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The immigrant's spiritual journey home

By Elise L. Moore

She wasn't the typical immigrant, but her plight resonates with anyone who has walked the hard road of living in a new country and learning a new language.

I received a call one day telling me about a Spanish-speaking woman who was living in difficult circumstances near our community. This woman from Peru had married an American whom she had met only a few days before the wedding. She spoke no English and he no Spanish. He had written her letters (translated by an agency) saying he had a good job, financial security, and lived in the state capitol—all more wishful than truthful statements.

I learned that she came from a good family, had worked as a nurse, and thought that coming to the United States would mean a better life and prosperity. Her new husband, while deeply in love with her, lived in his mother's dilapidated trailer miles from the nearest town. He had no job and was now in debt because he'd borrowed money from a bank to fly to Peru and marry her.

When we first met at the trailer, she was desperate. They had no money, very little food, and she was afraid of her mother-in-law. She felt betrayed, victimized, and pleaded to go home. Eventually, she and I would pray the way out of that nightmare.

Millions on the move

The United Nations estimates that between 1960 and 2005, 190 million people worldwide migrated to a foreign country. Of these, 13 million were considered refugees from war and natural disasters. That means 93 percent of all international migration is due to economic and social factors.

Within this same 45-year period, an estimated 38 million foreign-born people, or about 20 percent of the world's immigrants, came to the United States. Approximately 4 million arrived between 2000 and 2005. From 1960 to 2005, Asia had 53 million immigrants and Europe received 64 million newcomers. Australia and New Zealand had only 4.7 million migrants, but that represents almost 20 percent of their total populations. (Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <http://esa.un.org/migration>.)

Immigrants tend to be welcomed into communities where there's a need for labor, an aging population, or compassion for the suffering of refugees. On the other hand, citizens struggling to make a better life for themselves and their children in their own country might see newcomers as competition for scarce resources—as burdens to society rather than blessings, who are laying claim to jobs, land, and social benefits normally provided only to a country's citizenry.

There is, however, a spiritual dimension. Migration in its spiritual meaning can be similar to spiritual baptism. Like baptism, migration can represent movement of thought from the material—focusing on food, jobs, and physical resources—toward the spiritual and God's provision of inspiration, new ideas, and fresh opportunity to grow. Spiritual baptism transforms us through repentance, a movement of thought from materiality toward God, the divine Spirit. It purifies our thinking. Even our good thoughts and motives are uplifted and refined until they conform to Christ, which we can think of as the spiritual idea of God or divine Truth manifested in human hearts and lives.

Repentance and purification of thought can be like a spiritual migration from the material sense of life to a clearer, more spiritual sense. Looking to Christ, the higher idea, literally points the path to mental and physical freedom. Moral and spiritual changes in thought are manifested in improved human conditions. Whether or not we move to another place, at some point we all need to make the spiritual journey from limited material views of life to a liberated spiritual concept of being. This is the kind of migration that God governs through laws that bless all equally.

Some Biblical examples

The Bible contains several stories of mental migration governed by divine law. Abram, for example, left his homeland of Ur and became an immigrant at God's direction. He wasn't fleeing war or famine, but progressing mentally and spiritually, acting on spiritual intuition. Such intuition inspired Abram to be willing to leave tradition and seek fresh views of God, and God renamed him Abraham.

Abraham glimpsed something of the nature of the Divine as Supreme, all, the one God. He moved from a limited, tribal view of God to an understanding of God as always present and the one and only power. During this spiritual journey he was blessed by Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God (see Gen. 14:18–20). Abraham prayed for and healed others, such as Abimelech and his wife, who had children as a result of those prayers (Gen. 20:17, 18). He saw human laws and limitations drop away—he and his own wife Sarah had a son when she was 90 and he 100. Abraham wandered for the rest of his human life, but lack of close community ties allowed him to draw closer to God.

Abraham's progressive thought transcended traditional boundaries of culture and kings. He communicated with the Divine, was called "a friend of God," and experienced to some degree the kingdom of God on earth. Perhaps his experience and that of other Biblical characters like him inspired Mary Baker Eddy to write, "Pilgrim on earth, thy home is heaven; stranger, thou art the guest of God" (Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, p. 254).

In contrast, Jacob, Abraham's grandson, desperately wanted to stay home. As a second son, he was afraid there wouldn't be enough resources to support him. He didn't want change, didn't want to leave his homeland or alter his way of thinking. Migration was the furthest thought from his mind.

Yet Jacob was forced to flee. He faced some of the same sadness and challenges many immigrants face today. He never saw his parents again. He was cheated, victimized, given substandard wages, and was the object of prejudice, envy, and suspicion. Despite these hardships, Jacob persevered, married, had children, and was successful in his adopted homeland.

When he returned home 20 years later, Jacob was a wealthy man. Yet he found his greatest triumph in reconciling with his brother, Esau, and healing the deep hurts that had caused Jacob to emigrate in the first place. For Jacob, spiritual growth and progress began in earnest when he was willing to return home.

The journey home transformed his character. Before, Jacob had been afraid to trust God, afraid he wouldn't inherit, even afraid that God wasn't big enough or wise enough or powerful enough to ensure sufficient resources, without manipulating the situation himself.

Now that Jacob was willing to change his thought, he had to struggle against all those fears and silence them through confidence in God's inspiration, or angel messages. Hanging on to the higher spiritual view changed him deeply. The final reconciliation with his brother, Esau, merely confirmed that a remarkable movement of thought and character had taken place. The journey for Jacob was not so much traveling away from and back to his homeland, but discovering God as the source of income, happiness, and prosperity.

Whether God impels us to leave our home, or encourages us to stay, the journey is really a mental one, an awakening to a clearer understanding of God. And that's the journey the woman who migrated from Peru to Tennessee chose to take.

Praying together in Spanish

At our first meeting in their run-down trailer, my new friend's situation looked bleak. But no matter how heart-wrenching someone's story might be, I've found through the study of Christian Science that it's more important to listen to God than to the entangling personal

details. So as she talked, I listened for inspiration from the one divine Mind, which transcends language, culture, and circumstances.

I thought of a statement from Science and Health: “In mental practice you must not forget that erring human opinions, conflicting selfish motives, and ignorant attempts to do good may render you incapable of knowing or judging accurately the need of your fellow-men” (p. 447). I prayed to judge accurately and know what the real need was in this situation. There seemed to be so many.

I realized that both this man and his wife were honest, intelligent, capable children of God. A spiritual being couldn't be limited by language, environment, or heredity. Both of them were beloved of God. Both deserved to be blessed. I affirmed silently that the divine Mind had solutions for each of them, and that they could be receptive to God and be willing to follow divine inspiration.

Over the next few weeks, I arranged a steady stream of people to visit the trailer, relieving the severe isolation. I invited her to work for me from time to time so she would have some money of her own. The first day in my house, she noticed a copy of El Heraldo de la Ciencia Cristiana on the coffee table and took it home to read. >From that moment we began talking together about God as revealed in the New Testament. That God is good, is Love, and how God has spiritual and practical solutions for every situation. She began reading the Bible, finding the Psalms especially comforting. Soon afterward she began to study the Spanish translation of Science and Health. Her thoughts began to improve, and progress was the inevitable result.

At her request I began meeting with them to translate delicate conversations, so they could understand one another's feelings and intentions. She began to acknowledge her husband's good qualities. He didn't drink, wasn't violent, and desperately wanted her to be happy. This right desire motivated him to overcome feelings of hopelessness and failure. Within a few months they moved to town.

When the tide turned

A major turning point came when she was in a car accident. Her mouth was bleeding and some teeth were loose. She called me for help and I asked her husband to bring her to my house. When she arrived we sat together on the deck. I asked her to pray silently thinking about the Lord's Prayer, and I silently gave her Christian Science treatment. Treatment is a specific form of prayer that, through God's revelation, uncovers latent misconceptions and fears, and corrects them. After maybe 45 minutes, I felt all was well. We went inside and ate lunch. All evidence of the injury completely disappeared within a couple days.

(A Mexican woman who happened to be at the house witnessed this healing. The obvious physical change inspired her to start reading El Herald, and soon she experienced significant transformations of thought and life, too.)

From that point on, my Peruvian friend's progress was steady. The study of Christian Science opened her thought to the presence and activity of good. She learned to pray more effectively for herself. Even though she still spoke no English, she wanted a full-time job. With a little help translating, she was hired at her first interview. Soon her husband found a job and they moved to a little apartment.

Today, they are happily married, have a new house, and she is a US citizen. He has been well employed for many years and she has worked successfully for several companies. They both attribute the dramatic change and blessings in their lives to God and her study of Christian Science.

No one is beyond God's care. Everyone can feel and receive God's blessings whether at home or in an unfamiliar country. The journey is always mental. We leave behind old material beliefs about life with its limitations and seek the Christ, Truth, to know and feel the joys of spiritual awakening.

There's infinite room for every right son and daughter in God's kingdom. No one is left out. No one is left behind. Everyone is beloved and able to discover the infinite goodness of God right where they are. |css

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