

What the Bible Means to me

By Peggy M. Brook

“What does the Bible mean to you?” was a question asked me by a young doctor who had never studied the Bible but was a keen follower of Truth.

Thinking about this question then and since, I have realised that the Bible and the Christian Science textbook (*Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy) have been the two books that have given me most along my spiritual journey. But I have also realised that there are millions of seekers for Truth in the east and in fact all over the world who have adopted many other spiritual books as their guide. Can it be said that Truth has not or will not come to them unless they read these two books or indeed other particular books? No, for Truth is vaster far than any symbolization of it. Moreover, Truth existed before any books were written. To adopt an exclusive attitude on this point is to take a narrow view such as the Jews took with regard to their temple and which caused them to persecute Jesus and the apostles. One of the latter, Stephen, when accused of blasphemy against the temple and the law of Moses, pointed out that Abraham and Moses were divinely led before there was even a temple in existence. He proclaimed that “the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” And we might add: nor does the most High dwell in books made with words, no matter how inspired these books may be.

But already we have used an example from the Bible. Would another example taken from a different source have served the same purpose? Perhaps, as long as it was an example from life and based on eternal Truth. The Bible declares Truth was not casually termed the Book of Life. It teems with living examples. It teems with living examples of Truth at work in every phase of human experience, individually, collectively, and universally. This makes one ask oneself: of what use are examples and related experiences? Today there is a great urge to dispense with what has gone before and to rethink all the values of life. It is certainly true that every man has to work out his own salvation in the ‘now’ and directly with his divine Cause. On the other hand, one can learn many valid and timeless truths from tested experience. For instance, man’s exploration into physical space has done just this. Space has existed for aeons of time, but today man is learning how to move in and adapt himself naturally to space; he has learned this through deep study of the science of aeronautics and kindred sciences. He has also taken advantage of previous discoveries and

experiences, used them in practice, built on them, and gone further in the direction in which they led.

But how about man's exploration into areas of the mind and spirit? Spirit must have existed forever; spaceless, timeless, and man is continually learning how to move in and with and as Spirit. Revelation plays the greatest part in this, but also deep study of the truths that have been proved, learning from genuine examples of spiritual living, and letting Truth live in one's own daily life. Out of this inevitably comes spiritual progress.

The timeless values of the Bible

And so we return to the Bible. What is its function in all this? Why has it lasted as a textbook of Life for countless seekers? It declares something that speaks to them with authority. It pulsates with Life, it has the ring of Truth about it, and it breathes the comfort of Love. Moreover, it has brought men inspiration, strength, peace, regeneration, and healing. It may be said that this is true of many books besides the Bible. Undoubtedly, and yet the Bible is unique in that it was written and edited over a period of many hundreds of years and contributed to by a multitude of inspired writers who testified consistently to the same spiritual theme.

Be that as it may; it is up to each one to assess for himself the value of this book to him. For me, it would have meant history mixed with religious sentiment if a great teacher and Bible student, John W. Doorly, had not pointed out a revolutionary key, from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. I well remember how the Bible suddenly leapt into living meaning as John Doorly showed how Noah is us, Abraham is us, and Jacob is us, and so on, bringing its significance right into daily experience. The Scriptures came alive and moreover the key was one which consistently unlocked the Bible, book by book, as a coherent whole. There was no book closed to it. It was a key of specific spiritual values summed up in the definition of God's nature as Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love; also the operation of this divine nature in a fourfold activity termed the *Word* of revelation, the *Christ* or the divine translating process, *Christianity* as the living and proving of these spiritual values here and now, and *Science*, the truly scientific interpretation of Being.

Unlocking the Bible with this key, namely, these timeless values of a divine Science, had the unexpected effect of making me see through the belief that matter, time, history have fundamental reality in themselves. This consciousness of the reality of spiritual values

alone, and the consequent disappearing of the personal, limited, mortal concept of life, became more and more crystal-clear, insistent, and living as the Bible story began to be unlocked.

For instance, the timeless facts of eternal Being were seen in their order and beauty as the impelling power behind the seven days of creation which opens the Bible, thus taking the creative acts of each day out of the context of matter, time, and history and showing them to be the operating of ever present ideas familiar to spiritual consciousness. These ever-present ideas were merely *symbolized* by light, firmament, the fruitful earth, the sun, moon and stars, the birds and fish, the animals and man, and the day of rest. The conception and adoption of these dynamic factors of infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love, in turn, exposed the limitations of the Adam man, as portrayed in the second record of creation on Genesis, showing also how he can be liberated, and this in extraordinary detail relevant in every way to mortal existence today.

The timeless facts of eternal Being declared themselves behind the symbol of Noah and his ark, proclaiming that Spirit and its ever-preserving power is present *now*, no matter what type of flood there may be; also symbolizing in accurate metaphysical detail the nature and operation of this saving power of Spirit, whether this story be interpreted a thousand years ago, today, or whenever.

As one moved on with this key into the third big sweep of Bible history it identified with accuracy and the beauty the differentiated qualities of man's fundamental identity as symbolized by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua. It showed how these qualities always lead out of superstition (Ur of the Chaldees), and through a wilderness of transient human experiences to the acceptance of changeless, permanent reality (the Promised Land). This fact of man's spiritual identity speaks loudly, clearly, precisely, as one comes to close spiritual acquaintance with the essence of the symbolic meaning of these stories. This whole phase not only typifies every man's journey from sense to Soul, but also presents the unchanging spiritual impulses behind this journey.

With what is called the "Kingdom period" of the Bible one could hardly find a more pertinent and vivid picture of the true and false factors that are involved in the struggle to allow the government of a spiritual Principle of being to operate in our lives, rather than limited, changing, personal sense. This follows on directly from the attainment of the Promised Land. And here the question, as with all of us, is: What maintains harmonious rule in the "promised land" of spiritual identity? The interplay and consequences of personal

concepts of every kind (symbolized by Saul and many other kings) versus the irresistible and harmonious government of impersonal divine Principle (symbolized by the prophets and kings, such as David, who listened to them) can be traced in detail throughout this kingdom period. This is also known as the “prophetic age,” and when decoded, the astonishingly up-to-date messages of the prophets lay bare the great fundamentals of spiritual government for all time.

And then one comes to the New Testament, where one feels these fundamentals that reverberate throughout the Old Testament springing into living, dynamic, loving illustration with the life of Jesus and of the apostles. But this is not just the life of Jesus and of the apostles. It is our life, the life of all men, Life itself. With the New Testament the living Word of revelation comes sharply into focus as the full Christ translation, the coincidence of the divine with the human, and not merely in the experience of one man, as we have said. It shows the “God with us” for every man, what is termed Christianity, the proving and demonstrating of the Christ, Truth universally. All this leaps into life *as us* through the realization that the facts behind the Bible are the scientific facts of our being. One might say that we are the Bible; both the Old and the New Testaments. It is the Old that is continually showing our true life to consist of fundamental spiritual values that impel the laying off of a limited, outlined, mortal sense of existence; we, too, come into a promised land, and it is the New Testament that at the same time translates existence and proves in a context that is tangible to us here that these values are all-in-all.

The Bible emphasises Life and Love

So, if one would find the revolutionary nature of the Bible, one cannot study it from the level of mortal history merely illumined by a spiritual presence. It is above everything a book springing “out from” the divine, and showing for all time (and therefore out of time) what effect the divine has on the mist called human experience. The divine is us, the human experience, ours.

The human experience can be illustrated by a Noah’s ark preserving Noah from the flood, or by an understanding of the Spirit destroying faith in matter. It can be illustrated by an Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Joshua all leading to a promised land or by qualities of intelligent trust, fidelity, assurance, spiritual certainty, love, courage, compassion seen to be the enduring factors of man, emanating from the infinite Soul of the universe, that establish and preserve his identity. In one sense the illustration is unimportant; it is the eternal idea that matters.

Then why do we need the Bible? It may not be the book for all future ages, but to me it accents the living and the loving values of Truth. It irradiates divine Life and Love. It is an active, moving, concerned-with-human-experience illustration of Truth. Over and over again one finds ones deepest feelings mirrored in its pages. It is old fashioned when taken as being about history and people, but right up in the forefront of “now” when read as symbolizing eternal spiritual values in terms of the human scene.

One may ask: how can a record of war, cruelty, a vengeful God “as some religionists conceive of Him” and other Old Testament horrors portray love? Certainly not when viewed in this historical, literal, and rather superstitious way. But interpret it scientifically with spiritual sense, and one can see that the upheavals in the Old Testament are illustrating the fact that the divine Principle of the universe is good, in Bible language “of purer eyes than to behold evil” and unable to “look on iniquity.” Is it possible for such a Principle not to be overturning and overturning “until he come whose right it is”? Does not the principle of arithmetic or of any subject overturn ignorance and mistakes? The story of man’s awakening to the Principle of his being and his natural oneness with that Principle (which is the overall theme of the Old Testament) may appear fraught with instances of exposing and destroying ignorance and evil, but Love is behind it, for it will not allow man to be fooled by material concepts and their fruitless consequences. As the Psalmist put the true status of man, “I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.”

What love and comfort there is too in individual instances, such as the symbol of Abraham being spiritually led to take a bondmaid, yet never being deserted by God, and then eventually experiencing the divine promise given to him of an heir out of his own loins. Sometimes we may be led to adopt what we feel is a lesser way out of a situation, in other words, to take a “bondmaid”- when in our hearts we long to rely on purely spiritual means alone. But we can never be out of the presence of divine Love, even as God never deserted Abraham throughout his bondmaid phase, and eventually the fulfilment of the spiritual in our experience is realized in all its fruitfulness.

Or again, Elijah, pursued by Jezebel and ready to give up the struggle to maintain allegiance to the one God in the face of idolatry, uttering his desperate cry that he was alone, typifies the situation that a lone spiritual idealist may often believe himself to be in today. But the fact that power lies not in violent material forces, symbolized in this story by earthquake, wind, and fire (in our age perhaps by physical science, materialistic power structures of government, and the burning passions of sense), but in the “still small voice” of Truth,

brings a comfort that is very real, tangible, living. And then we find, as Elijah did, that there are seven thousand in Israel who “have not bowed unto Baal,” in our experience, that the “still small voice” of Truth is speaking to many all over the world, although our eyes have not previously been opened to see this.

The example of Jesus undertaking crucifixion has a tremendous impact when he is seen as an advanced spiritual scientist, virtually saying to his persecutors, “Take this body, hang it on a cross, let it lie in a grave for three days, and in the laboratory of Spirit I will show you what the nature of life really is. It does not emanate from, nor is it dependent upon, material organism. It is primarily Spirit in nature and essence.” One can talk about what life is and theorize that it must be spiritual, but here was life actually lived as it fundamentally is, and proved to be spiritual, and by someone whose body in all appearances resembled the bodily structure of every man.

Essences and symbols

The important factor in spiritual progress is always to be aware of the life-giving Spirit which lies behind the mere symbol, and one finds Bible study most helpful in releasing thought from becoming rigidified in symbols. If one would experience the inner reality and source of power in the Scriptural record, one must go past the words, the ancient religious customs, and the history to the spiritual essence that underlies them. Active Bible research makes great demands on spiritual discernment.

Naturally people and places in the Scriptures have a meaning, and in their meaning lies spiritual significance. Noah means “comfort,” Jacob, “striver with God,” Moses, “to draw out,” to give only a few. And then to take one example of delving behind an ancient religious custom, one may be asked of what value it is to read of the Israelites sacrificing a sheep to God. We could dismiss such a ritual by saying that that was the old way of approaching God; it was their practice to give such an offering to the Almighty, but we do not do this any longer in the Western world. Spiritual sense pushes further, though, and asks, what lies behind this? To take something that is valuable to oneself (such as sheep were to the Israelites) and sacrifice it to God has a real meaning for all time in the realm of ideas. Sheep stand for innocence and purity. We may believe that we personally can possess innocence, purity, goodness; that they belong to us. If we do, we personalize these qualities and immediately limit them. The fact is that there is only one infinite good and we reflect it, even as Jesus said, “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.” So sacrificing sheep and giving it to God is the equivalent of reckoning all good as

belonging to the one infinite good, and ceasing to reckon good qualities as a personal possession, but rather as the operation of one infinitely good Principle.

One might object that this is a laborious way of identifying this spiritual fact, but the value of such study does not end there. One finds almost unconsciously that the exercise of spiritual sense in order to see deeper than the face value of the Scriptural stories helps one to see more instantaneously and understandingly through the face value of all kinds of situations with which one is presented. Consequently one looks for and finds essences, rather than being fooled by the outside appearances.

The stumbling blocks with all symbols is that men get bogged down in them and cannot recognize a truth through any other symbol but the one to which they are accustomed. Today this is changing. Why? Because men are genuinely seeking essences; they are no longer content with “pat” answers, a merely unthinking moral code, nor with creed or dogma in religion. They want to discover the real values behind them, the rocklike Truth, that which is fundamental and living. In the hiatus between disbelief and a new understanding we may witness a wholesale overthrow of the status quo in all departments of life, but if there is a fundamental Truth to be found, it must be powerful enough to push its way through and stand forth clear and strong in a new way. Then the symbols will not matter *per se*, although they will still be relevant to the individual seeker.

To take an instance of this last statement: an inspired speaker was talking about Truth to a group of people on the west coast of America. He was using the symbolism of the Bible and Christian Science. There was a man in the group who had somewhat reluctantly come to this gathering. As he listened, he became absorbed by what was being said and exclaimed, “Why, this is the spiritual truth that lies behind my subject, ecology!” Now the speaker had no knowledge of this man’s subject, nor even of the terms it uses and yet the fundamental essences of spiritual Truth which the speaker was expressing in Bible and Christian Science terminology included the spiritual truth that lay behind the subject of ecology. If a musician had been there, he might have said, “Why, this is spiritual music!” Or an artist, “Why, this is pure art!” Surely this is what must have happened on the day of Pentecost when the apostles preached the Truth and every man heard them speak in his own language.

One visualizes the time coming when, amongst students of various branches of human knowledge, their latent spiritual sense will be increasingly altered to the deeper spiritual

origins of their subject, and quite naturally they will express these in their work and activity. Then will a new world Pentecost be on us.

Today's generation may feel that they do not need the type of symbolism that the Bible offers. We are moving into a new era. Perhaps, but not so far in the Western world no other one book reaches so many people of differing nationalities, language and colour. In fact, under the heading "Bible remains a best seller" the churches correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph* reported in September 1969 "The continuing vitality of the Bible is one of the wonders of history, says a statement issued by United Bible Societies.....Last year the United Bible Societies alone distributed a record total of more than 110,000,000 Scriptures and various parts of the Bible. In addition millions of Bibles are sold through the ordinary commercial and other channels."

What a link could be forged if creed and dogma and separatist religious sects founded on Bible truth could be superseded by the pure Science of Bible, so that common fundamental values of life itself, in their deepest and most basic form, could be universally understood and accepted. They will be anyway, because no one can turn back what *is*, but the moment of their acceptance may be accelerated if we can livingly illuminated a common symbolism which is already at hand with countless seekers.

Naturally the Scriptures are open to infinite interpretation, for their subject is infinity itself. But one's experience is that as the key of specific spiritual values and their consistent operation continues to unlock the Bible and in up to date form, it gives one an understanding of Truth that is increasingly universal. Let us always remember, though, that Truth is greater than any book. The apostle John said of Jesus' works that "if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." Surely this is even more so with the Truth that impelled the vast panorama of Bible revelation.

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