time. Then I realized that I could feel united with my dad consistently by glimpsing the spiritual reality that he had never died and that we (and everyone) are permanently united in God. In short, the closer I felt to God, the closer I felt to my dad.

It's spiritual consciousness that maintains the awareness of life unlimited by matter. *Science and Health* explains it this way: "One moment of divine consciousness, or the spiritual understanding of Life and Love, is a foretaste of eternity. This exalted view, obtained and retained when the Science of being is understood, would bridge over with life discerned spiritually the interval of death, and man would be in the full consciousness of his

immortality and eternal harmony, where sin, sickness, and death are unknown.”¹ For me, this bridge of spiritual understanding opened the way for a new view of life as eternal. Instead of feeling separated from my dad by death, I'd been able to glimpse divine Life uniting us.

Something Mrs. Eddy wrote when one of her students passed on helped me with this. She said: "My beloved Edward A. Kimball . . . is here now as veritably as when he visited me a year ago. If we would awaken to this recognition, we should see him here and realize that he never died; thus demonstrating the fundamental truth of Christian Science." ² Spiritualism would accept death and then explain a person's reappearance, whereas Christian Science helped me to understand in some degree that Life is undying and therefore that man has never departed.

But feeling united with my dad didn't mean that I was trying to turn to him for advice as a spirit guide. God guides His creation directly. His angel messages, or thoughts, don't require a material intermediary to be heard or felt. God is the source of wisdom, and He communicates individually with His sons and daughters. If we feel, at times, that God is far off and that we aren't hearing His guidance, it's helpful to remember that each one of us is capable and worthy of hearing God's guidance directly. Putting aside willfulness, as well as listening with a humble heart, quiets those doubts and fears. Then we're more receptive to divine inspiration and feel its influence.

Eternal life, direct communion with God, and our inseparability from others in God are profoundly uplifting and comforting concepts. Exploring them through spiritual study and prayer helps remove the web of mystery woven around death and reveal the tangible presence of Life.

¹*Science and Health*, p. 598.

² *The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany*, p. 297.