

WHAT IS SPIRITUALISM?

It answers the question: "If a man die, shall he live again; is it all over with me when I have laid aside this mortal body; are those dear and loved ones who have been severed from me by death, blotted out of existence for ever, or do they live, and love, and grow in knowledge in a better and happier clime, where I shall meet them in a few short fleeting years?" Most important question! While it remains unanswered, mankind, like doomed convicts, await, in a state of preliminary trial and suffering, the final operation of inevitable fate. At this dark and hideous picture the human mind naturally recoils; and if it can be shown that man is immortal—that a better life awaits the conclusion of this one, that this earth is a preparatory school-house, and that the future is eternal progression towards more perfect and happy conditions, then man's aspirations met, the justice and mercy of the Creator is vindicated, and man is put in possession of more worlds than one, and can enjoy them all in anticipation.

How does Spiritualism answer this great question, so all-important, that it has been propounded millions of times during the last four thousand years? The answer is very simple, and at the same time unquestionably certain. The cravings of the human soul are satisfied on this important matter by placing man in direct communication with such as have departed this life, and thus, by face-to-face intercourse, as it were, practically convincing the investigator that those who were deemed lost have only gone before, and live to inform us of their continued existence. Those who are unacquainted with the subject may smile incredulously at such expectations, while the more thoughtful will be glad to know how such a desirable consummation can be effected. To such it may be simply stated that communion with the spirit-world is not an impossibility, a miracle, a superstition, a trick, nor a delusion; it is a natural law of human existence, and has manifested itself in all ages of the world. History is replete with records of spirit-communion, most notably the Bible, and the sacred books of all peoples. Indeed, all religions have emanated from this source. For how could man have known anything of spiritual existence, unless those in that higher realm had been able to communicate the fact to him? It does not require that you should be of any particular creed or belief in order to establish communion with the spirit-world, which depends upon temperament, or bodily peculiarities of those who conduct the inquiry, and not on their knowledge or theories of any kind. To ensure success, a medium is

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necessary. And pray what is a medium? the curious and interested reader will be ready to exclaim. We reply: A medium is a person so constituted as to give off from the body a fine magnetism, or invisible power, similar to that peculiar to the magnet which attracts iron. This substance, though invisible, is the connecting link between mind and matter—the force through the agency of which we move our bodies and do the work of life, and, in short, enables the human spirit while in the flesh to control the physical body. The bodies of spiritual beings are supposed to be constituted of a similar material to this invisible fluid, whereby spirits coming near a medium are able to connect themselves with his magnetism, and thus exercise their will over material objects or human beings. This process was carried on long before modern Spiritualism was known. By this means guardian angels and ministering spirits have in all ages been enabled to approach humanity, and impress their minds with that which was necessary for their welfare and enlightenment. Through this faculty inventors and men of genius have been able to give new light to the world; and hence we see that Spiritualism, besides showing man how to communicate with the spirit-world, is a most important element in the science of mind.

We can now understand how the spirit which is invisible may be able to influence man and visible objects. The spirit-circle is formed by six or eight persons sitting round a table, and placing the palms of the hands lightly on the top of it. If a person having the natural qualifications of a medium is present, and if the temperaments of the other sitters are congenial, the magnetic power of the whole company will gather in a cloud over the table and the sitters, enabling the attendant spirits to move the table up and down, or from side to side, and even to float it in the air, while no human hand is touching it. This is almost incredible, but quite easy of explanation by the laws of magnetism above alluded to. When tables thus move, communication can at once be established by asking the intelligence that moves the table to make it tip a certain number of times, or cause raps as signals in answer to questions, or to indicate letters of the alphabet. A more direct way of communion is by writing. When certain persons thus sit at a table they find their hands moved about by an influence over which they have no control. This is to indicate that the spirits wish to write through them. If such a person take a pencil in the hand thus moved, he will be caused to write without any control or thought on his part.

In this way information has been communicated with which no person present was acquainted, and the autographs of strangers who had died years before have been written. Other mediums are put into a sleeping state, called the trance, by the spirits, just as a mesmeriser operates on his subjects, only the spirit-mesmeriser is not visible. In

this state the medium is made to say anything which the spirits desire, even to deliver lectures and sermons. Sometimes the mediums will act and personify deceased persons, though they never saw them in life. Another phase of mediumship is clairvoyance, by which mediums see spirits and describe them, the same as they would persons in the flesh. The clairvoyant sight can see the magnetic elements which are invisible to ordinary sight, and thus is enabled to perceive spirits.

There is a medium in almost every family, and if spirit-circles were formed generally by one family uniting with another, the whole population might be put in communication with the spirit-world at once, and derive enlightenment and comfort from its inhabitants, who have advanced beyond the mortal stage of shortsightedness. Investigators, however, must bear in mind that spirits are but human like themselves. Some of them know no more than those in the flesh, and perhaps much less, because a departed person—ignorant, depraved, or criminal—has power to communicate as well as the intelligent and exalted. The best means of getting into communion with enlightened and good spirits, is to have elevated and disinterested motives, seeking the truth for its own sake, and not for the gratification of any personal conceit or selfish purpose. Do not be credulous and believe that you are in communion with saints, heroes, and men of genius. Demand a test of identity from every spirit that communicates, and if your motives are good and your purposes pure, you will soon be attended by spirit-guides or co-workers in the upper world, who will protect you from the advances of those who would harm or deceive you. That all may have an opportunity of investigating this matter for themselves, the following rules for the spirit-circle are appended for guidance.

RULES AND CONDITIONS FOR THE SPIRIT-CIRCLE.

ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS.—The phenomena cannot be successfully elicited in very warm, sultry weather, in extreme cold, when thunder and lightning and magnetic disturbances prevail, when the atmosphere is very moist, or when there is much rain, or storms of wind. A warm, dry atmosphere is best, as it presents the mean between all extremes, and agrees with the harmonious state of man's organism which is proper for the manifestation of spiritual phenomena. A subdued light or darkness increases the power and facilitates control.

LOCAL CONDITIONS.—The room in which a circle is held for development or investigation should be set apart for that purpose. It should be comfortably warmed and ventilated, but draughts or currents of air should be avoided. Those persons composing the circle should meet in the room about an hour before the experiments commence; the same sitters should attend each time, and occupy the same places. This maintains the peculiar magnetic conditions necessary to the production of the phenomena. A developing circle exhausts power, or uses it up.

PHYSIOLOGICAL CONDITIONS.—The phenomena are produced by a vital force emanating from the sitters, which the spirits use as a connecting link between themselves and objects. Certain temperaments give off this power; others emit an opposite influence. If the circle is composed of persons with suitable temperaments, manifestations will take place readily; if the contrary be the case, much perseverance will be necessary to produce results. If both kinds of temperament are present, they require to be arranged so as to produce harmony in the psychical atmosphere evolved from them. The physical manifestations especially depend upon temperament. If a circle does not succeed, changes should be made in the sitters till the proper conditions are supplied.

MENTAL CONDITIONS.—All forms of mental excitement are detrimental to success. Those with strong and opposite opinions should not sit together: opinionated, dogmatic, and positive people are better out of the circle and room. Parties between whom there are feelings of envy, hate, contempt, or other inharmonious sentiment should not sit at the same circle. The vicious and crude should be excluded from all such experiments. The minds of the sitters should be in a passive rather than an active state, possessed by the love of truth and of mankind. One harmonious and fully-developed individual is invaluable in the formation of a circle.

THE CIRCLE should consist of from three to ten persons of both sexes, and sit round an oval, oblong, or square table. Cane-bottomed chairs or those with wooden seats are preferable to stuffed chairs. Mediums and sensitives should never sit on stuffed chairs, cushions, or sofas used by other persons, as the influences which accumulate in the cushions often affect the mediums unpleasantly. The active and quiet, the fair and dark, the ruddy and pale, male and female, should be seated alternately. If there is a medium present, he or she should occupy the end of the table with the back to the north. A mellow mediumistic person should be placed on each side of the medium, and those most positive should be at the opposite corners. No person should be placed behind the medium. A circle may represent a horseshoe magnet, with the medium placed between the poles.

CONDUCT AT THE CIRCLE.—The sitters should place their hands on the table, and endeavour to make each other feel easy and comfortable. Agreeable conversation, singing, reading, or invocation may be engaged in—anything that will tend to harmonise the minds of those present, and unite them in one purpose, is in order. By engaging in such exercises the circle may be made very profitable apart from the manifestations. Sitters should not desire anything in particular, but unite in being pleased to receive that which is best for all. The director of the circle should sit opposite the medium, and put all questions to the spirit, and keep order. A recorder should take notes of the conditions and proceedings. Manifestations may take place in a few minutes, or the circle may sit many times before any result occurs. Under these circumstances it is well to change the positions of the sitters, or introduce new elements, till success is achieved. When the table begins to tilt, or when raps occur, do not be too impatient to get answers to questions. When the table can answer questions by giving three tips or raps for "Yes," and one for "No," it may assist in placing the sitters properly. The spirits or intelligences which produce the phenomena should be treated with the same courtesy and consideration as you would desire for yourselves if you were introduced into the company of strangers for their personal benefit. At the same time, the sitters should not on any account allow their judgment to be warped or their good sense imposed upon by spirits, whatever their professions may be. Reason with them kindly, firmly, and considerately.

INTERCOURSE WITH SPIRITS is carried on by various means. The simplest is three tips of the table or raps for "Yes," and one for "No." By this means the spirits can answer in the affirmative or negative. By calling over the alphabet the spirits will rap at the proper letters to constitute a message. Sometimes the hand of a sitter is shaken, then a pencil should be placed in the hand, when the spirits may write by it automatically. Other sitters may become entranced, and the spirits use the vocal organs of such mediums to speak. The spirits sometimes impress mediums, while others are clairvoyant, and see the spirits, and messages from them written in luminous letters in the atmosphere. Sometimes the table and other objects are lifted, moved from place to place, and even through closed doors. Patiently and kindly seek for tests of identity from loved ones in the spirit-world, and exercise caution respecting spirits who make extravagant pretensions of any kind.

BEFORE proceeding with their investigations, inquirers into Spiritualism should correspond with Mr. Burns, Proprietor of the Spiritual Institution, 15, Southampton Row, London, W.C., who will gladly forward a packet of publications and useful information gratis. Stamps should in all cases be enclosed for return postage. Deputations of mediums or lecturers may be arranged for to visit any locality where public meetings or seances can be instituted.

Those who are desirous of becoming acquainted with Spiritualism in all its bearings, should read *THE MEDIUM AND DAYBREAK*, the Weekly organ of the Movement, price One Penny. The whole of the literature of the Movement may be read by subscribing to the Progressive Library. Other numbers of "Seed Corn," and a great variety of cheap publications on the subject, may be obtained of J. Burns, Spiritual Institution, 15, Southampton Row, London, W.C.