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Pulling back the curtain on evil

By Elise L. Moore

Most Americans have seen the movie classic *The Wizard of Oz*. Children are charmed as Dorothy, together with the cowardly lion, the tin man, and the scarecrow, travel to Oz to see the wizard. Who hasn't cheered when the wicked witch is doused with water and melts away into nothing?

The wizard, at first so foreboding and mysterious, turns out to be a harmless old man pulling levers, using special effects. After Toto, the dog, exposes the man's charade by pulling at a curtain, the whole mystery evaporates. The man kindly tells Dorothy that she's always had the ability to do what she wants to do—go home to Kansas. Three clicks of the shoes. Repeat, "There's no place like home," and Dorothy wakes up safe in her bed.

While director Victor Fleming's intent probably wasn't theological, I've found the imagery of *The Wizard of Oz* helpful in explaining a term used in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*: animal magnetism.

The term was first coined in mid-15th-century Europe to describe the effects we currently associate with hypnotism. "Animal magnetism" was in vogue during the 19th century, when Mary Baker Eddy was writing *Science and Health*. The term was not so mysterious then as it may be now. Many readers of that time were no doubt familiar with claims that animal magnetism could solve problems or even heal. Mrs. Eddy found it necessary to differentiate between Christian Science—her system of healing through the divine Mind, or God—and the manipulations of the human mind. *Science and Health* includes a short seven-page chapter titled "Animal Magnetism Unmasked," which addresses this issue. The remainder of the book mentions animal magnetism only 14 times—as an aid in defining evil or as exposing mind control and hypnotism as undesirable methods for helping humanity. Mrs. Eddy's purpose in discussing animal magnetism was to show how to overcome evil. How to become fearless in the face of adversity and be effective healers. Her purpose was not to frighten the reader.

The term *animal magnetism* takes the personality out of evil. Instead of thinking that we are facing an evil person, it gives us a framework for seeing evil as a negative influence or hypnotic pull of thought. Some Biblical authors impersonalized evil similarly by calling it "darkness." St. Paul wrote, in the King James Version of the Bible, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). *The Twentieth Century New Testament* amplifies the impersonal nature of evil: "For ours is no struggle against enemies of flesh and blood but against all the various powers of evil that hold sway in the darkness around us, against the spirits of wickedness on high."

Animal magnetism is impersonal error—a belief that deviates from what is correct—attempting to control humanity. This deceptive influence is an error of thought. According to *Science and Health*, "It is either ignorant or malicious" (p. 103).

"Ignorant" animal magnetism has to do with believing that God is not the only power of existence. Ignorant animal magnetism is the belief in a power other than God. Ignorance wants to be helpful, but not understanding divine power, it sends the seeker down a yellow brick road looking for answers.

"Malicious" animal magnetism is the overt suggestion that evil and violence are more powerful than God. Like the wicked witch, malicious animal magnetism threatens, obstructs, and tries to destroy goodness.

But neither ignorant nor malicious animal magnetism can control or harm us when we have a firm conviction of divine power—the power of God, who is good.

Understanding the nature of God and His Christ neutralizes and removes any form of animal magnetism from our thoughts and lives. Being supremely good and the only eternal power, God rightly asserts His/Her absolute control over any lesser claims. The Christ communicates God's supremacy to consciousness. Turning toward the spiritual, toward the supremacy and power of Love, frees us from ignorance and fear—the mesmeric effects of evil.

We can expose ignorant animal magnetism by pulling back the curtain. In the movie, when Dorothy and her friends saw the great Oz, they were intimidated by the big voice and special effects. When Toto pulled back the curtain, the illusion was revealed and Dorothy was no longer afraid. Animal magnetism was seen to

be a hoax. Like Dorothy, we can stop being impressed, and realize that God's solution to our difficulty has been available all along. As we turn to divine Mind, inspiration does come, and reveals the ideas we need.

It takes courage to think this way. We tend to accept that life, truth, and intelligence are entirely physical, and that humankind is destined to be sinful, sick, and ultimately to die. The spiritual dimension of life changes this. We stop wasting time wandering down a yellow brick road and start looking for answers in God.

One time I had a severe case of sun poisoning on my back. The pain was amazing. I asked my husband to put some lotion on it. As he did, I had a flash of inspiration that this pain was the result of ignorant animal magnetism. That's really what I thought, as I held onto a wall for support. I realized it was animal magnetism, riveting my attention to pain. Not only was I accepting it, but I was racing desperately down a metaphorical yellow brick road, seeking a solution in the wrong direction. What I needed to do was draw back the curtain and expose the whole situation as a liar.

So I radically turned away from the pain. I labeled it a lie, a fraud, and a charlatan. Then I filled my thought with absolute truths I knew about God—about His immediate power and presence. And that my identity was untouched. That I was the image of Spirit. This was the Christ at work in my consciousness.

After maybe 48 minutes, I went to sleep for the rest of the night. The next morning I woke permanently free from pain. The remaining physical evidence of sun poisoning disappeared within a day or so. Here was an example of what silencing ignorant animal magnetism can do—bring relief from pain and physical healing.

But what about malicious animal magnetism—the belief that evil is as real as good and more powerful. Sometimes it's evil disguised as good. Or it involves excusing evil methods, such as flying a plane into a building, by saying it's for a holy purpose. Or it's seen as evil threatening harm and intimidating people into apathy and silence. But animal magnetism is never a person, even when it looks that way.

Malicious animal magnetism is the thought, the suggestion that influences a person to act violently. People harboring intense feelings of envy, frustrated desire, and hopelessness seem especially susceptible to the influence of malicious animal

magnetism. So are those obsessed with personal power. But malice cannot take root in human consciousness and cannot take form in evil deeds when a strong faith in good and a commitment to unselfish righteousness persistently oppose it.

Mary Baker Eddy was aware of each individual's ability to defend consciousness against malicious animal magnetism. She wrote, "I suggest as a motto for every Christian Scientist,—a living and life-giving spiritual shield against the powers of darkness,—'Great not like Caesar, stained with blood, / But only great as I am good.' " (*Message to The Mother Church for 1902, p. 14*) Doing what is good and acknowledging God as the ultimate power is an effective spiritual shield against evil.

While I was working as a chaplain at a homeless agency, I met a young man whose life had been transformed by the ability of other people to wisely resist malicious animal magnetism. He had been raised to believe that no one mattered except himself and his immediate family. This pride and selfishness translated into a callous disregard for strangers. Juvenile delinquency rapidly escalated into violent crime.

While he was in prison, several ministers persisted in preaching that God is Love. They tried to do good toward him. Finally this kindness broke through the mesmerism of malicious animal magnetism. With heartfelt sincerity, he said his violent impulses disappeared when he began to accept God as Love.

As you search the Scriptures, you'll see how for many Bible characters, their life battle was really about overcoming ignorant or evil influences. Their success—or failure—depended on whether they listened to God and His message, or whether they followed the suggestions of the human mind.

We are responsible for challenging ignorant and malicious influences in our consciousness. This takes courage and persistence. And just as Dorothy had friends to help her along the way, so God gives us wisdom, confidence in good, and a precious awareness of His/Her love for us. We can "wake up" from ignorance or evil in any form—sickness, fear, poverty, anger. We can realize that health, righteousness, and a productive life are what God gives. Being alert to challenging animal magnetism will help us see proof of this, become more effective healers, and contribute to a better world.

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