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VISIONARY NURSING PRACTICE - FOR EVERYONE

Nursing is caring; being compassionate; reflecting God's grace and healing; Nursing is both individual and collective, personal and impersonal. Nursing in its highest sense involves treating oneself metaphysically in order to heal one's own thought, which in turn naturally embraces one's concept of others. This involves being conscious of man as forever whole, harmonious, undefiled, and remaining intact. This is illustrated in the following incident.

Two ladies went out shopping one day to buy carpets. The salesman in the shop wore a bandage covering half his face. After a few moments, one of the ladies seemed to lose interest in the carpets, and suggested that they return another day. They both left, but about three days later, the other one returned. The salesman recognised her and asked who the lady was, whom she had been with. He went on to explain that, although he didn't understand it, he felt that her friend had something to do with a very wonderful thing that had happened to him. He explained that not long after the two ladies had left on the previous occasion, his face, which had been scarred, began rapidly to heal. It was evident to the lady at that moment that the face was indeed perfectly clear. The condition had been cancer.¹ That lady was Julia Bartlett and her companion with the healing thought had been Mary Baker Eddy.

Mrs Eddy consistently healed in this way. When healing took place like this, it was evident that her method was a most conclusive form of nursing. It could be said that she was the most successful nurse in modern times. You may not, at the moment, think of what went on in that shop as nursing, but I hope you will take a moment to consider with me what I mean. The thoughts I want to share with you on nursing are important to us all as healers.

In Mrs Eddy's time, conventional nursing as it is known today was just about non-existent and the mortality rate was extremely high. Now, not only has health-care improved dramatically, but, thankfully, the human concept of nursing has progressed. There is now a growing acceptance that it is the whole man that needs nursing, not just a physical condition.

One hundred years ago, Mrs Eddy was also thinking about nursing. Her sense of nursing was based on the divine, fully embracing the human. In her ministry, nursing meant nothing less than compassion that brought all that was not of God to naught.

She saw that her students did not always reach the same altitude of demonstration as she did, and patients needed care while the healing took place. She wrote a Mother Church By-Law that defined the requirements for the Christian Science Nurse. But, as with all the By-Laws, it was written through far-reaching spiritual vision, and needs spiritual vision to interpret it. She did not intend the meaning of it to be limited to a select number of individuals or that its application be restricted. In a Journal article, it is reported that Mrs Eddy intended the Manual to be a guidebook, which, 'when understood and obeyed, [would make] the students better Christian healers'. It was 'to be applied to all aspects of life.'² She was well aware that, as individual members of The Mother Church, we would all grow to understand the higher idea of the Manual including the nursing By-law, as we awaken to a clearer sense of God's ever-present motherhood.

Christian Science nursing is a developing spiritual idea that Mrs Eddy is inviting us all continually to reflect upon, assimilate and practise in our daily lives. At this moment in human history, nursing in the highest sense is, perhaps, one of the most important activities in Christian Science.

Everyone needs to feel valued and cared for, and to feel the love that heals, in other words to feel nursed. The world and every man, woman and child in it needs to feel "Immanuel", God's presence with us. Our contribution to this need is to understand and demonstrate with more fluency the unconditional care of divine Love with us, which is nursing. Nursing has its source in God, divine Love and not only supports healing but does itself heal.

A friend of mine was asked to take a position in the Movement. She thought about it and confiding in a friend said she didn't think she cared sufficiently to take it on. The reply came back, The fact that you have even considered that you care, *means you care*. We are Christian Scientists because we care! Lack of confidence is a form of fear. Fear is faith in evil. Confidence is trust in good. The fact is that the closer we are to God, the closer we are to all those for whom we care.

My understanding of Christian Science nursing took a giant leap forward some time ago. I discovered the nursing character of God through one of the earliest recordings of God's nature as Mother, which is nearly 4,000 years old. It was Abraham's concept of 'Almighty God', which is El Shaddai. The Hebrew meaning of (El) is God and (Shaddai) is The Nourisher. The root word 'Shad' means a woman's breast, indicating tenderness and care. (Shaddai) also means the Strength-Giver, the All-Sufficient One. These terms express clearly the Fatherhood and Motherhood nature of God, as recorded by Abraham in Genesis 17.³

The Nourisher: I love this sense of God feeding us spiritually every moment. ***Strength-Giver:*** we can only go from strength to strength both mentally and physically when we are clear where our strength comes from. ***All-Sufficient One:*** He supplies us with every idea we could ever need, every hour. These terms reveal

Him as an ever-present, living power, an activity, which is forever functioning, which has always been amongst us for all to know and demonstrate. In proportion as this wonderful, consummate definition of God's nature is cherished as the very substance of our own being, we will become more confident in our expression of love in nursing ourselves and each other.

In an important sense, we are all nurses, but we can only fulfil this aspect of our divine nature by allowing God to nurse and cherish us first. If we are not feeling nursed of God, who is the very origin of our being, what ability do we have to fulfil the command to love our neighbour as ourselves? We must feel the love of our Father-Mother, otherwise we may mistakenly believe that we, personally, are the origin or cause of what is actually God's work, and then we will struggle and fail miserably. Man is never cause, but always effect.

Reasoning from this basis, are you being a good nurse to yourself and fully accepting God's loving nature, which is forever nursing and feeding you?

A friend, newly introduced to Christian Science, arriving at the church for the first time, felt so enveloped in love when the ushers greeted her, she said it stayed with her for about three months. About that time, one night she awoke and was completely paralysed, she could not move at all. Despite this, that sense of God's love was still with her. Because of this feeling, and of what she had already learned of God's nature of love, she said she was not afraid. She lay there and just loved God until she fell asleep. She awoke completely free.

To me, there are two illustrations here that are evidence of what one may call 'Christianly scientific' nursing. Firstly, the selfless love of the church ushers who, when my friend was welcomed into the church, must have been prayed up with compassionate love in seeing only the perfect man, and secondly, her own effortless prayer in just loving God, rather than asking God to do something for her. So often we are in a sense pleading with God to heal us, but she just loved God and this brought about her healing. One may call this Christianly scientific nursing, because it is an effortless and natural acceptance of Immanuel, God with us.

A way of developing this effortless sense of Christianly scientific nursing is by working with the healings in our Lesson Sermon. Each week we have at least one healing from the Bible and, so often, it abounds with nursing qualities that bring about healing. I would just like to share with you the nursing qualities I saw one week when we had the healing of the Centurion's Servant.⁴ I found over twenty such qualities in the related healing, without even considering Jesus part in it'. Maybe you could find more!

The Centurion had:

compassion and care, for the welfare of his servant;
expectancy that healing was possible;

worthiness, love, generosity, encouragement: the elders of the Jews said he was worthy, having generously built a synagogue for them, thereby evidently encouraging worship;

meekness, humility, trust: he sent word that he was not worthy to go to Jesus, but trusted that Jesus' word was sufficient to heal;

obedience, spiritual perception, receptivity, absolute faith, understanding, authority, dominion; by these he illustrated that he understood the position of one who was under authority, from both standpoints.

He, too, took orders as well as gave them. He said, in substance, I say to a soldier, Go and he goeth, come and he cometh, do this and he doeth it, and I know my orders will be carried out immediately. He was confirming the reason why he knew that his servant could be healed by one under divine authority. And, of course, his servant was found whole.

The Centurion certainly expressed in abundance those nursing qualities which enabled the saving power of God to act, and which resulted in an immediate and complete healing.

Exercising those nursing qualities, we have that same dominion and authority to say, 'Go', to a thought which does not have its origin in God and expect it to go. Or to say, 'Come', when an angel visitant is showing us a new, fresh healing insight, and we do not want to let it go.

This just illustrates some of the nursing qualities which, when we practise them in our daily lives, fulfil in some degree the first stipulation in the nursing By-Law which requires of us to demonstrate a knowledge of Christian Science practice.

Mrs Eddy, through the Manual By-Law on nursing, defines three requirements of us, as members of The Mother Church. Firstly, she requires '**a demonstrable knowledge of Christian Science practice**'; secondly, '**a thorough understanding of the practical wisdom necessary in a sick room**'; and thirdly, one '**who can take proper care of the sick.**' Remember, these are not just human but also divine requirements, and apply not only to those involved in public nursing, but to every one of us as members of The Mother Church. Our source, the Nourisher, Strength-Giver and All-Sufficient One, bountifully supplies us with everything necessary to fulfil these By-Law requirements. Your endeavouring to live them blesses not only you, but all whom you embrace within your thought.

How can we fulfil and demonstrate our individual ministry of nursing in obedience to the Nursing By-Law? Each one includes now all that is necessary to follow our Leader's directing. Let me just explain this. We all have the textbook, **Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures**, which guides us daily in demonstrating a knowledge of Christian Science practice. Our study of this textbook teaches us the practical wisdom that is needed in any difficult situation, because practical wisdom is

firstly prayer and then action. Through prayer, we have immediate communication with the motherhood of God, who nurses us, by communicating the right, wise action that is necessary in any given situation. As Christian Scientists, we can take proper care of the sick: and we must note, it does not say sickness, but 'the sick,' meaning care of the one who falsely believes he is sick.

How do we take care of the sick? By separating the disturbed or ignorant thought wrongfully claiming to identify itself as man, unseeing it - and acknowledging man's Christ identity!

I gained a fresh insight of nursing sometime ago, which clarified certain points for me. A practitioner responds to requests for treatment when someone has specifically asked them to. There are also many situations around us, around you and me, where treatment is not asked for, but our Christ-compassion calls upon us to pray impersonally. It could be a family member, a neighbour, a situation in the community, or our church. We have a responsibility to pray in such circumstances. This 'self-treatment' is effective nursing when we refuse to believe a false condition is any part of man's God-given identity, and allow the Christ to feed us with the pure consciousness of Truth and Love. We do not have to ask anyone's permission to pray in this way.

I had an experience proving this. I was quietly sitting at a window one day praying and at times looking out at the activity going on at the other side of the road. A car drew up and a young man helped a young woman out of the car who had to use crutches to go into the house. I questioned my thought. It was obvious to me that this situation was not of God, because my spiritual reasoning had been pondering God as a divine Principle whose nature was unfailing divine Love, who had never produced an opposite effect. I adamantly refused to be taken in by this presentation to my thought of imperfection as a reality. I rejected that mental image as being real anywhere, and cherished the true idea of man as forever nurtured, nursed and safe with God, good. After this prayerful reasoning I rested my thought and went on with my business, trusting that I was defending my understanding of God and man's relationship with Him.

The next morning sitting in the same position I watched the same young lady freely walk out of the house with no aids to help her. What had happened? I know that I had nursed and nurtured my own sense of God's perfect child and left the rest to God. However anyone else viewed this experience I know I had been faithful to my highest understanding and rejoiced at the young woman's freedom. This, in a sense was nurturing my nursing practice and refusing to bear witness to anything but God's reflection and this changed what I was seeing.

I have come to the conclusion that a lot of potentially good healing, does not take place because of confusion regarding the right to give treatment and the method or procedure to take. Mrs Eddy clearly teaches that treatment should not be given

without consent, unless in an emergency, and then only when the position is morally justifiable. We all endeavour to be obedient to this rule. The fact is that nowhere does she say that we should not treat our own thought, in fact she is continuously encouraging it. This is the self-treatment I like to think of as my nursing practice, to which I do not attach any limits. I expect it to heal just as effectively as when I am asked specifically to give treatment.

Self treatment is effective treatment. It involves going to the Father in prayer, just as Jesus did. He said, "I go unto my Father."⁵ With his Father is where he started and finished his treatment.

Mrs Eddy it seems was healing-through-nursing by not seeing any man other than the whole man, all the time. She confirms the correctness of her method when she states, "The spiritual power of a scientific, right thought, without a direct effort, an audible or even a mental argument, has oftimes healed inveterate disease."⁶ How often in the book on 'Christian Healer' we are told how people she had never directly spoken to were healed - as she drove by or when she was told about some situation. In Christ and Christmas, she illustrates her healing method in this way, "Christ's silent healing, heaven heard..." Not a word spoken, but silently bearing witness to God's reflection everywhere. This is where we can all learn more about individual nursing practice. Mrs Eddy would not let anything pass her notice without praying about it and healing it right there and then in her own thought. To me this is what the Nursing By-Law is inviting us all to do, this is nursing with vision.

These ideas do not obstruct the public healing ministry of nursing but fully support each individual's practice, refining and purifying the divine idea of nurse within each one of us. Christian Science nursing requires the grace that responds immediately and the vision that concludes in healing. Our love for God and man impels us to obey the Manual By-law on nursing, not as an option but as the law of Love calling each one of us.

Like Mrs Eddy, do not allow anything that needs healing to pass without your Christ compassion healing it - this is your nursing practice. Remember, even if you are not invited to heal a specific problem, you do not have to ask permission of anyone to heal your own thought. In humility, as we learn to accept God's grace, our nursing practice will be seeing God's reflection everywhere. We do not do it alone. God, the Nourisher, the Strength Giver and All-Inclusive One, is the one mighty spiritual force at work, and as we permit Him to love and cherish us first we cannot fail to nurse and heal through grace.

¹ Christian Science Journal November 1995, 16-18, from the series, A Lifetime of Healing.

² Christian Science Journal September 1996 “Lifetime of Healing

³ Studies in the Bible Edith Hoyt 107, Early Names for Deity

⁴ Luke 7:1-10

⁵ John 14:12 I go

⁶ Rudimental Divine Science, Mary Baker Eddy 9:21-23