

Preexistence

By Marjorie Dagnall, C.S. of Aptos, CA

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A rather whimsical question being asked today on T-shirts and posters is, “What if the hokey-pokey is really what it's all about?” A few decades ago, the T-shirt question was, “Is this it?” These questions suggest that whatever “it” is, we all share an awareness of it and relate to it. The questions seem to indicate expectancy that there could be something more somewhere, or maybe there was something else at some time and we've lost “it.” Maybe “it” will be again. I really don't know.

One thing I do know is that part of the hokey-pokey is to turn yourself around, and I like that! Many times I have been prayerfully led to turn things around and the result has been an entirely new viewpoint.

Jesus certainly turned things around. When the disciples were apparently wondering about their end, what would happen to them, in the Coptic Gospel according to Thomas, Jesus is recorded as saying, “Have you found the beginning, then, that you look to the end?... for whoever takes his place in the beginning will know the end, and will not taste death.... Blessed is the one who came into being before he came into being” (Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, N.Y., Random House, 2003, pp. 52-55).

Such exciting words, “blessed is he who was (came into being) before he came into being.” It brings to mind Jesus' reference to the glory

he had “before the world was” (John 17:5). The answer turns us around from the end to the beginning. We think of Mary Baker Eddy's definition of *beginning* as the “the only” (see *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 502) and of J.B. Phillips' exquisite translation of the first line of John's Gospel, “At the beginning God expressed himself.”

We each have our own private questions also. We have a vaguely familiar sense of something about us we're not quite in touch with, something that wants to be answered, but we can't quite form the question. Some deeply stirring awareness of a glory we're not sure we now have but maybe once did or that maybe we will have again, maybe at some other time, maybe in some other space. As for now, we wonder if the challenges will ever end, if our health is really established and our bank account sound? Will companionship be satisfactory? The questions are not just about us but are also about our world. We hear more and more about the end of the world. Many movies, TV programs, and books have the rapture and the world's end as their theme. We may wonder if there is some truth to their predictions.

Today let's pay attention to those vaguely familiar stirrings in us and allow ourselves to be turned about—to look, not at the end nor at the beginning, not to the past, but to “the only.” To turn from a mortal sense of

existence with its matter-based origin to our preexistence in God.

Perhaps it is the need to live that preexistence which stirs us. The need to express the rhythm of uninterrupted harmony right where the hokey-pokey begins and ends, to sing a new song over the melody of that old refrain, to be undisturbed about the supposed beginning and end of ourselves and even of our world. Perhaps it is living in the eternal now of the spiritual universe which we seek, the turning away from man as based in matter, housed in space, formed by time and disordered by fantasy.

Let's consider those four concepts: origin, space, time, and order. Many times, we, like the disciples, give thought to our end, and sometimes we speculate about our beginning. As a child, I was troubled about my beginning in a rather unusual way. Prior to my so-called conception and birth, my parents lost a child through miscarriage. While this was almost never referred to in my family, I heard about it, and I often pondered just who I was. Was I perhaps the miscarried identity brought forth successfully the second time? I wondered if I had taken someone's place or was I really me occupying my own space. This concern gradually faded away, but it surfaced occasionally until I realized that my identity was not set by the illusion of a material conception and birth, but that, as Mary Baker Eddy says in our textbook, *Science and Health*, "Being possesses its qualities before they are perceived humanly" (247:19-21).

Again in our textbook we read, "God...being perpetual in His own individuality, harmony, and immortality, imparts and perpetuates these qualities in man,—through Mind, not matter" (See page 280). This interest in my beginning eventually provoked an interest, not so much in my end, but in my present.

What did the concept of being "before the world was" have to do with that which calls itself *today*? My initial concerns about taking someone else's place or appearing as the result of a second pregnancy were really encounters with problems of time and space, two concepts we all deal with, both of which need turning around. Both argue loudly, wanting us to believe that they form us and govern us. When turned around, they serve as reminders that we are indeed spiritual and not subject to time and space at all.

Mrs. Eddy deals with the beliefs of time and space through the understanding of two terms, coexistence and coincidence, both of which refer to the inseparability of God and man, Principle and idea. *Coexistence* does away with the concept of time and *coincidence* with the concept of space. It is important to see that neither time nor space touches the true man, because neither is part of God's creation. We do not occupy someone else's space nor can we take someone else's place. We do not wait for time to perfect us, or bring us forth, or do anything with us.

Space is often thought of as that which extends itself out from a beginning. We tend to think that forms divide up space: the name for what exists between the forms is space. Feelings and statements like, "he gets in my space," or "she invades my space," or "he doesn't respect my boundaries" often mean we are afraid that someone else can get in our way, block our path or stop our progress, or that someone can take away our space, leaving us cramped and limited. To the Christian Scientist, all space is filled with God—therefore we are freed from having to guard our space or enforce our boundaries. The wonderful divine order eliminates the possibility of confusion and chaos and shows forth the lovely manifestation of the motherhood of God, coordinating all right ideas.

That great statement in our textbook, “John saw the human and divine coincidence, shown in the man Jesus, as divinity embracing humanity in Life and its demonstration, —reducing to human perception and understanding the Life which is God” is a powerful statement (561:16-20). A friend, very disappointed with God, once said to me, “Oh well, at least He gave me my life,” to which I retorted, “He did not. He gave you His Life.” Such an amazing reality: His life is our Life. There is no separation, no in-betweenness, not even a shadow, and this coincidence eliminates space.

The human and divine coincidence is not something calling itself divine and something else calling itself human, nor is it the divine doing something to or for the human. The human and divine coincidence is the place where you find that your ideas and God's are actually one. This is our inspired consciousness, the place where human thinking gives place to divine fact, where the *belief* is exchanged for the *idea* about something.

In that sacred place, the son of man is seen to be the Son of God. There is not the son of man over here and the Son of God over there. There is only one Son. In the coincidence of the human with the divine, there is really only one and there is no space between something that is one. When we think about ourselves, we often accept mortal mind's suggestions that we are separate from God, separate from each other, and that we ourselves are or have spaces needing to be filled. We believe ourselves to be hollow entities, empty enclosures which mortality claims to fill with bones, blood, and other material elements. The poet T.S. Elliot wrote “We are the hollow men” and mortality sometimes makes us think we are. It claims there are empty, vacant spaces such as wombs,

tombs, stomachs, bank accounts, and even gas tanks, and then tries to fill them. It claims that our lives are empty, our relationships are empty, our churches are empty and even our prayers are empty. But in that wonderful coincidence of the human with the divine, we can be none of those things because all space is already filled with God, and the concept of empty is replaced with man as the full, complete representation of God.

Mrs. Eddy is reported as saying “man is just as old as God” and “man never was a child to grow” (*We Knew Mary Baker Eddy*, pp. 137-138). Mrs. Eddy refers in our textbook to “Man and woman as coexistent and eternal with God...” (516:21). With this reference we shift from speaking about space to speak about time, but we have already been speaking about time. The word “preexistence” does not refer to the past. It is not a glory we had at some point way back when the morning stars sang together, but somehow lost.

We tend to think in a time-sequence. For example, when our Leader writes regarding “the order of divine Science” (see *S&H* p. 336), we tend to think *sequence* instead of *relationship* and *arrangement*: “This happens and then this happens”—like going through the grades in grade school. If this were true, we would have to work up to God, instead of working out from God. We must start with God and *stay there*. Otherwise this perceived progression makes us grade our work and measure our demonstrations because we think we don't know enough. Maybe we will know enough after class instruction, or this year's Association, or after we have been a Reader, or when we have as much metaphysical understanding as someone else—all are ways of thinking that imply sequence. But reality is not sequence; it's arrangement.

When I wondered if I was the first child of my parents or the second, I was completely off base. There is just Principle and its idea. There is no first and second or third and fourth. There is no here and there. No then and now. No beginning and no ending. The kingdom of heaven is not a space to be occupied at some future date; nor is your body a space for mortality to arrange or rearrange. We are arranged by God, as one fabric without seam or rent. I love Mrs. Eddy's statement that "the divine Science of man is woven into one web of consistency without seam or rent" (S&H 242:25-26). A friend mentioned how she saw that she was not a strand that could be pulled apart and result in collapse, like a hem that, when snagged, unravels; not a fabric that could have a section cut out, nor could there be a missing piece. We cannot be worn out through use, faded by age, stained by experience, nor wrinkled by time. This is preexistence made manifest.

Understanding something about preexistence means we can rejoice that the healing effect is also retroactive. We can heal the present and the past at the same time, go backward and forward simultaneously. Because man is always one, the work we do extends to all men and in all ages. If we heal the challenges we have as though they belonged only to the present or to the individual needing help, we are fragmenting our work and working with the finite instead of the infinite. Take the individual experiencing the claim of migraine headaches, who reports that her aunt had them, or her father or someone else in the family. When we see the perfection of one, we see the perfection of all. When we rejoice in the patient's present perfection, we realize the perfection of those who, to material sense, came before her in the line of ancestry, as well as those who are thought to come after.

When sin, sickness, and death are obliterated out of each so-called family tree, they will be obliterated from the world. Seeing that this triad was never a part of man's history at any time nor in any place, that it cannot be perpetuated through individual families any more than through individuals themselves, is seeing man's forever innocence. More than just putting down the claim of heredity, this understanding exposes and removes its *modus operandi*, or the way it claims to work in man's experience. So we heal from here back, except of course, there is no back! The healing takes place in the consciousness of man, wherever he appears to be. Our Leader says, "this healing power.... extends throughout all space" (see S&H 146), and we might add "through all time."

In *Miscellaneous Writings*, Mrs. Eddy writes, "Mortals will lose their sense of mortality—disease, sickness, sin, and death—in the proportion that they gain the sense of man's spiritual preexistence as God's child..." (see p.181). She also mentions that Jesus' "steadfast and true knowledge of preexistence, of the nature and inseparability of God and man,—made him mighty" (*Ibid.*, see p. 189). The question of what preexistence has to do with everyday life is answered through an understanding of Jesus' work.

Was it not our Master's "steadfast and true knowledge of preexistence" which enabled him to heal the man born blind told about in John's Gospel (see John 9)? In reality, this man's trouble was not that he was born blind, but that he was born at all. However, the act of being born does not annul the forever fact that light cannot be separated from its source. The source of light, of vision, is the eternal truth that God is light and therefore His manifestation man is light, and in him is no darkness at all. There is a wonderful article in *The Christian Science Journal* that was made

into a pamphlet called "I See!" The article brings forth some wonderfully relevant statements. For example, "Strictly speaking, the condition of impaired vision, so called, is not one of the individual's 'age' but of the world-wide belief in the passage of time. The problem of spectacles for reading does not begin at a certain age; it begins with birth. The whole of our human problems can be traced to the beliefs that we were born at a certain date, that we live in a material world during a certain passage of time, and that we then die. It is reported that Jesus once said, 'I am come to destroy the works of birth.'" (Noel Bryan-Jones, "I See," *The Christian Science Journal*, 1946, Vol. 64, No. 12, p. 573). Given this last statement, it is clear that the real problem is not death, but birth—the belief in a material birth. Don't let the belief of being born into matter interfere with your perfect vision.

When the disciples felt that their ship was sinking in the storm, Jesus didn't respond by joining in their perceived need to bail out the boat. He spoke instead to their darkened thought through the light of his knowledge of preexistence. He was then able to say to mortal mind's upheaval, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39). Know that weather and time cannot touch the preexisting condition of everpresent harmony. The waves of uncertainty and doubt cannot move us when we are safely anchored in Spirit's sure foundation; we need not fear that we can be knocked about in the storms of mortality.

In the healing of the lunatic son, Jesus' "steadfast and true knowledge of preexistence" enabled him to silence those convulsions through the understanding of the harmony of this child's true being. Jesus brings out that this problem was hanging around, noticeable since childhood, a birth defect—again, the hazards of being born into matter—and

he responded, "O ...perverse generation." This innocent young man was saddled with the problems of genetics, and most likely heredity and material substance, all because of a belief that man has been humanly generated and born (Matthew 17:14-21).

Wasn't the meek Nazarene showing us that the preexisting conditions of vision, harmony, peace, and normal action could not be set aside nor interfered with by human theories of birth and a false view of earth's environment? To Jesus there were not two realities, the human and the divine, having to be brought together. There is only one. Principle and its idea is one and since man has never left his fixed Principle, there is no man to fix! Mortality never had a real foothold in Truth. With our feet firmly planted in preexistent innocence, we can work out from God, as God's child, instead of pleading guilty to a selfhood apart from Him. Rejecting this other selfhood, which seems to come from birth and experience, we humbly and gratefully accept that glorious evaluation found in Solomon: "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee" (Song of Solomon 4:7). The world has not spotted you, impugned, stained nor tainted you. You have no weak spots like an Achilles' heel, tough spots like the callous breast, or troubled body spots. Turn from the thought of spots, be they measles, poison oak, cancer spots, or age spots.

My early interest in my identity led to the question, "What did the concept of being 'before the world was' have to do with that which calls itself *today*?" Most of us have had some wonderful experiences answering that question. I certainly have.

Early this year my truck was stolen. It is a needed and much-used vehicle. The authorities were notified, reports filed, and I, fairly confident that it would soon be located, gave it little thought and not much prayer. Days and

weeks went by. One day I was visited with the strong realization that God had given me this idea of a truck and unless He took it away, I still had it. I knew that God would not take away something useful that He had given, and I thought of the arrogance of mortal mind puffing itself up and assuming the disguise of thief or criminal or joy rider, and trying to make me believe I could be separated from something God had given me. I acknowledged that I had that truck and even though it was not on my property, even though I could not drive it or see it, I still had it in my consciousness.

Until that day, I had never really understood the oft-quoted lines in Hebrews that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). The apparent material belief that the truck was missing meant nothing to me, because the *divine fact* was present and meant everything. A week or so later the truck was returned.

After this realization, there was an absolute conviction that there was no space between that truck and me. I was certain that it was with me even though to material sense it was absent.

Interestingly enough, about the same time a filling came out of one of my teeth and the tooth seemed to be causing a great deal of discomfort. While brushing my teeth, I noticed that the tooth was black. I was fairly unconcerned because I reasoned if God had given me the idea of my truck and hadn't taken it away then the same rule applied to my tooth. As a spiritual idea my tooth was harmonious, fully-functioning, and hadn't been taken away. It didn't matter that it was black any more than it mattered that the truck was not in the driveway. The tooth was safe in the substance of Soul just as much as the truck was. Next time I happened to look at that tooth it was

its natural color. No, it has not filled itself yet, but I expect it to. Why not?

These two experiences were both worked out on the basis of the reality of my preexistence. My beginning with God gave me my identity “before the world was.” Therefore, transportation and harmony are a permanent part of that identity, not subject to painful loss caused by human experiences. Whatever God has given you, you still have—health, movement, supply, companionship, mission, vision—it all comes forth from the Father, is inherent in Him and is manifested in you and by you forever.

A friend of mine as a child was often disturbed by the teasing of her brothers. Often near tears and flicking her braids, she would march out of the room, stomping her feet and yelling in frustration, to her brothers' great delight. In distress about their behavior and her apparent inability to control her reactions to it, she asked her Christian Science Sunday School teacher for help in prayer. Her teacher agreed on condition that if her brothers' teasing caused her to leave the room in an angry state, she was to return and announce “That was not me.”

When the teasing happened again, she did as her teacher requested, and her brothers really loved that! “What do you mean that was not you” they crowed. She told them of her pain and what her teacher had asked. The boys were sad at what they had done to their sister and promised not to tease her again. And they didn't—for a few days. But they soon forgot their resolve. This time as my friend tried to turn around to leave the room, and opened her mouth to protest, she found she couldn't do either. She said she never again lost her temper. The material condition of human frustration could not interfere with nor set aside her unspotted, preexistent nature.

Just as no human condition could interfere with the safety of the disciples in that boat, or the light which was the blind man's vision, nothing could diminish the calmness which was my friend's thinking. It is very useful to be able to say "that is not me" when human generation wants to give you a birth date, when heredity tries to give you a set of genes, when psychology tries to give you a past, and when the insurance company wants to give you a future.

The "order of divine Science" is not one of sequence, but of relationship. What a magnificent thing is the permanency of relationship, of order, and of arrangement! It means that there is no shifting of purpose or motive. God spake and it was done and it is not changeable. What appears to us as a better human condition is not a human condition made better but the divine situation made clearer. The ups and downs of mortality including moods, bank balances, and so on are nothing more than a lie about divinity, the ever-present in whom is no variableness or shadow of turning (see James 1:17). My dictionary gives this most interesting definition of order: "a condition in which everything is so arranged as to play its proper part." The thing I like about this definition is *playing its proper part*. God gave us a universe in which everything is playing its part properly. The purpose cannot be separated from the outcome; the manifestation cannot be different than the idea which manifests it. If you plant radishes you are not going to grow roses. This is the stability of the universe made manifest. The divine preexistent order remains, and it is something we can call upon for clearer visions.

A final example: a young child was found at the bottom of a swimming pool after a frantic search. A Christian Science practitioner was called and the child was restored to life, without impairment. When asked by the

profoundly grateful parents how she had prayed, the practitioner said, "Oh! I removed the swimming pool." The swimming pool, an object of pleasure and joy could never become a vehicle for sorrow. That is the nature of order. One thing does not suddenly become something else. Preexistent order does not become material disorder. The simplicity of this way of prayerfully working was a turnabout for me.

This demonstration helped me in working with the concept of divine order recently. An individual called one morning asking me to remain where I was. He said he had an urgent need to speak with me but had to make another call first. I agreed, although I was pressed for time myself that day. Just then, I looked outside and saw something unusual. When I went outside to check, I saw that our peacock was out of his pen. If you have ever had the experience of trying to usher animals back into their pens, you know it is usually a two-person job and I was by myself. I was aware that the peacock could be out of the pen for many days. I looked at the open door, which seemed to be the cause of the peacock's escape, and accepted the divine fact that neither an open door nor a swimming pool had the power to interfere with the preexistent conditions of safety and order. A swimming pool could not be a vehicle for destruction and an open door could not become a cause for dislocation. Knowing this I turned myself around—prayed to see that God's law of order was established in my consciousness. I knew with absolute certainty that the peacock had to be in his pen. The fact that he appeared to be out of it meant no more to me than when the truck appeared to be missing and the tooth black. I turned to see the peacock moving toward his pen. Within minutes he had put himself back in his pen; I shut the pen door and went back in the house to answer the

phone and talk with the man who wanted me to be there for the urgent call.

So here we are at the end, after turning about and looking at the beginning and seeing it as the only. And what have we said here today, that is worth keeping in mind each day:

1. Vaguely familiar stirrings and even unformed questions touch a glory we think might be ours.
2. Preexistence is not a past state but a present reality demanding to be lived.
3. Identity was before material birth and conception.
4. God gave you His life and never left you alone to deal with it.
5. Space and time never touch the real man and that healing is from here back, as well as forward, and that healing one is really healing all.
6. We are not the hollow man having our so-called spaces filled with mortality.
7. Jesus showed us that the preexisting condition of vision, safety, and right action cannot be interfered with, by, or through, material conditions—not even birth.
8. What God gives you, you still have; even if it mistakenly appears as a missing truck, a blackened tooth, a lifeless child, or a stray peacock.

9. “That was not me” eliminates a birth date, the psychologist’s concern with a past, and the insurance company’s prediction about the future.
10. Preexistent glory is now and blessed is that man who was before he came into being.
11. “It” really is “before the world was,” because preexistence is the *only*.

And finally, the demand that we live it, coming up from the depths of our own questions, answers the concerns about the hokey-pokey being what it is really all about, what will happen to us and to our world. And that we have, clearly apparent in consciousness, the realization that neither time nor space can interfere with the divine fact that God and man are indissolubly one.

Godfrey John says it beautifully:

Somewhere in our lives there's a central stillness that is agelessly now and wordlessly here. It is a hush of days where in we find no word for hate or fear or dirt. It is a single column of undreamed-of light, the flawless stature of our being whose space is the shape of innocence. Its sound is made of prayer. It is our primacy glowing through the guilt of lost years. It is the unsung in us waiting to be heard... (Godfrey John, *Five Seasons*, N.J., Robert Sommer, 1977, p. 129).



ArdenWood

445 Wawona Street
San Francisco, CA 94116-3058
PH (415) 681-5500 FX (415) 379-2112
www.ardenwood.org

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Thank you.