

ANIMAL MAGNETISM—DON'T BE DUPED



A round-table discussion on animal magnetism

This spring, the Journal invited several teachers of Christian Science to come together via conference call to talk about "animal magnetism"—what it is and how its negative effects can be wiped out through prayer. Host Russ Gerber spoke with Suzanne Cowin of Boca Raton, Florida; Lois Rae Carlson of Evanston, Illinois; Ron Ballard of San Francisco, California; and Dorothy Maubane

of Pretoria, South Africa. Russ began the discussion with some observations about the term animal magnetism as it is currently used. The conversation that followed focused on the basic question of evil in its various disguises—and the understanding of God that can give individuals relief from its domination in their lives.



Russ Gerber moderated from the Sentinel Radio studio.

Russ: It's hard to tell, based on the variety of ways the term *animal magnetism* is being used today, just what exactly is meant by it. The term was used as the title of an off-off-Broadway play a couple of years ago. It's been the name of a company that makes products for animals. It's the title of a book that has pictures of celebrities and their pets. And you've probably all heard some charismatic character in a story described as having animal magnetism. So it seems like pretty harmless stuff when you look at it in light of these things.

Yet, there's more to animal magnetism than this lighthearted modern-day usage would suggest, which is what brings us to this discussion—what animal magnetism is and what we can do about it. My first

question to you is, Who originally came up with the term *animal magnetism*, and what did people claim it could or could not do?

Ron: Well, Russ, the term was made popular in the 18th century by the Austrian physician Franz Mesmer. Animal magnetism was proposed as a healing technique based on the idea that there was a force that could be exerted by one organism over another. It got quite a bit of play in Paris, where Mesmer had a fairly elaborate clinic, and was eventually investigated by the French medical and scientific societies, which found that animal magnetism, or mesmerism, as a technique, had no curative effect and was probably due to the vivid imaginations of the patients. Mary Baker Eddy refers to the history of this apparent force at the beginning of her chapter, "Animal Magnetism Unmasked."

Russ: If initially some people thought that animal magnetism should be taken seriously as a means of curing certain ailments, and others thought it was just kind of a product of the wild imagination, should it be taken seriously by people today?

Lois: Yes. We may not use the term so much in its historical context now, Russ, but people hold the conviction that we live in a material universe, and that we live in a state of reaction to other beings and to the earth—to the whole material cosmos. But this still boils down to the basic premise that we're not able to control our own lives because of a physical force. And that is what the term *animal magnetism* means for me.

Suzanne: I would agree. I think it's the idea that we're controlled by the material condition, the environment in which we find ourselves at any given moment.

A lot of people feel stressed out, because they feel their environment—their material surroundings, or even their mental surroundings, such as demands at work—are pressing in on them, and they don't feel they're in control of these forces. You can even narrow it down to tinier examples. In the *Star Wars* trilogy, there was what they called

"the Force." There was the idea that you could be seduced by the dark side of this Force. We're dealing in today's world more and more with this belief. What do we do with the elements of this "dark side" that presents itself—the negative thoughts, the fears, the prejudice, the hate, the violence? These influences would probably all fit under a modern definition of *animal magnetism*.

Russ: Dorothy, what are some of the ways this concept called animal magnetism is evident in South Africa?

Dorothy: In Africa, a lot of people believe in the occult. When I give a talk anywhere in Africa about Christian Science—about spiritual healing—the first thing people want to know is whether I'm a member of a cult and if I'm bringing witchcraft to them. I went to one university in Kinshasa, Republic of Congo, and students were waiting at the gate to bar me from entering, because they thought I belonged to a cult and that I was coming to mesmerize them.

I got out of the car and invited them to come and listen. I said that I'd give them an opportunity to ask me questions, and that they would then realize that the book I'd come to speak about—*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*—fully answers questions about occultism and witchcraft. Some medical students were there at the talk, and some good questions were asked. At the end of the day, I think it became clear that the book I was speaking about gave them good answers. And I think that sort of settled them a bit. We are encouraged, as students of Christian Science, to be individual. Prayer isn't mob action. It's quiet, individual.

With cult groups, the leader decides what has to happen. In the study of Christian Science, individuals have to think and pray ideas through for themselves, and not just wait to be spoon-fed or led to a solution by somebody else.

Russ: So if I'm hearing all of you correctly, this term *animal magnetism* really suggests the notion that there could be an influence in matter—or in a material personality—that could make people better, but

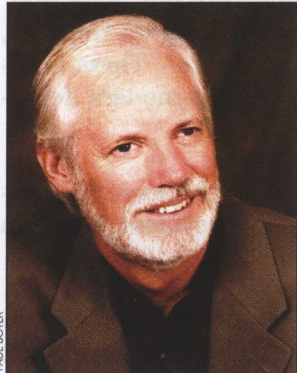


Dorothy Maubane
Pretoria, South Africa



Suzanne Cowin
Boca Raton, Florida

maybe also, as another way of looking at it, could also harm people. It could have sort of a malicious intent to it as well. How does that speak to the pervasive-



Ron Ballard
San Francisco, California

ness of hatred and violence that's going on right now in the world? Should we be considering the widespread and quickly moving hatred we see so much of today as animal magnetism, or mesmerism—a kind of mass hypnotism?

Ron: I think one of the ways you see animal magnetism most vividly today is as an impression made

upon the senses. It can be the *preoccupation* we often find with the different issues of evil—a fascination or fixation with it—whether that's the hypnotic effect with the hatred and violence in a racially-torn country or with the horrendous results of the terrorist attacks of last fall.

I've noticed in my spiritual healing practice over the years that often I'll receive calls about situations that have been particularly prominent in the news. They can be relative to specific forms of disease—which is certainly an element of violence that takes place in the body. Or they can be about school shootings. The excitement of the imagination, as well as the impression that's made upon the senses, becomes part of the collective human thought that plays out in people's lives.

Lois: Animal magnetism is another term for evil. It's clear in Mrs. Eddy's writings that she thinks of it that way. The words she associates with animal magnetism include *moral idiocy, dishonesty, sensuality, malice, falsehood, revenge*—as well as *infidelity*. But whenever I think of the word *evil*, I think of anything that causes failure. Anything that undermines. Good is that which inspires, enriches, enlivens, invigorates, comforts and sustains, and evil is that which undermines, weakens, belittles, and accuses.

The value of the term *animal magnetism* is that it alerts us to—and implies—a kind of magnetic pole in human thought. Evil would not seem nearly as impressive to us if it were just a blip on a TV screen. But

when it has disastrous consequences, it also tends to be mentally preoccupying. That's where I find Christian Science such an encouragement in helping people to understand what the true source of consciousness is. Because if we're just stuck in a material mode of thinking, reacting to everybody's fear of evil, life doesn't seem very much worth living.

But right in the middle of this soup of different stimuli, there's this clear, conscious, deliberate communication in which God says, essentially, "You are My child alone. The influence on your life is not aggressive materialism; the influence on your life is My love for you. And it's My intention, in loving you, to help you know you are not an animal. You don't live in a state of reaction to others. Your life is actually My Word. Your life comes from My love for you."

And this wonderful Father-Mother, God, is speaking this clear communication to us every day, in a way that cuts through all the muck, and helps us to identify ourselves in terms of goodness instead of in terms of all the vagaries of the human condition.

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Suzanne: I like that, Lois—where you talked about identifying ourselves in terms of goodness. I think that's the beauty of understanding more about God and who we are as the children of God. It counteracts this idea we have of ourselves as just human beings—bone and flesh—who react to circumstances. I think what we need—what gives people a feeling of self-control, of empowerment, rather than a feeling of helplessness in the face of all the hatred and violence—is a deeper and clearer sense of their own identity. Who are we? Where do we derive our power? It's gaining the understanding that we are spiritual and that our identity is composed of the qualities of God. That adds a depth to who we are, and brings us in line with the spiritual power of good that can overcome what looks like this dark side of "the Force."

Dorothy: I wanted to add more about the power of goodness. When we were facing apartheid in South Africa, and also now as I've been praying about what is going on in the Middle East, I've always held to the fact that no matter how deeply evil may be embedded in the human mind, it's beautiful to know that there is nothing that can destroy the conscious recognition of the power of good that we have inherited as God's children. If one is at peace, and really affirm-

ing the spiritual fact that goodness is pervading everything and is actually in control, we don't get mesmerized.

As we see goodness in ourselves and in the other person—in the “enemy”—this power of goodness reconciles differences in a way that can happen without speaking or saying anything. And somehow you find solutions in little pockets here and there. People tell you, “Oh, you know, that Afrikaner did me such a good thing.”

In most cases, we don't magnify these small good events. Instead, we're looking at this evil thing—at a war going on, and at all the negative things going on. But there's good going on. And we have to magnify it more. And look for it. Then we'll see more of it.

Lois: Dorothy, my memory is that after Nelson Mandela got out of prison, the protests didn't suddenly stop. But there was a clear commitment to working through the issues of peace in South Africa. The violence wasn't able to stop the peace process. Am I right about that?

Dorothy: You are very right.

Lois: The thing that doesn't make any sense to me in the Middle East is that the violence continues to be an excuse not to make peace. To me, that's a classic case of animal magnetism. Animal magnetism tries to derive logic where there is no logic. And you have such lovely examples as in South Africa, where people have said, “We have a right to peace, and we're going to find peace. And we're going to pursue it at all costs.” I feel like that is the real defense of civilization. Because when we identify common values like peace, human rights, basic access to education, and the rights of women, we commit ourselves to working together in support of them, and this solidarity is a protection against the evil influences that would give us a hundred reasons not to pursue what we know in our hearts is absolutely the only solution—living together in peace.

Ron: It's interesting that Mary Baker Eddy talks about individuals as being victims—of entering into a “state of semi-individuality, with a mental haziness which admits of no intellectual culture or spiritual growth.”¹ The perfect remedy for mental haziness is what I as a Christian would call the Christ, or “the divine manifestation of God” that comes to us.² And whether one is a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, or a

Hindu, it's possible to unite in a concept of God's manifestation that comes to human consciousness to destroy the mental haziness that is fascinated with evil. I think it's important for us to remember that the concept of the Christ is a universal truth that is available to all. That virtually all of the world's wisdom tradition is about seeking the Messiah—the power of God that is the message of the Christ. It's a *message*, not a man.

Russ: Let me turn to issues of health, which is where this all began back in the 18th century, when some believed that these material forces of control were going to produce cures. Although there are alternative treatments for disease and pain which have become popular in recent years, many people would argue that physical problems still require some sort of physical treatment.

Lois: I can tell you about a healing that might illustrate that. I had a very bad skiing accident, and I smashed my knee. It looked like either ligaments or cartilage had been torn, and the muscles around the knee were damaged. Because I'm used to relying on prayer for healing, it never even occurred to me to go to a doctor. And the pain was healed almost completely within 24 hours.

Gradually, I gained strength in the leg and was able to play tennis. But I never regained the ability to extend my leg all the way out or to contract it. When I sat with my kids on the floor playing cards, I couldn't cross my legs. In fact, my leg had to be stuck out on the side. It was as if the healing would only go so far.

The absolute key to my prayers was that passage in *Science and Health* about accidents being unknown to God, that His direction is *unerring*.³

The accident had happened in the middle of a ski class. And the instructor, who was a very young man, was absolutely furious with me when he realized that I was going to hold up the class. I said,

*The perfect remedy
for mental haziness
is the Christ.*



Lois Rae Carlson
Evanston, Illinois

"Well, just leave me. The ski patrol will come." He said, "No, no. I can't do that. I have to stay with you."

I was praying with my whole heart not to be a nuisance. After about a half-hour, I was able to get up. And, although maybe I shouldn't have, I did continue to ski down the hill, which was probably a really stupid thing to do. But this was the only way I felt I could get away from what I can only describe as the *venom* I was feeling from the instructor. And now I realize that in all my prayer about the accident, I had never prayed about the young man's hatred—I'd never acknowledged that God had not given that hatred any power over me. I had never separated the hatred from the young man.

Well, I felt such a compassion for this instructor. He was probably a pretty hot-shot skier and probably found it tedious to have to deal with slow learners like me. But I also saw that he must have been thinking about the others. He didn't want to hold them up.

And I thought, That's where the *mental* accident occurred. The accident wasn't physical. It was the belief of being a disturbance to someone else in a way that would cause hate.

I didn't know where he was now or what he was doing, but I knew that his reaction that day was not the power in my life—any more than it was the power in his life.

About three or four days later, I was working in the garden. I had gotten my feet dirty. Maybe nobody else does this, but I put my feet into the sink and just wash them in the sink. And suddenly I stood there on one leg, realizing—with my foot in the sink—that I had full mobility in the leg. And all the muscles were in the right place. And I've never had another restriction in that leg again. I felt at that moment the powerlessness of animal magnetism to fool me, or to fool anybody else, into agreeing with hate.

Russ: Do the rest of you have anything to share about someone who calls you and says, "I have a problem"? Something that would shed light on where mesmerism might come into play and how it needs to be addressed?

Ron: Going back to your comment, Russ, about people oftentimes feeling that when something is wrong physically it requires a medical method in order to

deal with it. Over the years, I've had a number of physicians refer cases to me where there have been no more material methods that could be applied. In those cases, individuals sometimes begin to explore just how totally mental our experience is. And that healing comes not only from a change of thought, but a regeneration of thought that moves from acceptance of matter as being the fundamental and constituent element of being to an understanding of Spirit as constituting the real essence and nature of our being.

Lois: When you talk about the mental nature, Ron, I think that's what's so remarkable about Christian Science. It actually redefines the source of consciousness. The real source of consciousness is the divine Mind, the creator of the universe, who created us in a state of completeness within a benevolent creation, a benevolent kingdom that actually supports and sustains our health.

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Suzanne: I've always found it interesting that even though Mesmer incurred widespread skepticism, he was one of the first people to draw the attention of the world to the important fact that imagination can have a direct bearing on the illness of the body.

Later, Mrs. Eddy was making the discovery that God is the basis and the source of health, and that divine power is good and sustains and heals. One of the concepts I often end up sharing with people who come to me for healing is from *Science and Health*, where Mrs. Eddy talks about anatomy. We're all brought up to think of anatomy just as the physical body. But she says, "Anatomy, when conceived of spiritually, is mental self-knowledge, and consists in the dissection of thoughts to discover their quality, quantity, and origin."⁴ I think that's so interesting. Instead of the skeleton and bones and muscles that make up the physical anatomy, *spiritual* anatomy is mental self-knowledge.

When I pray for patients, it's really important to consider the thoughts they're dealing with. And then bring them all into the light of God—Truth, Love. What is God telling us? What are the spiritual truths that govern our real, true being? When those are brought into focus—when that light breaks onto the thought that has been darkened by fear, pain frustration, disease—the light about the truth of God and His love for creation brings the healing of both mind and body.

Dorothy: In South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, we have a lot of cases of AIDS. The belief has become widespread that if you have AIDS and you sleep with a virgin, you'll be healed. So we've had a spate of children being raped. This happened to one of our Sunday School kids, who was nine at the time. I got this call, and the mother and the two sisters were just screaming. I could hear them all.

The girl had apparently been raped by the older boys on her street. And it was not only she but other girls, too. Little girls who had been sexually abused like that.

The first thing I had to do was to calm them down. And in doing that, I got to the basics of who we really were. I identified the boys, the girls, the mother, and myself from the premise of spirituality. Perfect man reflecting perfect God. And as we were calming down, I shared with them the story in a poem that I love so much. It's about how child's innocence protected her from a snake.

I was really sharing this story with the mother, because she was so concerned about the impact that this would have on her child later. And I told her we all have that sense of childlikeness—of innocence. And we must really hold on to it. The more we accept it, the more we are going to benefit from it. The first benefit is that we will be willing to forgive the perpetrator, because we *have* to forgive. Jesus says we have to forgive, no matter what the offense is.

It took quite a few weeks before any of us reached that level of readiness to forgive. But we did reach it. What happened was that the elders in the street counseled all who were involved. The men counseled the boys, and the women counseled the girls. And it was so beautiful because today, that child doesn't have a stigma. For awhile, she refused to play with her doll. She was withdrawn, and not like a little girl anymore. But soon she started playing with her dolls, and today she's a beautiful girl—maybe 13 years or so. And she's not intimidated by boys or anything like that.

I think healing takes place really from within, from not accepting evil as operating from "out there," as if some power outside of God could be in charge of things. And as if we could be the victims of that outside power. And once we realize that God is in control, then we have the control. God has given us dominion over *domination* by anything outside of Himself.

Russ: Would any of you like to add any final comments?

Lois: I think the reason we're still talking about this subject more than 100 years after *Science and Health* was written is that evil claims to be a creator. It claims to be able to manifest itself in horrendous crimes, violent diseases, horrible, revengeful states of thought. There's the drama, the shock of what we deal with in the news. You can't help but sometimes feel like it's surreal. And that this can't be the true history of civilization.

The thing that has been a rescue from tragedy in my life is Mrs. Eddy's clarity that Christian Science is the Science of good. That no matter how varied the forms of evil may seem to be—how new or different—they ultimately can't deny the living Principle of good, which is God. There's an idea in *Science and Health* that has been foundational to me: "There is but one way to heaven, harmony, and Christ in divine Science shows us this way. It is to know no other reality—to have no other consciousness of life—than good, God and His reflection, and to rise superior to the so-called pain and pleasure of the senses."⁵

I find that when I absolutely insist on goodness as the reference point in my life, I am solely and singularly committing all my efforts in the right direction. Every single day there's enough good in life to neutralize evil. To me, that's what the Bible verse means that says, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."⁶ It doesn't matter how varied evil gets, it never has the authority to displace God. The divine Principle of good will not loosen its grasp on our lives and on its control of creation or its government of creation.

Ron: I've always liked the passage where Mrs. Eddy says that "Animal magnetism, hypnotism, *etc.*, are disarmed by the practitioner who excludes from his own consciousness, and that of his patients, all sense of the realism of any other cause or effect save that which cometh from God."⁷ We may be perplexed as to what one person can do in the face of this incredible evil in the world, but we can at least take that step to exclude from our own consciousness all sense of the reality of any other cause or effect except that which comes from God. Each one of us can take a step toward seeing through the mesmerism of evil as being dominant in the world, and be conscious that all cause and effect comes from God.

Dorothy: We don't need to be afraid of evil. Why? Because in the light of the omnipotence and omniscience and omnipresence of God, there is no place for evil. God didn't make it. And therefore we must not fear it. It is a myth that has grown in strength as the years have gone by. Mrs. Eddy comments in

Science and Health, "As named in Christian Science, animal magnetism or hypnotism is the specific term for error, or mortal mind."⁸ Mortal mind is the notion that there can be intelligence apart from God. And also that intelligence can operate in a hypnotic way. It tempts us through suggestion. And to the degree that that suggestion is accepted, evil persists.

Suzanne: Every time we bring our thoughts in line with divine Love and with Truth, we bring our entire framework for living in line with the supremacy of God, with good itself. And that is where we derive the only real power there ever really can be. And it's ultimately the only power over the evil that *appears* to be. In the same way Mesmer's whole proclamation about this invisible force he called a magnetic fluid was dismissed by a team of experts—

in just that same way we're proving, a little at a time, that this evil, which appears to be such a forceful thing, is really powerless.

We can look at the tremendous surge of love and support and positive action—the resetting of priorities for so many individuals, for example—that came out of the terrible tragedy of 9/11. The real power of the world—the only power that moves us forward—lies in divine Love and in unity and peace. And I think as this continues—this march forward of the light pushing back darkness—you see people in their moments of greatness. You could call it idealism, but I would call it spirituality. □

¹ *The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany*, p. 211. ² *Science and Health*, p. 583. ³ See *Science and Health*, p. 424. ⁴ *Science and Health*, p. 462. ⁵ *Science and Health*, p. 242. ⁶ Matthew 6:34. ⁷ *Miscellany*, p. 364. ⁸ *Science and Health*, p. 103.

WARDING OFF NEGATIVE PRAYER

The author of Be Careful What You Pray For . . . You Just Might Get it (1997), among other books, Dr. Larry Dossey is executive editor of the peer-reviewed journal Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine. His Web site is www.dosseydossey.com. In light of his book on negative prayer, the Journal asked him for his thoughts since the September 11 tragedy.

I BECAME INTERESTED in negative prayer after discovering from a 1994 Gallup poll that five percent of Americans actually prayed to harm other people. This was a cross section of Americans. That's more than ten million people, and is only the one in 20 who would admit it.

The sensible follow-up question should be, Does this sort of prayer actually cause harm? I believe it does. I reexamined about 130 studies of distant healing and intercessory prayer, and it's clear from some of these studies that people can achieve both positive and negative results through prayer.

This issue was brought to the global stage by 9/11, when it became obvious that a large portion of the global population is actively praying for America's destruction. We have had to face the question of negative prayers, thoughts, and intentions more dramatically than ever before. But I believe that this is a universal problem and

not one that is confined to Islam. Events following 9/11 should make us confront the tendency to engage in negative thoughts against others ourselves, and to dress these up in religious language.

If you look at history, you can see that all religions have dirty hands on this issue. People who fall into the trap of mutual hatred are dishonoring their own faith. And if 9/11 can be said to have caused anything good, perhaps it's that it has prompted us to look deeply into our own hearts and intentions in relation to negative prayers.

One of the best defenses against negative prayer is positive prayer. Love and compassion have a way of neutralizing negative intentions and the harmful behaviors of other people. Love and compassion also structure our behavior so that we do not become objects of hatred.

Within the Christian tradition there are some classic prayers of protection, among them the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. One of my favorite prayer reference books is the *Oxford Book of Prayer*, which has an entire section on prayers of protection that draws on several major religious traditions. I'm suggesting that in a sense, we can avoid triggering negative prayer, just as we can preempt certain illnesses from happening to us. □