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## Animal magnetism— evil suggestion and nothing more

By Elise L. Moore

I'd been invited to the boss's house for lunch! It was Saturday. Winter sunshine streamed into the kitchen as cooking aromas filled the air. We chatted at the kitchen table. As his wife joined the conversation, pleasantries evolved into subtle suggestions. He complained about office politics. He jabbed at his supervisor. He tried to make me suspicious of others' motives. There was even a veiled threat that if I continued working on certain projects, my job security might be affected. Everything was said with a smile of comradely confidence. This was for my benefit, because he trusted me. I left full of lunch—and consternation.

As I drove home, I began to pray. "Father, what do you have to say about all this?" Where should my loyalties be? If I didn't play along, would my career stall? But these questions weren't much of a prayer. They were swirling the information around like stirring cream and sugar in an after-dinner coffee. Nothing was getting clearer.

So I changed the focus of my prayer. Instead of pondering the problem, I prayed about motives. What was this man's motive for complaining about his supervisor and recruiting me? Suddenly mental bells rang and whistles blew. What was at work here was animal magnetism. With that revelation, I knew what to do.

Perhaps you're asking, "What's animal magnetism?" The term was popular in the 19th century and refers to any attempt of one person to mesmerize or mentally influence another, negatively. Mary Baker Eddy, the 19th-century theologian who discovered Christian Science, used the phrase *animal magnetism* to describe all forms of evil, including any disruptive or destructive mental influence. This phenomenon may take two forms—ignorant or malicious. Mrs. Eddy describes both in her book on Christian Science, *Science and Health*.

Ignorant animal magnetism is the belief that life and intelligence are material instead of spiritual. Someone under its influence tends to ignore the spiritual or to be mystified by it. Often these people are seeking more spiritual ways and means of thinking and living, but they don't know how to get there.

Malicious animal magnetism, on the other hand, is selfish, willful, and bent on subterfuge. It knows what is right, but consciously chooses to excuse wrong methods to achieve its purpose. Someone under the influence of malicious animal magnetism will put his or her own self-interest above all else. At its worst, such malice is not above harming others, if that will enable it to achieve its selfish goals. It would influence people into thinking that evil can be successful and even useful.

Neither form of animal magnetism is ever considered to be a person, like a personal devil. But people do seem to be influenced by these mental modes if they don't know what they are, or if they choose to ignore them. The classic television comedy *Hogan's Heroes* provides away to show the difference between the person being influenced by animal magnetism and animal magnetism itself.

Placed in a prisoner of war camp during World War II, the American Colonel Hogan used charm and deception to trick the German Colonel Klink in every episode. Hogan wasn't animal magnetism. But he used trickery, illusion, and even violence to manipulate the situation to his advantage. Colonel Klink never seemed to wise up to the manipulative appeals to his ego. He was reduced to looking foolish in front of his supervisors and feebly whining, "Hogan! Hogan!" as he realized he'd fallen once again for Hogan's suggestions. Lovable Sergeant Schultz tried to ignore any signs of subterfuge. He'd close his eyes and bellow, "I know nothing. Nothing!"

Actually no one really wants to be like Schultz, Klink, or even Hogan. Who would want to ignore animal magnetism like Sergeant Schultz or be victimized by it like Colonel Klink? No one would really want to be seduced into achieving goals through chicanery or manipulation instead of intelligence and honesty.

Mrs. Eddy wrote several articles about animal magnetism so that people wouldn't be stupefied or manipulated. Before the episode with my boss, I'd been studying her article "Ways that are Vain, " <sup>1</sup> and from it, I gained a way

to pray specifically about this kind of manipulation. First, it's important to identify what is good, because it's vital to know what good looks and feels like before one attempts to face down evil. This sentence in Mrs. Eddy's article helped me to gauge the presence of good in action: "The natural fruits of Christian Science Mind-healing are harmony, brotherly love, spiritual growth and activity." If these elements are in place, good flows freely. If one or more of them is missing, it's a warning signal that some form of animal magnetism could be crowding out the natural functioning of good.

Now that the evidence of good is identified, what are the signs of an evil influence? Mrs. Eddy mentions four signs: that animal magnetism paralyzes good, gives activity to evil, starts factions, and engenders envy and hatred. As the article puts it: "The malicious aim of perverted mind-power, or animal magnetism, is to paralyze good and give activity to evil. It starts factions and engenders envy and hatred . . ." I've found these signals to be as certain an indicator of negative mental influence as footprints are indicators that someone unseen at the moment has crossed a path. Tracking the footprints of mental manipulation is easier when one ceases looking for a person and starts looking for the mental signs left behind.

If good hesitates to act, if evil justifies and defends itself in the name of good, if it splits and rips the fabric of an organization, department, or friendship, these are signals that negative mental influence has walked that way.

Once it has been discerned, negative mental influence has lost the element of surprise. It's like Colonel Klink refusing to listen to the suggestions of Colonel Hogan. If he had ever failed to cooperate, the sitcom would have ended. So the sitcom that evil tries to play out at work, at home, or elsewhere, virtually ends when a person identifies a suggestion as just that—an evil suggestion and nothing more.

After one has uncovered the attempt of evil to disturb thought, it's important to take positive action. In this statement Mrs. Eddy provides three positive actions: ". . . those who are the truest friends of mankind, and conscientious in their desire to do right and to live pure and Christian lives, should be more zealous to do good, more watchful and vigilant."

"Zealous to do good." *Zeal* has a couple of meanings. The higher or more spiritual view in the Glossary of *Science and Health* is "the reflected

animation of Life, Truth, and Love." <sup>2</sup> The vigorous activity of divine Life, expressed by individuals, neutralizes the attempt of evil to paralyze good. The humble power of Christ, Truth, stops the lies that divide, and unites individuals in trust and cooperation. The affection and grace of divine Love heal the heart of envy and hatred. Putting all of one's effort into expressing divine Life, Truth, and Love isn't being pushy or using human will. It's the human reflecting the divine. This heals and transforms one's life.

To be "more watchful and vigilant"—may sound redundant, and they are to some degree. But being watchful could imply looking for opportunity while being vigilant might be seen as being alert to danger. To me this is a front-door, back-door approach to alertness. Being watchful is standing at the front door awaiting opportunities for being and doing good. Being vigilant is guarding the back door so that no subtle influence of evil can enter unnoticed. With this, one's mental home is secured.

In the situation with my boss, I never acted on his suggestions. Instead I tried diligently to find solutions to stalled projects by working more closely with colleagues. The individuals he'd advised me to avoid, proved to be quite helpful. Projects were completed on time. Morale was good. Within the year, there was a reorganization, and I ended up reporting to another manager.

Vigilantly following the three steps of identifying good, discerning the signs of evil, and neutralizing the influence of animal magnetism are powerful ways to get out of the sitcom of animal magnetism and into the calm of a more spiritual way of life.

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<sup>1</sup> The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany. pp. 210-213. <sup>2</sup> Science and Health, p. 599.