



LESSONS ON THE ROAD

At the age of 19, **MARK UNGER** prayed for a friend who had menstrual cramps, and she was healed. He may not have known this was just the beginning of a life-long healing practice. In his mid-20s, Unger made a commitment to go public in his practice of Christian Science, and opened an office in downtown Spokane, Washington, advertising as a Christian Science practitioner. Since then, much has changed in his life. But his love for God and humanity remains firmly fixed. Unger talked with Staff Editor Suzanne Smedley from his practitioner's office in the Ashland, Massachusetts, home he shares with his wife, Val, and their cat, Sophie.

Mark, what do you think is the key to feeling one with God?

What I've learned in Christian Science is that there is one Principle, or Love, that governs the universe. And I think the key to feeling one with God is love. In fact, Mary Baker Eddy said this in the book she wrote to explain Christian Science, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*: "For true happiness, man must harmonize with his Principle, divine Love; the Son must be in accord with the Father, in conformity with Christ" (p. 337).

And, to me, the rule of this Principle is found in the two great commandments that Jesus gave us: "Love God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind," and also, "Love your neighbor as yourself." I've found that the more I express love, the more I feel the presence of divine Love.

What do you mean by "expressing" love?

Thinking about others more than myself. Doing good deeds unselfishly. This is quite different from human love, because human love is conditional. It can be temporary, and can even turn to hatred. But the love that Jesus talks about means living according to the Golden Rule—doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, and loving even your enemies. If we express the opposite, such as hatred, and anger, and bitterness, we'll feel cut off from God's love, and from one another.

But can we ever be cut off from this Love?

No, because God, the Principle of the universe, is everywhere and ever present. I like to equate our relationship with this divine Love to the relationship the sun has with its rays. The rays are connected to the sun. You can't cut the rays off from the sun, any more than you can cut the sun off from its rays. They are one.

I think we connect to everyone and everything through this one source. And I don't think we can find a genuine connection with anyone without first finding our oneness with God, our connection to Him or Her. Ignorance that there is an all-encompassing Love that's connecting us to Him or Her—and therefore to one another—is something that will make us feel detached. It will make us feel alone in the world.

If someone feels they've done something wrong that has rightfully separated them from God and His love, or that they no longer deserve His love, what can they do?

It's helpful to realize that there's nothing we could ever do that would cut ourselves off from God. Jesus brought that out in his teaching. It seemed that no matter what anybody did (in fact, he hung around with a lot of people who did things that weren't good), he helped them understand this. What they had to do was let go of the old, false concept they had of themselves, as having egos, agendas, and identities separate from God, and see this new reality.

Jesus himself knew his nature was inseparable, at one, with God. He said, "I and my Father are one" . . .

When Jesus said that, he was, as Mrs. Eddy explained, referring to the Christ, his divine nature, "the godliness which animated him" (*Science and Health*, p. 26). That same Christ is what animates us and works in us, revealing our oneness with God. Jesus referred to his Christly nature when he said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). Clearly the people of his day didn't understand what he meant, because they argued that he wasn't old enough to have lived before Abraham, who had lived about 2,000 years earlier. But Jesus was referring to the Christ, that divine nature from God that has always existed throughout time.

At the same time Jesus was showing us that our own link to the divine is unsevered—whether we appear to be diseased, a sinner, or even dead. The fact that Jesus healed disease, destroyed evil, and raised the dead, proved this point. I love something else Jesus said: "He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone" (John 8:29). I think he was showing us that the Father has not left us alone, either.

Sometimes the sinners, some of whom are referred to in the Bible as the publicans—people not well thought of because of their dishonesty or corruption—were the most receptive to Jesus' message, because they were humbled by his words. And I think this humility is another key element in finding our oneness with God.

You mentioned a humbling experience . . .

It was a life-lesson for me.

Tell us about it.

When I was 19 or 20, I went on a year-long road trip by myself on my motorcycle. It was for the purpose of learning about God and how God works in our lives. One afternoon,



COURTESY PHOTO

I-12 East on the way to New Orleans in 1973-74.

on the spur of the moment, some friends and I decided to hitchhike from New Orleans to a city about 60 miles away.

We'd been hitchhiking for a few hours, not getting any rides, and I felt this nudging inside that said, "This is not working out. This is not the right time to go." But I wanted to go so badly, and I just didn't want to hear it. Pretty soon, it got dark, and we hadn't gotten a ride. I just hung on.

When we finally did get a ride, they took us to a two-lane road and dropped us off. We kept hitchhiking on this lonely road, and finally got another ride. They dropped us off at a crossroads, and we didn't know which way to go. So we thumbed down another car, and the guy said, "You're going totally the wrong way. Here, I'll take you down this road." So he took us down and dropped us off. The whole night, basically, went like that. Nothing was going right.

We finally ended up on this old, lonely road about 10:00 at night. And there was no traffic. We were stuck, from what I could see. So finally I went to God, and I said, "God, I'm sorry I didn't listen. Could You please help us get back home?" I was really praying. And moments later, a car came by and picked us up. The driver took us back toward New Orleans. He took us a ways, and then dropped us off because he was going to a nearby dance club. We were on a two-lane road where there was absolutely no traffic. It was probably going on 11:00 by now. And I'm figuring, "We're completely stuck, and we're going to be sleeping out here all night."

And then I really went to God and asked, "OK, what is it that I'm supposed to learn here?" That was when I started looking around, and I realized that we were right back where

we'd started. In the exact same place. For hours, we'd been going in a circle.

I felt God was talking to me through this experience, saying, "If you turn away from Me, if you turn away from My direction, My goodness, My love, My guidance—and just do your own thing in life—you will go in a vicious circle. You will not get anywhere." I really got the lesson that that's what will happen in life when we're not doing the will of God, of Love, which I've found always gives us the very best of everything. It will only make us feel cut off from our divine source.

And that realization changed something for you?

At that moment, even though there were no cars around, I knew that my suffering was over. I'd learned my lesson. We were miles away, and many turns and freeways away, from where we needed to be. But I remember I turned to my friends and said, "You know what? Don't sweat it. We're going to get one ride right to where we're going."

Just then, the guy who had dropped us off decided to leave the club. He came out of the parking lot, picked us up, and asked, "Where are you headed?" We told him New Orleans, and he said, "Oh, darn, I've got to go such-and-such a way, so I'll drop you off at this street, and you can continue to hitchhike." But I was just reveling in the fact that God was good and that God was present, and I wasn't concerned. And just as he was saying that he was going to take this other turn, he drove up the ramp that went our way—and he ended up dropping us off right at our street. Instead of feeling that it had been a bummer of a night, I was just beaming. I felt so loved, so cared for.

It only takes a second. You can turn on a dime to find that connection with God that's never lost. I had turned away from God, but God had never turned away from me. He was always there, keeping me safe and helping me and my friends. And when I saw this, everything changed.

So an experience like this can stay with you?

You can't go through something like that and not be a changed person.

One of the key things I learned was that there really is a God, and we really are connected to Him/Her. I saw that this God was taking care of me, and consequently it was clear that He was taking care of everyone. I could trust my life to Him. Instead of making all my own decisions, and doing my own thing with my little limited view of the world, I learned to turn more and more to this Love to guide me in my decisions. When you do that, you feel a certain freedom. You feel supported in what you do. You feel loved, you feel guided. You have the ideas you need.

And the beautiful thing is that because we can't be separated from God even for an instant—any more than a sunbeam can be separated from the sun—we can always turn to this Love to help us. **ics**