This Annual Meeting is a joyous occasion and it is a pleasure to be here today. We expect Christian Science church services and testimony meetings to be occasions for healing. Why shouldn’t this meeting also be a healing one?

Let’s just suppose you learned that Jesus was seated here with us. Now I realize this sounds absurd. But my point is, what would be your attitude? Wouldn’t you anticipate a spiritual sense to permeate the meeting, and healing to occur? Yet Jesus made it clear that it was not his human presence that healed. He said, “The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” It was the divine quality of nature—the Christ within him—that healed. And it is that same divine quality within man that heals today.

Mrs. Eddy tells us that there is a divine influence ever present in human consciousness. This divine influence is the Christ, the true idea of God. Wasn’t Jesus speaking of the healing Christ when he said, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”? So, while Jesus is not here at this meeting, the healing Christ is present.

As surely as there can be no healing without the presence of the Christ, neither can there be the Christ present without healing taking place. So what is it that would prevent this from being a healing meeting? It is the suppositional absence of the Christ, or animal magnetism.

Mrs. Eddy once told the students in her household, “The workers in the field are not healing because they are not meeting animal magnetism which says they cannot heal...if you stay here until you learn to handle animal magnetism, I will make a healer out of you.” Then, if we wish to be better healers, we too must handle animal magnetism. So let’s consider this topic this afternoon.

Some of you may be thinking, “Oh no, who wants to hear about animal magnetism?” Now I realize it is always more enjoyable to consider the loveliness of Love—the beauty of holiness—than it is to discuss animal magnetism and evil. Indeed, even Mrs. Eddy was at first disinclined to handle it. But that is the nature of the subject—to hide it itself. We too must yield our reluctance to expose animal magnetism.

According to her secretary, Adam H. Dickey, Mrs. Eddy once wrote, “Teach your students what animal magnetism is, how it works in themselves and from outside sources on them. These are the points in which my students fail most in teaching and are the most difficult to teach rightly so as not to frighten but strengthen the students.”

Obviously we don’t fear something if we know it doesn’t exist. Fear of animal magnetism stems from ignorance. But there is a difference between ignorance and ig-NOR-ance. Mrs. Eddy’s critics asserted that neither animal magnetism nor mental malpractice had existence and therefore did not need to be addressed. Mrs. Eddy spoke of such individuals as “stickers for a false, convenient peace.”

To ignore animal magnetism does not handle the claim that it exists. We must include in our study not only the absolute truth of being, but also the unmasking and destroying of the lies about true being. It requires great balance when considering the subject of animal magnetism. We tend to make too little or too much of it. Let’s approach our topic with poise. Actually it’s a pleasure to handle animal magnetism. So let’s have some fun today.

Why is it so important to handle animal magnetism? Because every problem in the world is one of animal magnetism. No, every problem is not intentionally directed, malicious animal magnetism. But every problem is a false concept acting mesmerically in human consciousness. So long as there appears to be evil present or problems that confront our lives—so long as there seems to be an inability to demonstrate the healing efficacy of Christian Science—we need to handle animal magnetism. The handling of animal magnetism is basic in the practice of Christian Science.

Just what is animal magnetism? Actually it is awkward to try and define something that doesn’t exist. It can only be defined in terms of a supposition, the absence of that which does exist. It’s like trying to define darkness. Darkness isn’t the presence of something; it is an absence of something. Animal magnetism is the suppositional opposite of the Christ.
As the Christ is the absolute true idea that comes to human consciousness to destroy error, so would animal magnetism be the suppositional opposite, an erroneous concept presented to our human consciousness to destroy truth.

Mrs. Eddy speaks of animal magnetism as the antipode of divine Science. Whatever divine Science would do, then animal magnetism would claim to do the opposite. Animal magnetism, by its very nature, would counteract and make ineffective our healing work. But animal magnetism is not something powerful, black, and spooky. It is not a thing, a person, or entity. It has no source or cause, nor is it a source or cause. Animal magnetism is only a term.

Let’s briefly review three basic terms: error, animal magnetism, and aggressive mental suggestion.

Error is a term, a term we use to indicate a suppositional opposite, or absence of truth or reality. Obviously it must be only a term because there couldn’t be any such thing as real unreality or erroneous truth.

Animal magnetism is also a term, a term that is used to imply that not only does error exist, but it has the power to do something. It is error’s claim to act. Mrs. Eddy tells us, “Animal magnetism is the voluntary or involuntary action of error in all its forms; it is the human antipode of divine Science.”

How does animal magnetism act? This leads to our third term: aggressive mental suggestion. Aggressive mental suggestion is a term indicating the means through which animal magnetism acts. The only way animal magnetism can touch you is for you to accept an aggressive mental suggestion into your consciousness.

Perhaps some of you read the article in The New York Times Magazine last year entitled, “The Spin Doctors.” The article discusses the placebo and nocebo. Most of us know about placebos. A placebo is a false drug—such as a sugar pill—that doesn’t contain any medicinal ingredient. And yet people taking it believe they are better. A nocebo is the opposite of the placebo. It is the presentation of a mental catalyst that would make people worse.

For instance, Mrs. Eddy tells us in Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures... A man was made to believe that he occupied a bed where a cholera patient had died. Immediately the symptoms of this disease appeared, and the man died. The fact was, that he had not caught the cholera by material contact, because no cholera patient had been in that bed.” Note that the man had not just been frightened to death. He came down with the actual symptoms of cholera. Where did the symptoms come from?

Robert Hahn, an epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control, wrote in a paper given at a nocebo conference: “Beliefs can make us sick as well as healthy. The nocebo phenomenon is a little-recognized facet of culture that may be responsible for a substantial variety of pathology throughout the world.”

What the M.D.’s are calling a nocebo effect is actually the result of accepting an “aggressive mental suggestion.” It is vital to defend ourselves against aggressive mental suggestions. Why? Because presenting a false suggestion is the basic modus operandi of hypnotism.

In his book, Principles of Psychology, William James makes it clear that hypnosis operates through suggestion, and the trance is in fact an extreme state of suggestion. Mr. James further states,

Suggestions come to us every moment of our lives, and to the extent that we accept them uncritically, unconsciously, passively, or without logical grounds, we are being mesmerized or hypnotized in our waking state. Suggestions may be audible or inaudible, personal or impersonal, random or purposeful, and have immediate or delayed effects.

Mrs. Eddy considered alertness to animal magnetism’s false suggestions so vital in the practice of Christian Science that she placed a By-law in our Manual. “It shall be the duty of every member of this Church to defend himself daily against aggressive mental suggestion,...”

It is generally accepted that a hypnotist cannot make a subject perform acts repugnant to his or her nature. But experienced hypnotists claim they can hypnotize an individual to perform acts not consistent with his nature and even without the subject’s consent.

In his Memoirs of Mary Baker Eddy, Adam H. Dickey tells of Mrs. Eddy calling members of her household together and—speaking of the hypnotist—she said, “He boasts that he can make a law for you six months ahead.” Mr. James confirms Mrs. Eddy’s remark. He states that deferred suggestions may take effect
months or even years later.

Hypnotists claim that they can suggest something now that the subject will find himself experiencing as a physical condition years after being hypnotized. Then why couldn’t people be hypnotized now to believe that years later when they reach a certain age, their hair will turn gray or they will have a faulty memory or failing eyesight? Or when giving birth to a baby, there will be pain. Have we been hypnotized into believing that when we sit in a cold draft today, we will get influenza tomorrow?

Let’s suppose each of us here was hypnotized into believing that an elephant was up here on the platform with me. This would be very distracting, to say nothing of the fact that it could be dangerous and destructive. We want to remove him. But easier said than done. After all, an elephant is big and powerful. What can we do about it? Well, we may call the zookeeper. On the other hand, since we are Christian Scientists, perhaps we should call a practitioner. Of course, we are all practitioners, so how should we work? Well, we can affirm the truth that there is no destructive element in God’s kingdom. That’s true, isn’t it? Do you think this statement of truth is sufficient to remove the elephant? Or perhaps we can go to the Concordance and see what Mrs. Eddy has to say about elephants.

Meanwhile, let’s suppose that a latecomer arrives and finds us praying about the elephant. But the newcomer doesn’t see an elephant. Why not? Because he hasn’t been hypnotized. He sees things as they really are. Our Leader tells us, “Jesus beheld in Science the perfect man, who appeared to him where sinning, mortal man appears to mortals.” Well, if everyone else saw a sick or sinning man, why didn’t Jesus? Because he wasn’t hypnotized. He saw man as he really is—perfect.

Although an individual may appear to be mesmerized into believing in the reality of his disease, isn’t it clear that animal magnetism would also mesmerize us into seeing a sick person who needs healing? Jesus didn’t see what all the mesmerized people thought they saw—a sick man—nor did he accept a hypnotized man who believed he was sick. Why not? Because he knew the truth, that man reflects the one, perfect divine Mind, and therefore couldn’t be hypnotized.

If you find yourself trying to eliminate this elephant or a disease, then you are hypnotized. Stop dealing with the elephant and deal with the real problem, the hypnotized state of thought. The M.D. deals with removing the elephant. The Christian Scientist deals with the hypnotic state of thought. Why? Because that is all there is to the elephant or any disease.

Who or what is it that would hypnotize us? No, not necessarily a person or group of persons, but general world belief, the suppositional absence of truth. Even so, general world belief does not change reality. For example, the entire world once believed that the earth was flat. But this never changed the earth from being round. No one has ever fallen off this earth! Oh, but what if one were mesmerized into believing that the earth was flat, then could he fall off? No! Why not? Because the earth isn’t flat.

Always remember, every problem is a hypnotic state of thought that appears as imperfect matter. That’s why, before I start to give a treatment, I’ve learned to ask myself, “Am I accepting the condition as real, and going to give a treatment to try and change reality, or do I see this as a false, mesmeric suggestion, a lie about reality?” The purpose of Christian Science treatment is not to improve imperfect reality. Rather, we disprove a lie about perfect reality. Prayer doesn’t change reality; prayer reveals reality. To become conscious of reality is answered prayer.

What is it that needs healing? The strategy of animal magnetism is to mesmerize us into seeing the problem as a person, disease, or abnormality. But this is a decoy and leaves animal magnetism untouched. This is the serpent, alias animal magnetism, hiding itself. Rather, we need to deal with the real problem, animal magnetism. That’s why we never, never treat man. If you find yourself treating man, then stop; you are not working correctly. We are not dealing with a sick man, but the false suggestion that man is sick.

For instance, let’s go back for a moment to the man who manifested all the symptoms of cholera after being told he was in the bed of a man who had died of cholera. Let’s suppose you were called as a Christian Scientist to deal with this case. You were told the symptoms were those of cholera, and the man appears to be dying. What would you treat? Would you treat the man? Would you treat the disease? Would you deal with contagion? Would you look up citations on cholera? Would you turn down the case because you feel cholera is too serious for you to handle with your limited understanding of Christian Science? No! You would not do any of these things if you knew the truth that it was all a hoax: the man had only been presented with and accepted a false suggestion. If you really knew the truth, you wouldn’t deal with cholera. You would deal with the false belief. Why? Because the false belief would be all there was to the problem. Oh, but what happens if you begin to experience the symptoms of flu? What are you going to do? If you are not careful, you may be tempted to deal with the flu as though it were a real condition. But wouldn’t it be more specific to deal with a false
suggestion, knowing that a false suggestion is all there is to the problem.

How do we eliminate a false suggestion? By knowing the truth! Now, what does it mean to “know the truth”? When confronted with a problem, we sometimes hear a Christian Scientist say, “I must know the truth about it.” There is nothing incorrect about this. But unfortunately, “knowing the truth” has become Christian Science jargon meaning something we need to do to change or eliminate an imperfect condition. But knowing the truth means exactly what it says. Knowing the truth means knowing or being conscious of that which is true. Knowing the truth is not a tool we use to go from imperfection to perfection. It is not a process. Yes, you may affirm, “There is no elephant present.” But not as a means to eliminate the elephant. Knowing the truth is not the means through which we remove a real elephant. Knowing the truth is realizing there is no elephant to remove. Nor do we affirm, “I am well” as a means to stop being sick. We affirm, “I am well because I AM well, and therefore I’m not sick.”

If you begin your treatment thinking, “I’m giving this treatment to improve an imperfect condition,” then STOP, because you are working from a mesmerized point of view. Therefore, I find it helpful to recognize that the patient is well BEFORE I give the treatment. The treatment doesn’t make the patient well. The fact is that the patient is already well. The treatment is the recognition of this fact. Knowing the truth is being conscious of what is true. A consciousness that knows that which is, will never accept that which is not.

A consciousness that knows that which is, is a consciousness imbued with the Christ. Knowing the truth is being conscious of yourself as you really are. So, knowing the truth doesn’t bring healing. Knowing the truth is the healing. Healing is not recovery. Healing is discovery, the discovery of the perfection of being already present. Healing is the revealing of reality.

Earlier, we spoke about Mrs. Eddy’s statement that we are not healing because we are not meeting animal magnetism, which says we cannot heal. This is a suggestion of animal magnetism that must be met.

One of the early practitioners in our movement was Clara Shannon. In her book, Golden Memories, she tells about helping a patient for quite some time without achieving a healing. She wrote Mrs. Eddy, and Mrs. Eddy wired Mrs. Shannon to come and see her, which she did.

Mrs. Eddy inquired if Mrs. Shannon’s work was consistent with the basic principles of Christian Science practice, including dealing with the condition of the patient’s mind. Mrs. Shannon said it was. Then Mrs. Eddy asked if she had any fear. (Note, not the patient’s fear, but the practitioner’s fear.) Mrs. Eddy then said, “Stop working on the disease. Handle mental malpractice against your practice; that is, error that argues with the patient and your thought that you cannot reflect the Truth, and that Christian Science cannot heal.” Mrs. Shannon did so and upon her arrival back home she found the patient completely healed.

Remember, suggestions always come in the guise of our own thought. We must be alert to the suggestion that says, “Christian Science doesn’t heal.” We quickly reject this suggestion, based on the many proofs of healing. Then the suggestion comes: “O.K., Christian Science heals, but it can’t heal me.” Again we reject this, knowing God’s law is universal and always operative for everyone. Next the suggestion comes: “O.K., Christian Science heals, and it can heal me, provided I have sufficient spiritual understanding. But I don’t. I’m uninspired. I’m just reading words.” And what happens? We take this third suggestion in, hook, line, and sinker, and off we go trying to find inspiration, instead of handling the aggressive mental suggestion that tells us we lack it.

We may find ourselves thinking, “Well, I do have some spiritual understanding, maybe enough understanding to heal a cold. But I don’t have enough spiritual understanding to heal something really serious.” See what we have done? We are back dealing with a condition. That’s like saying, “I have enough understanding to remove a little mouse, but not enough to remove this elephant.”

Now, I ask you, is it any more difficult to awaken a person mesmerized into believing he is being chased by an elephant than to awaken a person mesmerized into believing he is being chased by a mouse? No! The problem isn’t an elephant. The problem is the mesmeric dream itself. Why look up citations on elephants? To awaken from the dream takes care of the mouse and the elephant. We must recognize that God never made a dream or a dreamer. Both the dream and the dreamer are a lie.

So, if you find yourself believing, “I can’t heal,” you can agree with your adversary quickly and say, “You are right, animal magnetism. I cannot heal, for it is not a matter of one person correcting another person. But rather, it is the Christ, the absolute true
idea correcting a lie about a person, and there is no lie that does not yield to the truth.” This fact refutes the false suggestion that would tell us that it is our inadequate, personal human mind that attempts to heal.

Mrs. Eddy writes, “Hold perpetually this thought—that it is the spiritual idea, the Holy Ghost and Christ, which enables you to demonstrate, with scientific certainty, the rule of healing…” When we see that it is the healing power of the Christ within us, then we can go forward with confidence and refute animal magnetism’s suggestion that we cannot heal.

Another suggestion of animal magnetism is that of disunity. Today, the general world belief of disunity is found in places such as Bosnia, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, as well as disunity in other aspects of life, such as business, family, between departments within institutions, and within our church. We are being distracted and are playing into the hands of animal magnetism when we focus on person rather than the error appearing as person.

As surely as disease, accident, and malfunction appear to be real and cannot be ignored, neither can we ignore what appears as the anti-Christ in any presentation. In short, we must reject the suggestion that animal magnetism can use you, me, or anyone else as its tool to produce error, to act under an assumed name to curse, hypnotize, disrupt, or destroy our health, wealth, joy, or the Christian Science church, its officials, or you and me, its adherents.

The world belief of disunity is clamoring for acceptance. And we Christian Scientists need to be especially alert to reject animal magnetism’s claims of disunity and affirm that Christian Scientists are united!

We are united in our great love and gratitude for God and His unspeakable love and care for each one of us. We are united in our love and gratitude for Christ Jesus, our Way-shower.

We are united in our love and gratitude for our Leader, Mary Baker Eddy, for what she did, what she was, and for what she is. What did she do? She discovered Christian Science, gave us Science and Health, founded our dear Mother Church and its Manual, which forever governs it. Who was she? She was the revelator who brought the great revelation, Divine Science, the Comforter which Jesus himself prophesied. And who is she? She is and shall ever continue to be our beloved and only Leader. We are united in our refusal to idolize her or adulterate the purity of Christian Science as she taught it. We are all united in our love and gratitude for her.

We are united in our deep gratitude for the healing efficacy of Christian Science, for every healing that has ever taken place. Why? Because each healing is proof of the universal, inflexible, undeviating, and constant law of God which is operating right here, right now, for you and me.

Unity is vital to the Christian Scientist. Disunity leads to disintegration. Since God is the one and only Mind, there can be no disunity due to conflict of minds nor unity due to a meeting of minds. Rather, there is a unity based on one divine Mind being reflected by each individual. Hence no conflict of interest, no distrust of others, no conflict of opinions.

Does unity have anything to do with healing? A great deal! The whole healing practice of Christian Science can be stated in terms of restoration to oneness, a realization of the oneness—yet distinctness—of Mind and idea, God and man.

It was healing that built the original Mother Church in Jerusalem, and it was healing that reestablished The Mother Church in Boston. If Christian Science does not offer healing, it has nothing new or different to offer mankind. Our church will stand or fall to the degree of our success or failure to heal.

The members of the original Christian church failed to handle animal magnetism. We cannot make the same mistake. According to her secretary, Adam H. Dickey, Mrs. Eddy told her household:

You must rise to the point where you can destroy the belief of mesmerism, or you will have no Cause. It tried to overcome me forty years and I withstood it all. Now it has gotten to the point where the students must take up this work and meet animal magnetism. I cannot do it for you. You must do it for yourselves, and unless it is done, the Cause will perish and we will go along another 1900 years with the world sunk into the blackest night. Now will you rouse yourselves? You have all the power of God with you to conquer this lie of mesmerism.10

I trust we have seen this afternoon that every problem is the failure to handle animal magnetism. That’s why it is important before you start your
treatment to establish that every treatment must handle animal magnetism. In fact, to give a treatment is to handle animal magnetism, and to handle animal magnetism is to give a treatment. I cannot stress too strongly that handling animal magnetism is not something you do as a last resort when all else has failed. It’s not the last thing you do; it is the first thing you do.

This afternoon we have been discussing our duty to defend ourselves against animal magnetism’s aggressive mental suggestions. This is what we must do. Now let’s consider how we do it.

In his Memoirs, Adam Dickson quotes Mrs. Eddy as saying, “Where all students have failed is in not knowing how to handle animal magnetism.” We handle animal magnetism in proportion as we see it to be nothing but a term without law, power, substance, mind, or reality. How could that which is not do something to that which is? To see animal magnetism as nothing is not ignoring it. It is handling it.

About ten percent of handling animal magnetism is specific affirmation and denial. Our textbook states, “The exterminator of error is the great truth that God, good, is the only Mind.” Why does the one divine Mind exterminate error? Because it exterminates the suggestion of a second mind to originate an aggressive false suggestion. The one divine Mind precludes the presence of another mind to hypnotize or be hypnotized. If God doesn’t think, it’s not thought.

Knowing this, we can affirm here and now the absolute truth that:

- We reflect the divine Mind as our Mind. Therefore, we think as God causes us to think.
- Since we think as God causes us to think, we can’t be mesmerized.
- Because we cannot be mesmerized, we are not mesmerized.
- We know who we are, and how we are.
- We cannot be the victims of a curse or hypnotic suggestion.
- We cannot be confused or drowsy when we read the Bible, our textbook, or give a Christian Science treatment.
- We cannot be made to procrastinate or feel reluctant to give a Christian Science treatment.
- We cannot be discouraged or give our consent to surrender.
- Animal magnetism cannot gain objectivity as personal sense appearing as pride, egotism, jealousy, vindictiveness, or deceit.
- It cannot make anyone a malpractitioner.
- Nothing can come to anyone or go from anyone but what God expresses.
- Therefore, we can’t be mesmerized into turning away from the Christ, Truth, to accept a material body, place, or thing.
- Nor can we act in a way foreign to our sense of right, to pursue pagan, materialistic means to strengthen our church.
- We can’t be hypnotized into accepting that someone else can be hypnotized.
- Animal magnetism cannot assert itself and gain entrance into our consciousness or prevent the Christ in healing, delay its results, or cause a reversal.
- In short, we can neither influence nor be influenced erroneously. Why not? Because God is the only Mind and therefore our Mind.

Now, none of what we have been discussing has any value unless we are alert to such suggestions as:

- I don’t want to handle animal magnetism.
- I’m too tired and sleepy to handle animal magnetism.
- I don’t know how to handle animal magnetism.

If we fail to handle these suggestions, then all we’ve learned is worthless. But, of course, we do know how to handle animal magnetism. So let’s make sure we do it!

Don’t address person, place, or thing—address the error:

- You devilish suggestion, you are a liar and the father of a lie. There is no truth in you.
- You are nothing but a term.
- You have no power, no substance, no law, no mind.
- You can do nothing because you are nothing.
- You can’t get into my consciousness because I can’t get out of the divine consciousness.
- Like darkness, you have no cause.
- Nor are you a cause.
- You are only a suppositional opposite of the Christ.
- You cannot, you have not, you shall not.
- There is nothing in me that responds to your suggestions.
- So shut your mouth. I refuse to “stand aghast at nothingness.”

So much for the ten percent of handling animal magnetism. Now, how about the remaining ninety percent? Our Leader tells us to keep our minds so filled with Truth and Love that the suggestions of animal magnetism can’t get into consciousness. That’s why living Christian Science is about ninety
percent of handling animal magnetism.

Jesus proved that living Christian Science is the best defense against animal magnetism. How grateful we are that we have a Way-shower whose life was the one perfect example of living the Science of the Christ and thereby handling animal magnetism. Jesus not only understood the Science of being, but lived it. What Jesus knew he lived and this enabled him to do what he did, and what he did enabled him to say what he said.

Mrs. Eddy writes, “If the lives of Christian Scientists attest their fidelity to Truth, I predict that in the twentieth century every Christian church in our land, and a few in far-off lands, will approximate the understanding of Christian Science sufficiently to heal the sick in his name.”

Mrs. Eddy’s prophecy includes a qualification. She says “if.” “If the lives of Christian Scientists attest their fidelity to Truth...” Mrs. Eddy might as well have said, “If Christian Scientists handle animal magnetism.”

If we live a life of love, we are living a life unafraid. If we live a life unafraid, we are living a life serene. Such a serenity is living a life inbued with the Christ, Truth. If we maintain a Christlike consciousness, we can say to animal magnetism, “You’ll find nothing in me.” But why “if”? What is there to prevent our living Christian Science and thereby handling animal magnetism?

After all, darkness does not prevent the light; the light prevents darkness. Animal magnetism doesn’t prevent your living Christian Science; living Christian Science precludes animal magnetism. It is never a question of what animal magnetism can do to you or our church to pull us down—but always what the Christ does to lift us up. So why “if”?

You have what it takes. You have the Christ. “Christ within you, the hope of glory.” Our Leader tells us, “To live so as to keep human consciousness in constant relation with the divine, the spiritual, and the eternal, is to individualize infinite power; and this is Christian Science.”

Endnotes

1. John 14: 10
2. Matt. 28: 20
3. Adam H. Dickey, Memoirs of Mary Baker Eddy, pp. 128-129
5. Science and Health 484: 21-24 Animal
6. Ibid. 154: 10 A
7. Manual 42: 4-7 It (to,)
9. Ibid. 496: 15-17
11. Science and Health 469: 13-14 The (to 3rd.)
12. Ibid. 563: 7 stand (to?)
14. Col. 1: 27 Christ
15. Miscellany 160: 5

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