

COURSE ON SPIRITISM

WORKBOOK – 6

(Fundamental Principles of the Spiritist Teachings)



A regular course on Spiritism would be given in order to develop the principles of Science and to promote the fondness for serious studies. This course would have the advantage of laying the foundation for the unit of principles, of forming enlightened followers, capable of spreading the spiritist ideas, and developing a great number of mediums. I consider this course of a nature to exercise capital influence on the future of Spiritism and its consequences."

-Allan Kardec ("Posthumous Works" - Project, 1868)



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WORKBOOK 6:

Fundamental Principles of the Spiritist Teachings

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This material is an adaptation of the “Systematic Study of the Spiritist Doctrine”, edited by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation.

This project was coordinated by the teamwork effort of Vanessa Anseloni, Luís Eduardo F. Almeida, Celia M. S. Batista and M. Daniel Santos.

This material is subjected to improvement.

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INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.

It is with great pleasure that the Spiritist Society of Baltimore (SSB), an educational non-profit organization established at the city of Baltimore, Maryland, offers this material for the dissemination of Spiritism in English. The main purpose of this work is to fulfill, in the English language, Kardec's ideas about a systematic study of Spiritism principles. Accordingly, the interested student has an opportunity to build up a fundamental understand of the scientific, moral and philosophic aspects of Spiritism, as well as a scholar of Spiritism, with knowledge acquired after many years of study, should also find interesting references in this material.

The material presented herein is an adaptation of the "Systematic study of Spiritism" as assembled by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation (BSF). This source was selected because of many years of experience with its use by SSB and of its widespread and unquestionable efficacy in disseminating Spiritism in Brazil. However, this work is not a direct translation of the material available in Portuguese. Great care was taken in order to adapt all lessons to the bibliography available in English at the time of its publication. With this in mind, and scrupulously adhering to Kardec's work, many lessons of the original BSF work were combined as well as new lessons were included. All references used are clearly cited at the end of each lesson.

The lessons are assembled as instructions in how to develop and accomplished each topic. A coordinator should be assigned to each lesson, carefully review the material in advance and use the instructions to address each topic. This material should be used in a regular study setting and many lessons were planned to be worked by students divided in teams. As much emphasis as possible was given to build active lessons that would involve and demand the participation of all students. This should foster friendship among all class members and allow all students to participate and to develop their knowledge as the course progress. It is estimated that each lesson should take between 1 – 1 ½ hours to be completed. The use of projection resources, like overhead or slide presentations during the suggested brief introductions is recommended, but not indispensable.

As in every human activity, no matter how simple or complex, it is necessary to establish since the beginning rules and regulations that will: (1) help guide the work in order that the objectives are attained and (2) to clarify all expectations and to assign responsibilities so that all fell as part of a team. In the next section, we show the rules and regulations for our study section at SSB, which is discussed with everyone who intends to coordinate lesson. Of course, these are guidelines and each Spiritist group should make the necessary adaptations.

Finally, we offer a special thanks to Mr. Jorge Godinho, BSF member, for his distinctive friendship and to all of our spiritual Mentors and Guides who supported us throughout this endeavor.

With Love to all,
-The SSB family

Sample of rules and regulations for coordinators

The Spiritist Society of Baltimore, Inc. (SSB) is an educational non-profit organization that offers spiritual, psychological and material assistance to all in need. One of its services is the study group meetings in which Spiritism is thoroughly studied as recommended by Allan Kardec. Each meeting comprises of a 1 ¼ hour-study session, followed by a passes session. The coordinators of these meetings have two major responsibilities: (1) to guarantee participant's study and understanding of Spiritism as contained in Kardec's books; (2) the organization of the study group meeting. The SSB may appoint coordinators that will take turns in the conduction of the meetings. It is essential that each coordinator follows the rules and regulations contained in this memorandum in order to guarantee an optimal level of achievement from participants.

Each coordinator shall:

1. Be committed to the two major responsibilities stated above.
2. Study the topic above and beyond its goals in order to be a good coordinator. Be a faithful facilitator of Spiritism. Please, do not emit personal opinions as they are not the focus of the study. Instead, make efforts to facilitate the understanding of the Superior Spirits' statements contained in Kardec's works. If during the study group session you are not sure of something, it is always better to say you will search for the answer and will bring it to them next week.
3. Run spell check on the text and also in any presented material, like power point presentations. Also, check special pronunciation at Merriam Webster Dictionary online (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>).
4. Study the meaning of the main spiritist vocabulary that will be studied on that day.
5. Print and distribute to participants a copy of the lesson to be studied.
6. Arrive at least 15-30 minutes prior to the beginning of the study session. The coordinator is responsible for the room set up. Both the study session and the passes service shall have a proper environment.
7. Welcome participants and begin the study meeting with a prayer.
8. Choose a volunteer for the initial reading and final prayer.
9. Be the primary responsible for welcoming newcomers and assisting anyone who is in need of counseling and/or spiritual treatment.
10. Please, incentive participants to kindly speak English only before, during and after the meeting.

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Now, continue your Course on Spiritism by studying its sequence
compiled in the

**Workbook 5B – The *Fundamental Principles of*
*the Spiritist Doctrine***

Lesson 1**Polytheism and Paganism****OBJECTIVES:**

1. To cite the differences between polytheism and paganism
2. To study the origins of polytheism
3. To describe the common aspects of the polytheist religions.
4. To ascertain the influence of the polytheist ideas in the moral and intellectual formation of humankind.

METHODS:

1. Prepare an introduction to the class showing that before humankind accepted a single God, many religions were polytheist, i.e., they believed in many gods. One of the most widely known cases in the Occident is the old Greek mythology. You can use the material available in the appendix section of this lesson or prepare your own material.

2. Divide the class in 2 groups. Both groups will read the same material (texts A through C) and answer the same questions. The coordinator should ensure that all members of the groups participate in the final discussion.

Read texts A through C and address the following questions:

- a) What are the characteristics of polytheism and paganism?
- b) Explain the origins of polytheism.
- c) Accordingly with question 668 of the Spirit's Book, how should we interpret the gods of antiquity?
- d) What factors were responsible for the appearance of polytheism?
- e) Why are the primitive religions polytheists and later become monotheist?
- f) Emmanuel affirms that all religions (polytheists and monotheists alike) share among them a substantial unity. How do you interpret this affirmation?

Text A: Paganism⁽¹⁾

Paganism (from Latin *paganus*, meaning "a country dweller", "rural", "rustic" or "of the country") is a blanket term which has come to connote a broad set of western spiritual or religious beliefs and practices of natural or polytheistic religions, as opposed to the Abrahamic monotheistic religions. "Pagan" is the usual translation of the Islamic term *mushrik*, which refers to 'one who worships something other than Allah'. Ethnologists do not use the term for these beliefs, which are not necessarily compatible with each other: more useful categories are shamanism, polytheism or animism. Often, the term has pejorative connotations, comparable to heathen, infidel and kafir in Islam.

From its earliest beginnings, Christianity spread much more quickly in major urban areas (like Antioch, Alexandria, Corinth, Rome) than in the countryside (in fact, the early church was almost entirely urban), and soon the word for "country dweller" became synonymous with someone who was "not a Christian," giving rise to the modern meaning of "pagan". In large part, this may have had to do with the conservative nature of rural people, who were more resistant to the new ideas of Christianity than those who lived in major urban centers.

Text B: Polytheism⁽²⁾

Polytheism is belief in, or worship of, multiple gods or divinities. The word comes from the Greek words poly+theoi, literally "many gods." Ancient religion was polytheistic, holding to a pantheon of traditional deities. The belief in many gods does not necessarily preclude, but it sometimes includes, the belief in an all-powerful all-knowing supreme being, as the ruler and parent (often king and father) of gods and mankind.

In polytheistic belief, gods are conceived as complex personages of greater or lesser status, with individual skills, needs, desires and stories. The gods are not always omnipotent or omniscient; rather, they are often portrayed as similar to humans in their personality traits, but with additional individual powers, abilities, knowledge or perceptions.

Philosophical perceptions of the gods are different to the way they are portrayed in mythology. In philosophical traditions the gods are seen as eternal, perfect at one with each other and collectively omnipotent. Neoplatonism taught the existence of 'The One', the transcendent ineffable god and unifying principle of polytheism.

For polytheists, the gods have multiple epithets, each with its own significance in specific roles, and have dominion or authority over specified areas of life and the cosmos. Thus a god may be the god of music or herding (Apollo), the god of a food (Ceres) or love (Aphrodite); have a particular role in the god-hierarchy (Zeus), or be the "patron god" of a geographical or cosmological phenomenon, or a region, town, stream or family, or liberation (Dionysos). In mythology, gods have complex social arrangements. For example, they have friends, allies, spouses, lovers and enemies, they experience human emotions such as jealousy, whimsy or uncontrolled rage, may practice infidelity or be punished, and can be born or die, only to be reborn. However such representations of the gods are seen by the philosophers as hiding deeper spiritual truths. For example it is said that in a banquet of the gods, Discord threw down a golden apple; the goddesses contended for it, and were sent by Zeus to Paris to be judged. Paris saw Aphrodite to be beautiful and gave her the apple. Here the banquet signifies the hypercosmic powers of the gods; that is why they are all together. The golden apple is the world, which being formed out of opposites, is naturally said to be 'thrown by Discord'. The different gods bestow different gifts upon the world, and are thus said to 'contend for the apple'. And the soul which lives according to sense - for that is what Paris is - not seeing the other powers in the world but only beauty, declares that the apple belongs to Aphrodite.

Text C: The Spirit's Book⁽³⁾

667. How is it that polytheism, although it is false, is nevertheless one of the most ancient and wide-spread of human beliefs?

"The conception of the unity of God could only be, in the mind of man the result of the development of his ideas. Incapable, in his ignorance, of conceiving of an immaterial being, without a determinate form, acting upon matter, man naturally attributed to Him the attributes of corporeal nature, that is to say, a form and a face; and thenceforth everything that appeared to surpass the proportions of an ordinary human intelligence was regarded by him as a divinity. Whatever he could not understand was looked upon by him as being the work of a supernatural power; and, from that assumption, to the belief in the existence of as many distinct powers as the various effects which he beheld but could not account for, there was but a step. But there have been, in all ages, enlightened men who have comprehended the impossibility of the world's being governed by this multitude of powers, without a supreme over-ruling direction, and who have thus been led to raise their thought to the conception of the one sole God"

668. As phenomena attesting the action of spirits have occurred in all ages of the world, and have thus been known from the earliest times, may they not have helped to induce a belief in the plurality of gods?

"Undoubtedly; for, as men applied the term god to whatever surpassed humanity, spirits were, for them, so many gods. For this reason, whenever a man distinguished himself among all others by his actions, his genius, or an occult power incomprehensible by the vulgar, he was made a god of, and was worshipped as such after his death."

(Kardec's comments): The word god, among the Ancients, had a wide range of meaning. It did not, as in our days, represent the Master of Nature, but was a generic term applied to all beings who appeared to stand outside of the pale of ordinary humanity and, as the manifestations that have since been known as "spiritist" had revealed to them the existence of incorporeal beings acting as one of the elementary powers of nature, they called them gods, just as we call them spirits. It is a mere question of words; with this difference, however, that, in their ignorance, purposely kept up by those whose interests it served, they built temples and raised altars to them, making them offerings which became highly lucrative for the persons who had charge of this mode of worship whereas, for us spirits are merely creatures like ourselves, more or less advanced, and having cast off their earthly envelope. If we carefully study the various attributes of the pagan divinities, we shall easily recognize those of the spirits of our day, at every degree of the scale of spirit-life, their physical state in worlds of higher advancement, the part taken by them in the things of the earthly life, and the various properties of the perispirit.

Christianity, in bringing its Divine light to our world, has taught us to refer our adoration to the only object to which it is due. But it could not destroy what is an element of nature; and the belief in the existence of the incorporeal beings around us has been perpetuated under various names. Their manifestations have never ceased; but they have been diversely interpreted, and often abused under the veil of mystery beneath which they were kept. While religion has regarded them as miracles, the incredulous have looked upon them as jugglery; but, at the present time, thanks to a more serious study of the subject, carried on in the broad daylight of scientific investigation, the doctrine of spirit-presence and spirit-action, stripped of the superstitious fancies by which it had been obscured for ages, reveals to us one of the sublimest and most important principles of nature.

CONCLUSIONS:

The study will be accomplished if the class can satisfactorily conclude that:

- The concept of many gods (polytheism) comes from the initial human attempt to explain the forces of nature (like lightening and thunder, floods, earthquakes, etc) as the action of gods. Over time, these gods were characterized as human beings susceptible to human passions, like jealousy, greed, rage, etc.

- Over time the concept of many gods was substituted, primarily through the Jewish people and the first revelation, into the monotheist idea of a single God.

- The Spirit's Doctrine instruct us that the original idea of many gods in fact come from an incomplete understanding of the spiritual world and refers to many superior spirits who in fact assisted Humankind during its development.

REFERENCES:

1. From Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paganism>, August/2006)
2. From wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism>, August/2006)
3. Kardec, Allan, "The Spirits' Book", questions 667 and 668, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.

APPENDIX

(A) **Greek Mythology** from Wipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_mythology, August/2006)

Greek mythology consists in part of a large collection of narratives that explain the origins of the world and detail the lives and adventures of a wide variety of gods, goddesses, heroes, and heroines. These accounts were initially fashioned and disseminated in an oral-poetic tradition; our surviving sources of Greek mythology are literary reworkings of this oral tradition. Greek mythology was also reflected in artifacts, some of them works of art, notably the repertoire of vase-painters. The Greeks themselves referred to the myths and associated artworks to throw light on cult practices and ritual traditions that were already ancient and, at times, poorly understood.

The Greek gods

In the wide variety of myths and legends that constitute ancient Greek mythology, the deities that were native to the Greek peoples are described as having essentially human but ideal bodies. Although each god's physical appearance is distinct, they have the power to take on whatever form they choose. The few composite or chimerical beings that occur, such as the Sphinx, had their origins in Anatolia or the Near East and were imported into the Greek culture.



Perseus with the head of Medusa

Regardless of their underlying forms, the Greek gods have many fantastic abilities: they can disguise themselves or make themselves invisible to humans, they can instantly transport themselves to any location, and are able to act through the words and deeds of humans, often without the knowledge of the human through whom the gods act. Most significantly, the gods are not affected by disease, can be wounded only under highly unusual circumstances, and are immortal. Even though each of the gods was born, most of them growing from infancy to adulthood, once they reach their physical peak of maturity they do not age beyond that point.

Each god descends from his or her own genealogy, pursues differing interests, has a certain area of expertise, and is governed by a unique personality; however, these descriptions arise from a multiplicity of archaic local variants, which do not always agree with one another. When these gods were called upon in poetry, prayer or cult, they are referred to by a combination of their name and epithets, that identify them by these distinctions from other manifestations of themselves. A Greek deity's epithet may reflect a particular aspect of that god's role, as Apollo Musagetes is "Apollo, [as] leader of the Muses." Alternatively the epithet may identify a particular and localized aspect of the god, sometimes thought to be already ancient during the classical epoch of Greece.

In such mythic narratives, we are told that the gods are all part of a huge family, spanning multiple generations. The oldest of the gods were responsible for the creation of the world, but younger gods usurped their power. In many familiar epic poems set in the "age of heroes," the twelve Olympians are said to have appeared in person. In order to help out the Greeks' primitive ancestors, the gods performed miracles, instructed them in various areas of practical knowledge, taught them proper methods of worship, rewarded good behavior and chastised immorality, and even had children with them.

Lesson 2	Moses and the First Revelation: The Ten Commandments of God's Law
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OBJECTIVES:

1. To identify the role played by the Hebrew people for the appearance of monotheism.
2. To know the relevant facts about Moses' life.
3. To identify Moses as a great lawmaker and as the missionary of the first revelation from God to humankind.
4. To analyze the Ten Commandments and justify its divine origin.

METHODS:

1. The coordinator should make an introduction about Moses. The following material⁽¹⁾ can be used as a guide. Feel free to bring your own ideas. Be careful not to repeat the material that will be used by the groups later in the class.

Moses in Christian thought

For Christians, Moses - mentioned more often in the New Testament than any other Old Testament figure - is often a symbol of the contrast between traditional Judaism and the teachings of Jesus. New Testament writers often made comparison of Jesus' words and deeds with Moses' in order to explain Jesus' mission. In Acts 7:39-43, 51-53, for example, the rejection of Moses by the Jews that worshipped the golden calf is likened to the rejection of Jesus by the Jews that continued in traditional Judaism.

Moses also figures into several of Jesus' messages. When he met the Pharisee Nicodemus at night in the third chapter of John, he compares Moses' lifting up of the bronze serpent in the wilderness, which any Israelite could look upon and be healed, to his own lifting up (by his death and resurrection) for the people to look upon and be healed. In the sixth chapter, Jesus responds to the people's claim that Moses provided them manna in the wilderness by saying that it was not Moses, but God, who provided. Calling himself the "bread of life", Jesus states that he is now provided to feed God's people.

Moses is also regarded as a symbol of the law. He is presented in all three Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17, Mark 9, and Luke 9, respectively.

Later Christians found numerous other parallels between the life of Moses and Jesus to the extent that Jesus was likened to a "second Moses." For instance, Jesus' escape from the slaughter by Herod in Bethlehem is compared to Moses' escape from Pharaoh's designs to kill Hebrew infants. Such parallels, unlike those mentioned above, are not pointed out within Scripture.

2. Divide the class into 2 groups. Each group should read the assigned texts. The coordinator should prepare a general sketch to guide the discussion from group I to the whole class.

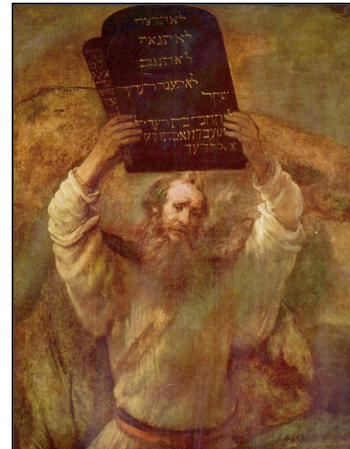
Group I. **Moses' Life⁽²⁾**

The group must read the text and prepare a summary with the main facts of Moses' life to be presented to the class.

Moses or Móshe is a legendary Hebrew liberator, leader, lawgiver, prophet, and historian. Moses is one of the greatest figures in Biblical history.

According to the Book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible, Moses was a son of Amram and his wife, Jochebed, a Levite. Jochebed (Moses' mother), was Amram's (Moses' father) father's sister (aunt). Aaron is Moses' elder brother.

Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into the desert, and received the Torah from God on Mount Sinai. There are various conjectures and calculations for when this event might have occurred, ranging from the 13th to the 16th centuries BCE. Arising in part from his age, but also because 120 is elsewhere stated as the maximum age for Noah's descendants (one interpretation of Genesis 6:3), "may you live to 120" has become a common blessing among Jews.



Moses with the
Tablets, by Rembrandt

Moses' legacy was probably expounding the doctrine of monotheism, which was not widely accepted at the time, codifying it in Jewish religion with the 1st Commandment and punishing polytheists. He is considered a prophet in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.

In the Exodus account, the birth of Moses occurred at a time when the current Egyptian Pharaoh had commanded that all male children born to Hebrew slaves should be killed by drowning in the Nile. The Torah leaves the identity of this Pharaoh unstated. But he is believed by some to be Thutmose III or Ramses II; other, earlier pharaohs have also been suggested including a Hyksos pharaoh or one shortly after the Hyksos had been expelled.

Jochebed, the wife of the Levite Amram, had a son, and kept him concealed for three months. When she could keep him hidden no longer, rather than deliver him to be killed, she set him adrift on the Nile River in a small craft of bulrushes coated in pitch.

The daughter of Pharaoh discovered the baby and adopted him as her son, and named him "Moses" (considered to mean "to draw out"). By Biblical account, Moses' sister Miriam observed the progress of the tiny boat. Miriam then asked Pharaoh's daughter if she would like a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby. Thereafter, Jochebed was employed as the child's nurse, and he grew and was brought to Pharaoh's daughter and became her son.

After Moses had reached adulthood, he went to see how his brethren, who were enslaved to the Egyptians, were faring. Seeing an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he killed

the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand, supposing that no one who would be disposed to reveal the matter knew of it. The next day, seeing two Hebrews quarreling, he endeavored to separate them, whereupon the Hebrew who was wronging the other taunted Moses for slaying the Egyptian. Moses soon discovered from a higher source that the affair was known, and that Pharaoh was likely to put him to death for it; he therefore made his escape to the Sinai peninsula and settled with Hobab, or Jethro, priest of Midian, whose daughter Zipporah he in due time married. There he sojourned forty years, following the occupation of a shepherd, during which time his son Gershom was born. (...)

One day, as Moses led his flock to Mount Horeb, he saw a burning bush that would not be consumed. When he turned aside to look more closely at the marvel, God spoke to him from the bush revealing his name to Moses.

God also commissioned him to go to Egypt and deliver his fellow Hebrews from their bondage. He then returned to Egypt. Moses was met on his arrival in Egypt by his elder brother, Aaron, and gained a hearing with his oppressed brethren. It was a more difficult matter, however, to persuade Pharaoh to let the Hebrews depart. This was not accomplished until God sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians. These plagues culminated in the slaying of the Egyptian first-borns whereupon such terror seized the Egyptians that they ordered the Hebrews to leave.

The long procession moved slowly, and found it necessary to encamp three times before passing the Egyptian frontier — some believe at the Great Bitter Lake, while others propose sites as far south as the northern tip of the Red Sea. Meanwhile, Pharaoh had a change of heart, and was in pursuit of them with a large army. Shut in between this army and the sea, the Israelites despaired, but God divided the waters so that they passed safely across on dry ground. When the Egyptian army attempted to follow, God permitted the waters to return upon them and drown them.

When the people arrived at Marah, the water was bitter, so the people murmured against Moses. Moses cast a tree into the water, and the water became sweet. Later in the journey the people began running low on supplies and murmured against Moses and Aaron and said they would have preferred to die in Egypt. Manna from the sky in the morning and quail in the evening took care of the situation. When the people camped in Rephidim, there was no water, so the people complained again and said, "Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" Moses struck a rock with his staff, and water came forth. (...)

When the Israelites came to Sinai, they pitched camp near the mountain. Moses commanded the people not to touch the mountain. Moses received the Ten Commandments orally (but not yet in tablet form) and other moral laws. Moses then went up with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders to see the God of Israel. Before Moses went up the mountain to receive the tablets, he told the elders to direct any questions that arose to Aaron or Hur.

While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving instruction on the laws for the Israelite community, the Israelites went to Aaron and asked him to make gods for them. After Aaron had received the golden earrings from the people, he made a calf of gold and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." A "solemnity of the Lord" was proclaimed for the following day, which began in the morning with sacrifices and was followed by revelry. After Moses had persuaded the Lord not to

destroy the people of Israel, he went down from the mountain and was met by Joshua. Moses destroyed the calf and rebuked Aaron for the sin he had brought upon the people. Seeing that the people were uncontrollable, Moses went to the entrance of the camp and said, "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me." All the sons of Levi rallied around Moses, who ordered them to go from gate to gate slaying the idolaters.

Following this, according to the last chapters of Exodus, the Tabernacle was constructed, the priestly law ordained, the plan of encampment arranged both for the Levites and the non-priestly tribes, and the Tabernacle consecrated. Moses was given eight prayer laws that were to be carried out in regards to the Tabernacle. These laws included light, incense and sacrifice.

After leaving Sinai, the Israelites camped in Kadesh. After more complaints from the Israelites, Moses struck the stone twice, and water gushed forth. However, because Moses and Aaron had not shown the Lord's holiness, they were not permitted to enter the land to be given to the Israelites. This was the second occasion Moses struck a rock to bring forth water; however, it appears that both sites were named Meribah after these two incidents.

While the Israelites were making their journey around Edom, they complained about the manna. After many of the people had been bitten by serpents and died, Moses made a brass serpent and mounted it on a pole, and if those who were bitten looked at it, they did not die. This brass serpent remained in existence until the days of King Hezekiah. (...)

Moses appointed Joshua, son of Nun, to succeed him. Moses then died at the age of 120.

Group II. **Moses and Spiritism**

Read texts A and B and answer these questions.

- a) What was the role of Moses in the moral/intellectual evolution of humankind?
- b) What were Moses' objectives in forming a "semi-materialistic religion" for the Hebrew people?
- c) Are there any contradictions between the fundamental religion principles put forth by Moses and Jesus' teachings? Yes, No and Why.
- d) Can we expect the religion principles contained in the Ten Commandments to become outdated by new the phenomena revealed by the Spirits' Doctrine?

Text A: **The New Era⁽³⁾**

9. God is unique, and Moses was a Spirit whom He sent on a mission to make known His presence, not only to the Hebrews but to the entire pagan world. The Hebrew peoples were God's instrument to enable Him to manifest through Moses and the prophets. The vicissitudes suffered by these peoples were meant to attract their attention and so help disclose the existence of the Divinity.

God's commandments as revealed through Moses contain the essence of the most comprehensive Christian morality. However, the biblical commentaries and annotations restrict their meaning, because if they had been put into action in all their pureness they

would not have been understood. Nevertheless, these Ten Commandments have become a brilliant frontispiece and a beacon destined to light up the pathway which humanity must follow.

The morality taught by Moses was appropriate to the stage of advancement of the people he proposed to regenerate. These people, who were semi-barbaric with respect to the perfecting of the soul, would not have understood that God could be worshipped by other means than holocaust, nor that it is necessary to forgive one's enemies. From the materialistic, scientific and artistic points of view their intelligence was remarkable. But they were morally backward and would never have been converted by a wholly spiritual religion. Therefore it was necessary that they be offered a semi-materialistic form of religion, as is represented in the Hebrew faith. The holocausts spoke to their senses at the same time that the idea of God touched their Spirits.

Christ was the initiator of the most pure and sublime morality. That is to say, the morality of the evangelical Christian, which will renew the entire world by bringing together all mankind and turning them into brothers and sisters. It will cause charity to blossom forth in all hearts as well as love for one's neighbor, so establishing a common solidarity between all peoples. Finally, from this morality, which will transform the whole Earth, the planet will become the home of far superior Spirits than inhabit it till now. This is the law of progress which will be accomplished and to which nature is submitted. Spiritism is the lever which God is using to enable humanity to advance.

The time has come in which moral ideas must be developed to bring about the progress determined by God. They will follow the same route as that taken by the ideas of liberty, us predecessor. Do not think however, that these developments will be effected without a fight. No, in order to reach maturity these ideas will need discussion and conflicts so that they may attract the attention of the masses. Once this has been achieved, the beauty and sanctity of this morality will touch all Spirits, who will in turn embrace a science which will give them the key to a future life and open the doors to eternal happiness.

Moses showed humanity the way; Jesus continued this work; Spiritism will finish it. AN ISRAELITE SPIRIT (Mulhouse, 1861).

Text B: The Ten Commandments⁽⁴⁾

2. There are two distinct parts to the Mosaic Law: the Law of God as promulgated on Mount Sinai and the civil or disciplinary law decreed by Moses. The first is invariable; the other, being appropriate to the customs and character of the people, modifies itself with time.

The Law of God is formulated on the following Ten Commandments:

I. I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in Heaven above, or that is in the Earth beneath, or that is in the water under the Earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them.

II. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

III. Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it Holy.

IV. Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

V. Thou shalt not kill.

VI. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

VII. Thou shalt not steal.

VIII. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

IX. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox nor anything that is thy neighbors.

This Law is for all times and all countries and because of this has a divine character. All other laws were decreed by Moses, who found it necessary to restrain his people through fear due to their turbulent and undisciplined nature, and also to combat the abuses and prejudices acquired by them during the period of slavery in Egypt. To give authority to his laws, he had to give them divine origin, as did other legislators of primitive peoples. The authority of man needed to base itself on the authority of God. But only the idea of a terrible God could impress ignorant peoples in whom the sentiments of true justice and morality were very little developed. It is evident that He Who included amongst His commandments 'Thou shalt not kill or cause damage to your neighbor' could not then contradict Himself by making extermination a duty.

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1. "God is unique, and Moses was a Spirit whom He sent on a mission to make known His presence, not only to the Hebrews but to the entire pagan world".
2. "There are two distinct parts to the Mosaic Law: the Law of God as promulgated on Mount Sinai and the civil or disciplinary law decreed by Moses. The first is invariable; the other, being appropriate to the customs and character of the people, modifies itself with time".

REFERENCES:

1. From Winkipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses#_note-0, august/2006).
2. Idem, august/2006.
3. Kardec, Allan. "The Gospel Explained by Spiritism", chapter 1, item 9, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.
4. Idem, chapter 1, item 2.

Lesson 3**Christianity: Origins and Propagation****OBJECTIVES:**

1. To characterize Jesus' mission.
2. To explain cures and other acts practiced by Jesus and considered miracles.

METHODS:

1. The coordinator will discuss with the class that we are continuing our studies about the evolution religious thinking on Earth and that today we will study the nature of Jesus' mission on Earth. Present some Gospel's passages indicating that Jesus came with a mission to Earth. Some of these passages are (there are many others):

a. (Mark: 9:37) ³⁷“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

b. (John 8:42) ⁴²Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.

c. (John: 7:33) ³³Jesus said, “I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me.

d. (John 7:16-18) ¹⁶Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. ¹⁷Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. ¹⁸Those who speak on their own do so to gain glory for themselves, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.

2. Divide the class into 2 groups. After the groups have finished their assigned material, bring the class together and work on the questions.

Group I. The Mission of Jesus.

Read texts A and B and address the following questions.

- a. Why can we consider Jesus as a superior spirit?
- b. Is it correct to say that Jesus wanted to suppress or totally transform all Mosaic

Law?

- c. Explain Jesus mission on Earth.
- d. Explain why Jesus was called a “medium of God”?

Text A. *The Christ⁽¹⁾*

3. Jesus did not come to destroy the Law, that is to say God's Law. He came to fulfill and develop it, to show its real meaning and to adapt it to the degree of Man's advancement at that time. That is why we find within the Law the principle of our duty to God and our fellowmen to be the base of His doctrine. Regarding the laws devised by Moses we find that he, on the contrary, modified them profoundly, both in form and substance. While constantly combating the abuses of exterior practices and false interpretations, he was unable to make the people go through a more radical reform than that of reducing the Law to the order: 'Love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself,' adding *this is all the law and the prophets*.

By the words, 'Heaven and Earth will not pass till everything be fulfilled, even to the last jot,' Jesus wished to say it was necessary for God's Law to be completely implemented and practiced over all the Earth in all its pureness, with all its amplifications and consequences. In effect, what use would it have been to promulgate the Law if it were only to benefit one nation or only a few men? Mankind, being sons and daughters of God, is without distinction and so subject to the same solicitude.

4. But Jesus was no mere moralist legislator offering His word as exclusive authority. It fell to Him to complete the prophecies which had announced His advent, by means of the exceptional nature of His Spirit and His divine mission. Jesus came to teach mankind that true life is not the one lived here on Earth, but rather the life lived in Heaven. He came to show the pathway to this Kingdom, how to be reconciled with God and to present these facts as part of things to come which would enable mankind to fulfill its destiny. However, He did not explain everything, but limited Himself to offering only the initial part of the truth on many subjects, saying that Man as yet could not understand the whole truth. But He talked about all things in implied terms. In order for people to be able to understand the hidden meaning of His words it was necessary for new ideas and knowledge to mature, so bringing the indispensable key, as these things could not appear before the human Spirit had achieved a certain degree of maturity. Science still had to play an important part in the emergence and development of these ideas; therefore it was necessary to give time for science to progress.

Text B. *Superiority of the Nature of Jesus*⁽²⁾

1. The facts reported in the Gospels, and which have been considered until recently miraculous, belong for the most part to the order of psychic phenomena, — those which arise from the faculties and attributes of the soul. By comparing them with those which have been described and explained in the preceding chapter, one recognizes between them an identity of cause and effect. History shows analogous instances in all times and among all nations, for the reason that, ever since souls have been incarnated and discarnated, the same effects must have been produced. One can, it is true, contest the veracity of history upon this point; but now they are produced under our eyes, as it were, by will-power, and by individuals who have nothing exceptional about them. The fact alone of the reproduction of a phenomenon in identical conditions suffices to prove that it is possible, and governed by a law of nature, and that it therefore is not miraculous.

The principle of the psychic phenomena reposes, as has been seen, upon the properties of the perispiritual fluid, which constitutes the magnetic agent upon the manifestations of the spiritual life during life and after death, — in short, upon the

constitutive state of the spirits and their role as the active force of nature. These elements known, and their effects ascertained, the result is, that certain facts must be admitted as such which were formerly rejected when attributed to a supernatural origin.

2. Without prejudging anything of the nature of Christ, which is not in the compass of this book, let us consider him as nothing other than a superior spirit, — one of those of the highest order; and let him be placed only by his virtues above the rest of terrestrial humanity. By the great results which he produced, his incarnation into this world could have been only one of those missions which are confided alone to direct messengers from the Most High for the accomplishment of his designs. By supposing that he was not God himself, but an ambassador of him for the transmission of his word, he would be more than a prophet: he would be a divine Messiah.

As man, he had the organization of organized beings; but as a pure spirit, detached from matter, he must have lived in the spiritual life more than in the carnal, of which he had not the weaknesses. His superiority over men was only of his spiritual nature, which absolutely controlled matter, and his perispirit, which was formed of the most refined of earthly fluids (chap. XIV, n° 9). His soul must have been attached to the body only by the most indispensable links; constantly separated from one another, it must have endowed him with a double sight, not only permanent, but of an exceptional penetration, very superior to that of ordinary men. It must have been the same with all the phenomena which depend upon the perispiritual or psychic fluids. The quality of these fluids gave to him an immense magnetic power, seconded by a constant desire to do good.

In the cures which he performed, did he act as a medium? Can he be considered as a powerful healing medium? No; for the medium is an intermediary, an instrument which discarnate spirits use. Now, Christ had no need of assistance, he who assisted others; he acted, then, by himself, by virtue of his personal power. Thus can incarnated beings, in certain cases, do according to their strength? What other spirit would have dared to inspire him with his own thoughts, and charge him to transmit them? If he received a strange influx, it could only be from God. According to a definition given of him by a spirit, he was a medium from God.

Group II. **Explanation of the cures performed by Jesus.**

Read texts A and B and address the following questions.

- a. Why did Jesus perform “miracle” cures while he was on Earth?
- b. Why didn't Jesus cure all sick people?
- c. Explain how cures can be obtained.
- d. Were the many cures performed by Jesus miracles?

Text A. ***The Numerous Cures performed by Jesus*⁽³⁾**

26. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures,

and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him (Matthew, 4: 23-25).

27. Of all the acts which testify to the power of Jesus, without doubt the cures he performed are the most numerous. He wished to prove by that that true power is that which does good; that his object was to render himself useful, and not to satisfy indifferent curiosity by the performance of extraordinary things.

By alleviating suffering, he touched the hearts of men, and made more proselytes than if he had alone gratified their curiosity. By this means he made himself beloved. Whilst, if he had limited himself to producing surprising material effects, as the Pharisees demanded of him, the greater part of the people would have seen in him only a sorcerer or skillful juggler with whom idlers had been amused.

Thus, when John the Baptist sends to him his disciples to ascertain if he is the Christ, he does not say, "I am he;" for every impostor could have been able to say as much. He does not tell them of the marvelous things he has accomplished, but simply replies, "Go say to John, the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the Gospel is preached to the poor." It was equivalent to saying: "recognize me in my works; judge the tree by its fruit:" for there is found the veritable character of the divine mission.

28. It is also by the good it does that Spiritism proves its divine mission. It cures physical evils, but, above all, moral maladies, which are the most important works by which it affirms itself. Its most sincere adepts are not only those who have been astonished by the sight of its extraordinary phenomena, but those who have been touched to the heart by the consolation it gives; those who have been delivered from the tortures of doubt; those whose courage has been sustained by it in affliction, who have drawn strength from the certitude of the future which it has brought to them, with a knowledge of their spiritual being and destiny; those whose faith is unchangeable because they feel it and comprehend.

Those who see in Spiritism only material effects cannot comprehend its moral power; as incredulous, who know it only by its phenomena of which they do not admit its first cause (God), see in Spiritists only jugglers and charlatans. It is then, not by the performance of wonderful works that Spiritism will triumph over incredulity; it is by multiplying its moral benefits. For, if they will not believe in the mighty works it accomplishes, they experience, like all the world, sufferings and afflictions, and no one refuses alleviation and consolation.

Text B. *The Universal Cosmic Fluid*⁽⁴⁾

31. The universal fluid is, as has been seen, the primitive element of the carnal body and of the perispirit, which are only transformation of it. By the sameness of its nature this fluid can furnish to the body the principal reparative. Being condensed in the perispirit, the propelling power is the spirit, incarnated or discarnated, which infiltrates into a deteriorated body a part of the substance of its fluid-envelope. The cure is performed by the substitution of an unhealthy molecule for a healthy one. The curative power will then be drawn from the purity of the inoculated substance. It depends also upon the energy of the will, which provokes a more abundant fluid-emission, and gives to the fluid a greater force of penetration. In short, it is the intentions of he who desires to

cure, let him be man or spirit. The fluids which emanate from an impure source are like defective medical substances.

32. The effects of the fluidic-action upon illnesses varied according to circumstances. Its action is sometimes slow, and requires a prolonged treatment, as in ordinary magnetism. At other times it is rapid as an electric current. There are some persons endowed with such a magnetic power, that they perform upon certain ill people instantaneous cures only by the laying-on of hands, or sometimes by the sole act of will. Between the two extreme poles of this faculty there is an infinite variety of distinctive shades. All the cures of this kind are from the different varieties of magnetism, and differ only in the power and rapidity of their action. The principle is always the same: it is the fluid which plays the role of therapeutic agent, the effect of which is subordinated to its quality and to special circumstances.

33. Magnetic action can be produced in many ways:

1st By the fluid of the magnetizer himself; properly speaking, magnetism, or human magnetism, the action of which is subordinate to the power, and above all to the quality of the fluid.

2nd By fluid from the spirit acting directly and without intermediation upon an incarnate being, either to cure or to calm suffering, to provoke spontaneous somnambulistic sleep, or to exercise over the individual any moral or physical influence whatever. That is spiritual magnetism, of which the quality is determined by the quality of the spirit.

3rd By the fluid which the spirits shed upon the magnetizer, to which the latter serves as a conductor. This is mixed magnetism, semi-spiritual, or human-spiritual. The spiritual fluid, combined with the physical, gives to the latter the qualities which are wanting to it. The meeting of spirits for a like circumstance is sometimes spontaneous, but more often it is brought about by the call of the magnetizer.

34. The faculty to cure by the fluidic-influx is very common, and can develop itself by exercise; but that of curing instantaneously by the laying-on of hands is rare and its power can be considered as exceptional. However, it has been seen at diverse epochs, and in nearly every nation there are some individuals who possess it to an eminent degree. Lately many remarkable examples have been seen of it, the authenticity of which cannot be contested. Since these kinds of cures rest upon a principle of nature, the power of performing them is not a preference shown, or a departure from nature's laws. They can only be miraculous in appearance.

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1) Following Jesus teachings that “a good tree only gives good fruits and a bad tree only give bad ones”, we can easily conclude that Jesus was the highest spirit ever to incarnate on Earth.

2) His mission was not to overthrow the whole Mosaic Law, only its human aspects which must continue to evolve according with society. All Divine aspects of the Mosaic Law, specially the Ten Commandments, were fulfilled by Jesus.

3) His “miracle” cures do not represent deviations from the natural law, but in fact applications of natural laws that we do not understand at this moment.

REFERENCES:

1. Kardec, Allan. “The Gospel Explained by Spiritism”, chapter 1, item 3, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.
2. Kardec, Allan, “Genesis” chapter XV, items 1 and 2, Spiritist Alliance for Books, 2003.
3. Idem, chapter XV, items 26 – 28.
4. Idem, chapter XIV, items 31 – 34.

Lesson 4**The Christian Morality and the Gospel.****OBJECTIVES:**

- To give the characteristics of Christian morality.
- To explain why Jesus taught through parables.
- To understand the meaning of the Beatitudes contained in the Sermon on the Mount.

METHODS:

1. Make an introduction by presenting and generally discussing the Sermon on the Mount. The coordinator should consult the “Gospel according to Spiritism” in order to have an understanding of each of the passages of the Sermon.

2. Divide the class into 2 groups. Each group will address its texts and questions. Then, bring the class together for a discussion of the questions.

Group I.*The Christian Morality*

Read the following text⁽¹⁾ and answer these questions.

- a) Why did Jesus teach moral principles through parables?
- b) What are the differences between pride and self-esteem? Is self-esteem contrary to Christian morality? Is it correct to say that we should have less pride and more self-esteem? Is sacrifice towards others contrary to self-esteem?

3. All the moral teaching of Christ resumes itself in the need for charity and humility, that is to say, in the two virtues which are contrary to selfishness and pride. In all of His teaching Jesus indicates these two virtues as being the ones which lead to eternal happiness. He said that the poor in spirit, that is to say the humble, were blessed because the Kingdom of Heaven would be theirs: Blessed are those who have pure hearts; Blessed are the gentle and the peacemakers; Blessed are the merciful. He also taught the need to love one's neighbour as oneself, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, to love our enemies, to forgive all offences if we wish to receive forgiveness, to do good without ostentation and to judge ourselves before we judge others. So then charity and humility are the two things which Jesus never ceased to recommend and for which He stands as an example. He also never ceased to combat pride and selfishness. Nor did He limit Himself to the mere recommending of charity, but put it in very clear and explicit terms as being the only condition for future happiness.

With respect to the description given by Jesus of the Final Judgment, we must separate, as in many other cases, that which is only form or allegory. The people to whom Jesus spoke, being still unable to understand totally spiritual questions, made it necessary

for Him to offer them material images which would both shock and impress. Therefore in order for them to better understand what was being said to them, Jesus was obliged to keep closely to the form of the ideas of those times, always reserving for the future the real interpretation of His words and the points which at that time were unable to be clearly explained. But alongside the accessory or figurative parts of this explanation, there is one dominant feature: that of the happiness reserved for the just and the unhappiness awaiting those who are evil.

What then are the considerations of sentence according to that supreme judgment? On what has the indictment been based? Does the judge perhaps ask if the person under interrogation has fulfilled this or that formality, if they have more or less observed this or that external practice? No, he will ask but one question: if charity has been practised; and then make the pronouncement: "Go to the right all who have helped their brothers and sisters. Go to the left all those who have been unyielding." Is it said, by any chance, what is the orthodoxy of their faith? Is any distinction made between those who believe in this or that manner? No, because Jesus places the Samaritan, considered by some to be a heretic, who practised love towards his fellow creature above any orthodoxy which lacks charity. So do not consider charity to be merely one of the conditions for salvation. But instead, consider it to be the only condition. If there were others to be met, then Jesus would have mentioned them. Since He put charity in first place, it is because it implicitly embraces all the other virtues such as humility, kindness, benevolence, indulgence, justice, etc., and also because it is the absolute negation of pride and selfishness.

Group II. ***The Greatest of the Commandments***

Read the following 2 texts^(2,3) and answer these questions.

- a) What does it mean "To love God"? How do we love God?
- b) What does it mean "to love your enemies"?
- c) Explain the sentence "Without charity there is no salvation".

Text A. The Gospel according with Spiritism.

4. But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew, 22: 34-40).

5. Charity and humility, such is the only path to salvation. Selfishness and pride are the paths to ruin. This principle is found to be formulated on the following precise terms: "Love your God with all your soul and your neighbour as yourself; *all the law and the prophets are contained in these two commandments.*" And so there would be no mistake in the understanding of the meaning of the love for God and for our neighbor, He then added: "And there is the second commandment, which is similar to the first." This means that it is not possible to truly love God without loving your neighbor, nor to love

your neighbor without loving God. Straightaway, all that you do against your neighbor you also do against God.

Therefore, as it is not possible to love God without practicing charity towards one's neighbor. All of mankind's obligations are resumed in the maxim: *without charity there is no salvation.*

Text B **The Spirits' Book**

886. *What is the true meaning of the word charity as employed by Jesus?*

"Benevolence for every one, indulgence for the imperfections of others, forgiveness of injuries."

(Kardec's comments) Love and charity are the complement of the law of justice; for, to love our neighbor is to do him all the, good in our power, all that we should wish to have done to ourselves. Charity, according to Jesus, is not restricted to alms-giving, but embraces all our relations with our fellow-men whether our inferiors, our equals, or our superiors. It prescribes indulgence on our part, because we need the same ourselves; it forbids us to humiliate the unfortunate, as is too often done. How many, who are ready to lavish respect and attentions on the rich, appear to think it not worth their while to be civil to the poor; and yet, the more pitiable the situation of the latter, the more scrupulously should we refrain from adding humiliation to misfortune. He who is really kind endeavors to raise his inferior in his own estimation, by diminishing the distance between them.

887. *Jesus has also said: Love your enemies. But would it not be contrary to our natural tendencies to love our enemies, and does not unfriendliness proceed from a want of sympathy between spirits?*

"It would certainly be impossible for a man to feel tender and ardent affection for his enemies; and Jesus did not intend to prescribe anything of the kind. To 'love your enemies' means to forgive them, and to return good for evil. By so doing, you become their superior; by vengeance, you place yourselves beneath them."

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1) "(...) it is not possible to truly love God without loving your neighbor, nor to love your neighbor without loving God. Straightaway, all that you do against your neighbor you also do against God." Therefore, as it is not possible to love God without practicing charity towards one's neighbor. All of mankind's obligations are resumed in the maxim: *without charity there is no salvation.*

2) "To 'love your enemies' means to forgive them, and to return good for evil. By so doing, you become their superior; by vengeance, you place yourselves beneath them".

REFERENCES:

1. Kardec, Allan. "The Gospel Explained by Spiritism", chapter 15, item 3, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.
2. Idem, items 4 and 5.
3. Kardec, Allan, "The Spirits' Book", questions 886 and 887, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.

APPENDIX:

(1) The Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount (The Holy Bible, Matthew 5:1-12, The New International Translation).

⁵Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them, saying:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

From Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_meek_shall_inherit_the_earth), accessed Nov 2006

The **Beatitudes** (from Latin, *beatitudo*, happiness) is the name given to the well-known, definitive and beginning portion of the Sermon on the Mount of the Gospel of Matthew. Some are also recorded in the Gospel of Luke. In this section Jesus describes the qualities of the citizens of the Kingdom of heaven (it refers to the reign or sovereignty of God over all things, as opposed to the reign of earthly or satanic powers), showing how each is/will be blessed. The Beatitudes do not describe many separate individuals, but rather the characteristics of those who are deemed blessed by God. Kodjak believes that this opening of the sermon was meant to shock the audience, as a deliberate inversion of standard values, but that today this shock value has been lost owing to the commonness of the text.

Each of the blessed individuals is generally not considered blessed according to worldly standards, but with a heavenly perspective—that is, truly blessed. The word traditionally translated into English as "blessed" or "happy" is in the Greek original μακάριος (*makarios*); a more literal translation into contemporary English would be "possessing an inward contentedness and joy that is not affected by the physical circumstances". Each of the Beatitudes presents a situation in which the person described would not be described by the world as "blessed", yet Jesus declares that they truly are

blessed, and they are blessed with a blessing that outlasts any type of blessing this world has to offer. (...)

One interpretation of narrative theologians is that the Beatitudes provide a corrective against an upside-down view of the power structures of the world that has been all but universally taken for granted. That is, the powers and principalities of this world - primarily referencing, but not meant to be exclusive to political, military and economic forces - appear to be the inheritors of power and dominion. In the Beatitudes, however, Jesus explains that the reality of things as seen from God's perspective is that the powerless who are the inheritors the future. It is the meek, the poor, those who suffer loss, those on the bottom of the social ladder, who will rule in the rightside-up kingdom of God. Jesus is attempting to jog his listeners' assumptions regarding security and hope, showing them that the kingdom of God is for those who hope in God and not in the power structures offered by the world. Though not specifically referenced and explained with much less poetry, these same themes are strongly espoused by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Colossians and to the Ephesians. As for a more modern example, such an interpretation of the Beatitudes can be found in "Resident Aliens", by Stanley Hauerwas & William Willimon. In their book Jesus is explained to be showing his audience that "In God's kingdom, the poor are royalty, the sick are blessed." "The Beatitudes are not a strategy for achieving a better society ... they are an indication ... of life in the kingdom of God ... to produce a shock within our imaginations ... to see life ... in a radical new way." Similarly, John H. Yoder, in his "Politics of Jesus" refers to Matthew 5 as part of a "call on the disciples of Jesus to renounce participation in the interplay of egoisms". This entire work attempts to show that such politics of Jesus is the entire basis behind Christian pacifism - that the Jesus who has already conquered evil now calls us to follow him through the same heavenly humility.

Lesson 5**Love to God, Worship and Contemplative life****OBJECTIVES:**

1. To understand what is to worship God.
2. To explain how human beings get to love God even more when they get to know more about God.
3. To establish the limitations of a contemplative life.

METHODS:

1. The coordinator will distribute one of the following questions to each participant. Ask them to individually try to answer their questions in a piece of paper. Then, the coordinator will begin presenting the answers given by the Superior Spirits (as recorded in *The Spirits' Book* by Allan Kardec). The coordinator asks participants to try to match the answers with the questions that they have on their hands. Group is open for comments and discussion after each question and answer that is matched.

2. Finish with an overview of the lesson by answering the following questions:

- a) What is to worship God in the Spiritist view?
- b) How do less evolved spirits worship God? How about the more evolved ones?
- c) Are rituals needed in order to express our adoration to God? Why?
- d) How can human beings develop their knowledge on God? How can this knowledge make them love God even more?
- e) Jesus said "My Father and I are one". How does that saying express Jesus perfect understanding on God?
- f) Why is worshipping God a part of the Divine or Natural Law?
- g) Does contemplative life bring benefits to human beings? Why?
- h) When is meditation necessary?

The Spirits' Book, Part III, Chapter XVII, Questions 649 – 657

649. *In what does adoration consist?*

"In the elevation of the thought towards God. Through adoration the soul draws nearer to Him."

650. *Is adoration the result of an innate feeling or the product of exterior teaching?*

"Of an innate feeling, like the belief in the Divinity. The consciousness of his weakness leads man to bow before the Being who can protect him."

651. *Are there people entirely without the feeling of adoration?*

"No. There never was a nation of pure atheists. All feel that there is, above them, a supreme Being."

652. *May adoration be regarded as having its source in natural law?*

"It is included in natural law, since it is the result of an innate human feeling; for which reason it is found among all people, though under different forms."

653. *Are external manifestations essential to adoration?*

"True adoration is in the heart. In all your actions remember that the Master's eyes are always upon you."

-Are external acts of worship useful?

"Yes, if they are not a vain pretence. It is always useful to set a good example; but those who perform acts of worship merely from affectation and for the sake of appearances, and whose conduct belies their seeming piety, set a bad example rather than a good one, and do more harm than they imagine."

654. *Does God accord a preference to those who worship Him according to any particular mode?*

"God prefers those who worship Him from the heart, with sincerity, and by doing what is good and avoiding what is evil, to those who fancy they honor Him by ceremonies which do not render them any better than their neighbors. All men are brothers, and children of God; He calls to Him all who follow His laws, whatever may be the form under which they show their obedience.

He who has only the external of piety is a hypocrite; he whose worship is only pretence, and in contradiction with his conduct, sets a bad example. He who professes to worship Christ, and who is proud, envious, and jealous, who is hard and unforgiving to others, or ambitious of the goods of earth, is religious with the lips only, and not with the heart. God, who sees all things, will say to him, 'He who knows the truth, and does not follow it, is a hundredfold more guilty in the evil he does than the ignorant savage, and will he treated accordingly in the day of retribution.' If a blind man runs against you as he goes by, you excuse him; but if the same thing is done by a man who sees, you complain, and with reason.

Do not ask, then, if any form of worship be more acceptable than another; for it is as though you asked whether it is more pleasing to God to be worshipped in one tongue rather than in another. Remember that the hymns addressed to Him can reach Him only through the door of the heart."

655. *Is it wrong to practice the external rites of a religion in which we do not heartily believe, when this is done out of respect for those with whom we are connected, and in order not to scandalize those who think differently from us?*

"In such a case, as in many others, it is the intention that decides the quality of the act. He whose only aim, in so doing, is to show respect for the belief of others, does no wrong; he does better than the man who turns them into ridicule, for the latter sins against charity. But he, who goes through with such practices simply from interested motives, or from ambition, is contemptible in the sight of God and of men. God could not take

pleasure in those who only pretend to humiliate themselves before Him, in order to attract the approbation of their fellow-men."

656. Is worship performed in common preferable to individual worship?

"When those who sympathize in thought and feeling are assembled together, they have more power to attract good spirits to them. It is the same when they are assembled for worshipping God. But you must not therefore conclude that private worship is less acceptable; for each man can worship God in his own thought."

657. Have men who give themselves up to a life of contemplation, doing nothing evil, and thinking only of God, any special merit in His eyes?

"No, for if they do nothing evil, they do nothing good; and besides, not to do well is, in it, evil. God wills that His children should think of Him; but He does not will that they should think only of Him, since He has given men duties to discharge upon the earth. He who consumes his life in meditation and contemplation does nothing meritorious in the sight of God, because such a life is entirely personal and useless to mankind; and God will call him to account for the good he has failed to do."

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

- 1) "To worship is to raise your thoughts toward God. As you worship, you draw your soul closer to the Source of Life."
- 2) "Worship is part of the natural law because it is the result of an innate human feeling. This explains why worship is found, in different forms, throughout the world."
- 3) "True worship is in the heart."
- 4) "It's important to think about God, but that is not all there is to life. You have all been given tasks to perform in your lives. If you give life entirely to meditation and contemplation, you have no merit. You would be living only for yourself. What good would that do humanity?"

REFERENCES:

1. Kardec, Allan. "The Spirits' Book, part III, chapter XVII, questions 649-657, edited and translated by Allan Kardec Educational Society.

Lesson 6**The Power of Faith****OBJECTIVES:**

1. To analyze Kardec's interpretation in regard to unshakable faith and religious faith.
2. To give the Spiritist interpretation on the New Testament passage "Faith and the Mustard Seed" (Matthew 17: 14-20).

METHODS:

1. The coordinator will read the following Kardec's sentence and brainstorm with the group:

"Unshakable faith is only that which can meet reason face to face in every Human epoch."

2. In pairs, ask participants to share a personal story on faith. Give them 10 minutes to discuss. Allow pairs to share their stories with the rest of the group.

3. In a big group, ask participants to read the following texts from "The Gospel Explained by Spiritism", chapters 19, items 1-5, 6-7 and 12, and answer the following questions.

- a) What is to have faith?
- b) When does religious fanaticism happen?
- c) What is the difference between "I believe" and "I know"?
- d) Why should faith be reasoned?
- e) Why is reincarnation important for the development of faith?
- f) What is the difference between to believe and to have faith?
- g) Why is unshakable faith the foundation to Humankind's regeneration?
- h) Why didn't Jesus' disciples heal the obsessed person?
- i) What is the meaning of the words "mustard grain and mountain, in the text?"

The Power of Faith

1. And when they were come to the multitude, there came to Him a certain man, kneeling down to Him, and saying: "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is lunatic and sore vexed: for times he fell into the fire, and other times into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him." Then Jesus answered and said: "Oh, faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him closer to me." And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him, and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart and said: "Why could we not cast him out?" And Jesus said unto them: "Because of your unbelief for verily I say unto you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall

say unto the mountain, remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” (Matthew, 17:14-20).

2. In one sense it is certain that confidence in one's own strength gives man the capacity to carry out material things which he would not be able to do if he doubted himself. However, here we wish to deal exclusively with the moral sense of these words. The mountains which faith can transport are the difficulties, the resistances, the ill will, in fact all those things which man has to face, even when we refer to good things. The prejudices, routines, materialistic interests, selfishness, the blindness of fanaticism and the prideful passions are but a few of the mountains which block the way of those who work for human progress. Robust faith gives perseverance, energy and resources which allow us to overcome these obstacles, be they large or small. From wavering faith results only uncertainty and the kind of hesitation which those adversaries we need to combat take advantage of; this faith does not even try to find the means to win because it does not believe it can.

3. Another acceptance of the term gives us to understand that faith is the confidence we have in the realization of something, and the certainty of attaining a specific end. It gives us a kind of lucidness which permits us to see, in thought, the goal we wish to reach and the means of getting there, so that those who have faith go forward, in a manner of speaking, with absolute security. In either one of these cases, it can give place to the realization of great things. Faith which is real and sincere is always calm; it permits patience which knows how to wait, because having its foundation in intelligence and the understanding of life, it is certain of reaching the objective it aspires to. Vacillating faith feels its own weakness; when its interest is aroused it becomes frenzied and thinks it can supply the force it lacks by using violence. Calmness during the struggle is always a sign of strength and confidence; whereas on the contrary violence denotes weakness and self-doubt.

4. It is important not to confuse faith with presumption. True faith is linked to humility; those who have it, deposit more confidence in God than in them, as they know they are but simple instruments of Divine Purpose and can do nothing without God. This is the reason why the good Spirits come to their aid. Presumption is less faith than pride, and pride is always punished sooner or later by the deceptions and frustrations inflicted upon it.

5. The power of faith can be demonstrated in a direct and special manner in magnetic action. Through the intermediary of faith, man acts on the fluids, which are a universal agent, modifying their qualities and giving them in a manner of speaking, irresistible impulsion. From this it follows that whoever joins a normally great fluidic power to that of ardent faith can, solely by the strength of their willpower directed towards goodness, operate those singular phenomena of healing and other occurrences known in olden times as miracles, but which are nothing more than the consequences of a Law of Nature. This is the reason for Jesus saying to His apostles that if they did not cure it was because they had no faith.

Religious Faith - The State of Unshakable Faith

6. From the religious point of view faith consists of the belief in the special dogmas which constitute the various religions. All of them have their articles of faith.

From this aspect faith may be either *blind or rationalized*. Blind faith examines nothing and accepts without verification both truth and falsehood, and at each step clashes with evidence and reason. Taken to the extreme it produces *fanaticism*. While sitting upon error, sooner or later it collapses. Only faith that is based on truth guarantees the future, because it has nothing to fear from the progress of enlightenment, seeing that *what is true in obscurity is also true in light* each religion claims to have possession of the exclusive truth. But for someone to *proclaim blind faith on a point of belief is to confess themselves impotent to demonstrate that they are right*.

7. It is commonly said *that faith cannot be prescribed*, from which many people declare it is not their fault if they have no faith. Beyond doubt, faith cannot be prescribed, and what is even more certain, *it cannot be imposed*. No, it cannot be prescribed but only acquired, and there is no one who is prevented from possessing it, even among those who are most refractory. We are speaking of basic spiritual truths and not of any particular belief. It is not the part of faith to seek these people out, but they who should go and seek faith, and if they search with sincerity they are bound to find it. You can be sure that those who say: "There is nothing I should like more than to believe, but I cannot," only say this with their lips and not with their hearts, seeing that while they are saying it they close their ears. However, the proof is all around them, so why do they refuse to see? On the part of some it is indifference; of others the fear of being forced to change their habits. But in the majority there is pride which refuses to recognize the existence of a superior force because they would then have to bow down before it.

In some people faith appears to be inborn, a spark being enough to cause it to unfold. This ease of assimilation of spiritual truths is an evident sign of previous progress. On the contrary, in others there is difficulty of assimilation which is a no less evident sign of their backward natures. The first already believe and understand, having brought with them on *being reborn* the intuition of what they know. Their education is complete. The second still have everything to learn; their education is still to come. Nevertheless, come it will, and if it is not completed in this existence then it will be in another.

The resistance of the unbeliever, we must agree, is almost always due less to himself than to the manner in which things have been put to him. Faith needs a base, one that gives complete understanding of what we are asked to accept. In order to believe it is not enough to *see*; above all else it is necessary to *understand*. Blind faith is no longer of this century, so much so, that it is exactly blind dogmatic faith which produces the greatest number of unbelievers today, because it tries to impose itself, demanding the abdication of the most precious prerogatives of mankind, which are rationalization and free-will. It is principally against this kind of faith that the unbeliever rebels, so showing that it is true to say faith cannot be prescribed. Due to the non-acceptance of any proofs, blind faith leaves the spirit with a feeling of emptiness which gives birth to doubt. Rationalized faith, when based on facts and logic, leaves no doubts. Then the person believes because they are certain; and no one can be certain unless they understand. This is why they are unshakable, because *unshakable faith is that which can stand face to face with reason in all epochs of humanity*.

This is the result to which Spiritism conducts us, so triumphing against incredulity, as long as it does not encounter systematic and preconceived opposition.

Human and Divine Faith

12. In man, faith is the inherent sentiment of his future destiny; it is the consciousness he has of the immense faculties implanted in his inner-self, a source in latent state, which it is his duty to make blossom forth and grow by the action of his will.

Till today faith has only been understood in its religious sense because Christ exalted it as a powerful lever, and because He has been seen only as the Head of a religion. However, Christ, who performed material miracles, showed us through these same miracles what man can do when he has faith, that is to say, the *will to desire* and the certainty that this wish maybe achieved. Did not the apostles also perform miracles by following His example? Moreover, what were these miracles if not natural effects whose causes were not understood at that time, but which can be explained in great part today, and which by the study of Spiritism and magnetism will become totally comprehensible?

Faith is either human or divine, according to how man applies his faculties, to the satisfaction of terrestrial needs or to celestial and future aspirations. A man of genius who throws himself into the realization of a great undertaking will triumph if he has faith, because he feels sure of succeeding and that he is bound to reach the end envisaged. This certainly puts an immense force at his disposal. A good man, believing in his celestial future, desiring to fill his existence with beautiful and noble actions in the certainty of the happiness which awaits him, draws on his faith for the necessary force and so accomplishes miracles of charity, devotion, and abnegation. Finally, there are no evil tendencies which cannot be combated by faith.

Magnetism is one of the greatest proofs of the power of faith when put into action. It is through faith that it cures and produces those singular phenomena in other times called miracles.

I repeat: faith is both *human* and *divine*. If all incarnates could be persuaded of the force which they carry within themselves, and if they wished to place their will at the service of this force, they would be capable of producing these so called miracles that are nothing more than the development of a human faculty. - A Protecting Spirit (Paris, 1863).

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1) "Unshakable faith is that which can stand face to face with reason in all epochs of humanity."

2) "Faith which is real and sincere is always calm; it permits patience which knows how to wait, because having its foundation in intelligence and the understanding of life, it is certain of reaching the objective it aspires to."

3) "If all incarnates could be persuaded of the force which they carry within themselves, and if they wished to place their will at the service of this force, they would be capable of producing these so called miracles that are nothing more than the development of a human faculty."

REFERENCES:

1. Kardec, Allan. "The Gospel According to Spiritism", chapter XIX, items 1-5, 6-7 and 12, edited and translated by Allan Kardec Educational Society.

Lesson 7	Prayer and its Efficacy
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OBJECTIVES:

- To analyze the efficacy of prayer.
- To justify the habit of praying.

METHODS:

1. The coordinator can begin by asking participants the following questions:

“Does prayer really help you? Why?”

2. In a big group, ask participants to read the following texts(1) and answer these questions.

- a) What is prayer for?
- b) Why is prayer a mechanism of the thought?
- c) What happens through the act of prayer?
- d) Why is it said that prayer is a magnetic action?

Text I.**The act of prayer: Transmission of thought**

9. Prayer is an invocation through which, by means of thought, man enters into communication with the being to which he directed himself. This may be for the purpose of asking for something, giving thanks or as a glorification. We may pray for ourselves or for others, for the living or for the dead. Prayers addressed to God are heard by those spirits who are charged with the execution of His will. All those addressed to good spirits are referred to God. When someone prays to beings other than God, these are serving as mediators or intercessors, because nothing can happen without God's wishes.

10. Spiritism makes the act of prayer understandable by explaining how thought is transmitted, either when the spirit to whom we are praying comes to our help, or when our thoughts raise themselves up to this being. In order to understand what happens in this circumstance, it is necessary to consider all incarnate and discarnate beings as immersed in the universal cosmic fluid which occupies space, as we on Earth are immersed in the atmosphere. This fluid receives an impulse from will-power, which is the vehicle of thought just as air is the vehicle for sound, with the difference that the vibrations of air are circumscribed, whereas those of the universal cosmic fluid extend infinitely. So when a thought is directed at someone either on Earth or in space, from an incarnate to a discarnate being, or vice-versa, a fluidic current is established between them, which transmits the thought from one to the other, just as air transmits sound.

The energy contained in this current remains proportional to the force behind the thought and the desire. This is how the spirits hear the prayers directed to them wherever

they may be. It is also how spirits communicate among themselves, how they transmit their inspirations to us and how contacts are established at a distance between incarnates.

This explanation has in mind especially those who do not understand the utility of completely mystical prayer. It is not meant to seemingly materialize prayer, but rather to make its effect intelligible by showing it can have direct and effective results. But this does not make it any the less subordinate to God's wishes; He being the Supreme Judge of all things, it is only through His wishes that the action of prayer may become effective.

11. It is through prayer that man obtains the assistance of the good spirits who come running to sustain him in his good resolutions and inspire wholesome ideas. In this manner he acquires the moral strength necessary to be able to surmount all difficulties, and come back to the straight and narrow path should he at any time stray from it. By these means he can also turn away from himself all the evil which he attracts through his faults. For example: a man loses his health due to his excesses and so leads a life of suffering till the termination of his days. Has he then the right to complain if he does not obtain the cure he so desires? No, because he could have found the strength to resist temptation through the act of prayer.

12. If we divided the evils of life into two parts, one being those which man cannot avoid and the other those tribulations of which he himself is the principal cause, due to carelessness and excesses, (see chapter 5, item 4) we would see that the number in the second group far exceeds those in the first. So it is evident that man is the author of the greater part of his afflictions and that they could be avoided if he always behaved with prudence and wisdom.

It is no less certain that these miseries are the result of our infractions against God's Law and that, if we duly observed these Laws, we would be completely happy. If we did not exceed the limit of what is necessary for the satisfaction of our needs, we would not have the sicknesses which are provoked as a consequence of these excesses; nor would we experience the vicissitudes which derive from them. If we put a limit on our ambitions we would not have to fear ruin; if we did not desire to raise ourselves higher than we are able, we would not have to be afraid of falling; if we were humble, we would not suffer the deception of hurt pride; if we practiced the law of charity we would not be slanderers, jealous or envious, and so would avoid arguments and fights. If we did no evil to anyone we would not need to fear vengeance, etc.

Admitting that man can do nothing with respect to other evils, and that prayer would be useless in ridding him of them; would it not mean a great deal to have the possibility of exempting ourselves from those ills which stem from our own behavior? Here it is easy to conceive the action played by prayer, which aims at attracting wholesome inspirations from the good spirits, and in asking them for strength to resist our bad thoughts, whose realization could be disastrous to us. In this case, *what the prayers do is not to remove the wrong from us, but turn us away from our bad thoughts which cause us harm. The prayers in no way do not prevent the fulfilling of God's laws, nor do they suspend the course of the laws of Nature. They stop us from infringing these laws by guiding our free will.* Yet they act by default, in an imperceptible manner, so as not to subjugate our freewill. Man finds himself in the position of one who solicits good counsel and then puts it into action; but is always free to follow the advice or not. God desires it to be like this, so that man can have responsibility for his actions, thereby leaving him the merit of the choice between good and evil. This is what man can always

be sure of obtaining if he asks fervently, and this is the kind of situation where, above all, the words "Ask and it shall be given" can be applied.

Could not the effects of prayer, even when reduced to these proportions, bring immense results? It has been reserved for Spiritism to prove its action through the revelation of the relationship existing between the physical and spiritual worlds. But its effects are not limited just to these results.

Prayer is recommended by all the spirits. To renounce it is to ignore the benevolence of God; to reject for oneself His assistance and for others the good that we can do.

13. On attending to a request which has been addressed to Him, God desires to recompense the intention, the devotion and the faith of the one who prays. This is why the prayers of a good person have greater merit in God's eyes and are always more effective, because the corrupt and evil person cannot pray with the same fervor and confidence which comes only from a sentiment of true piety. From a selfish heart, the one who prays only from the lips, *only words can come*, and never a charitable impulse which is what gives force to prayer. So clearly can this be understood, that on asking for the prayers of another person instinctively preference will be given to those whose conduct, it is felt, will be more agreeable to God because they will be more promptly heard.

14. As prayer exercises a type of magnetic action, it could be supposed that its effect would depend on fluidic power. However, this is not so. To be precise, spirits exercise this action on man so as to overcome any insufficiency in those who pray, either by direct influence *in his name*, or by giving him momentarily an exceptional force when they judge him deserving of this grace, or when it can be useful to him.

The person, who does not consider himself sufficiently good as to exercise a wholesome influence, should not refrain from praying for the good of another because of a mistaken belief of being unworthy to be heard. The consciousness of his own inferiority constitutes a test in humility, which is always pleasing to God, Who then takes into account the charitable intention which animated their intention. Fervor and confidence in God are the first steps in the return to goodness, for which the good spirits feel themselves blessed in being able to offer stimulation. Prayer is repelled only from *the prideful who deposit faith in their own power and merits, believing it possible to superimpose themselves upon the Will of the eternal Father*.

15. The power of prayer lies in the thought and does not depend on words, the place or the moment in which it is proffered. Therefore it is possible to pray in all places, at any time, alone or with others. The influence of a place or time is only felt according to the circumstances which favor the meditation. *Communal prayer has a more powerful action when all who are praying join together in a heartfelt thought and envisage the same objective*, since it is as if many beseeched together in one voice. But it will do no good for a large number of people to gather together for prayer if each one acts in isolation, on their own account. A hundred people can pray selfishly, whereas two or three joined by the same aspirations, praying like true brothers and sisters in Christ, will give more power to their prayer than would the hundred selfish persons (See chapter 28, items 4 & 5).

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1) “Prayer is an invocation through which, by means of thought, man enters into communication with the being to which he directed himself”.

2) “The power of prayer lies in the thought and does not depend on words, the place or the moment in which it is proffered”.

REFERENCES:

1. Kardec, Allan. “The Gospel According to Spiritism”, chapter XXVII, items 9-15, edited and translated by Allan Kardec Educational Society.

Lesson 8	Sacrifices, Mortifications and Promises
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OBJECTIVES:

- To analyze the reasons why sacrifices, mortifications and promises can be manifestations of external adoration
- To understand the Spiritist view on sacrifices, mortifications and promises

METHODS:

1. Coordinator begins by giving an introduction on sacrifices, mortifications and promises through its historic point of view. See Wikipedia for several examples on it.
2. Divide class in three groups and ask them to read questions and answers 718 – 727 of *The Spirits' Book* by Allan Kardec. After that, each group shall present a summary on what they have learned.

Text I. The Spirit's Book

718. *Does the law of self-preservation require us to provide for our bodily needs?*

"Yes; without physical health and strength, labor is impossible."

719. *Is it blamable in a man to seek after the comforts and enjoyments of corporeal life?*

"The desire of corporeal well-being is natural to man. God only prohibits excess, because excess is inimical to preservation; He has not made it a crime to seek after enjoyment, if that enjoyment be not acquired at another's expense, and if it be riot of a nature to weaken either your moral or your physical strength."

720. *Are voluntary privations, in view of a voluntary expiation, meritorious in the sight of God?*

"Do good to others, and you will thereby acquire more merit than is to be acquired by any self-imposed privations."

-Is any voluntary privation meritorious?

"Yes; the self-privation of useless indulgences, because it loosens man's hold on matter, and elevates his soul. What is meritorious is resistance to the temptation that solicits to excess or to indulgence in what is useless; it is the cutting down even of your necessities that you may have more to give to those who are in want. If your privations are only a vain pretence, they are a mere mockery."

721. *At every period in the past, and among all peoples, there have been men who have lived a life of ascetic mortification; is such a life meritorious from any point of view?*

"Ask yourselves to whom such a life is useful, and you will have the reply to your question. If such a life is only for him who leads it, and if it prevents him from doing good to others, it is only a form of selfishness, whatever the pretext with which it is colored. True mortification, according to the dictates of Christian charity, is to impose privation and labor upon yourselves for the good of others."

722. Is there any foundation in reason for the abstinence from certain foods eaten among various peoples?

"Whatever man can eat without injury to his health is permitted to him. Legislators may have prohibited certain aliments for some useful end, and, in order to give greater weight to their prohibitions, have represented them as emanating from God."

723. Is the use of animal food by man contrary to the law of nature?

"With your physical constitution, flesh is useful for nourishing flesh; without this kind of sustenance man's strength declines. The law of preservation makes it a duty for man to keep up his health and strength, that he may fulfill the law of labor. He should therefore feed himself according to the requirements of his organization."

724. Is there any merit in abstinence from any particular kind of food, animal or other, when undergone as an expiation?

"Yes, if undergone for the sake of others; but God cannot regard as meritorious any abstinence that does not impose a real privation, and that has not a serious and useful aim. This is why we say that those whose fasting is only apparent are hypocrites." (720)

725. What is to be thought of the mutilation of the bodies of men or of animals?

"What is the use of asking such a question? Ask yourselves, once for all, whether a thing is or is not useful. What is useless cannot be pleasing to God, and what is hurtful is always displeasing to Him. Be very sure that God is only pleased with the sentiments that raise the soul towards Him. It is by practicing His law, and not by violating it, that you can shake off your terrestrial matter."

726. If the sufferings of this world elevate us through the manner in which we bear them, are we elevated by those which we voluntarily create for ourselves?

"The only sufferings that can elevate you are those which come upon you naturally, because they are inflicted by God. Voluntary sufferings count for nothing when they are not useful to others. Do you suppose that those who shorten their lives by superhuman hardships, like the bonzes, fakirs, and fanatics of various sects, advance their progress thereby? Why do they not rather labor for the good of their fellow-creatures? Let them clothe the naked; let them comfort those who mourn; let them work for the infirm; let them impose privations upon themselves for the sake of the unfortunate and the needy; and their life will be useful, and pleasing to God. When your voluntary sufferings are undergone only for yourselves, they are mere selfishness; when you suffer for others, you obey the law of charity. Such are the precepts of Christ."

727. *If we ought not to create for ourselves voluntary sufferings that are of no use to others, ought we to endeavor to ward off from ourselves those which we foresee, or wit h which we are threatened?*

"The instinct of self-preservation has been given to all beings to guard them against dangers and sufferings. Flagellate your spirit, and not your body; mortify your pride; stifle the selfishness that eats into the heart like a devouring worm; and you will progress more than you could do by any amount of macerations out of keeping with the age in which you are living."

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

- 1) "Do good to others and your value will be greater".
- 2) "The self-preservation instinct was given to all beings as a defense against danger and suffering. Chastise your spirit, not your body. Torment your pride and suppress your self-centeredness, which is like a snake devouring your heart. In this way, you will progress more than through self-imposed ordeals, which are outdated for this day and age anyway."

REFERENCES:

(1) Kardec, Allan. "The Spirits' Book, chapter XX, questions 718 - 727, edited and translated by Allan Kardec Educational Society.

Lesson 9	Charity
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OBJECTIVES:

- To analyze the sentence: **“Without Charity there is no Salvation”**.
- To understand the difference between charity, alms and philanthropy.
- To explain how we should practice charity toward criminals.

METHODS:

1. The coordinator should make a brain storm (debate) with the whole class on the following terms: Charity, philanthropy and alms-giving. Explore the similarities and differences between these terms. The coordinator may find the appendix material useful.

2. Divide the class into 3 groups. Each group will read the texts assigned to them and work on the proposed questions. Afterwards, the coordinator will bring the groups back together and ask each group to present their answers.

Group I. **Charity and Love of the Neighbor.**

Please, read the following text⁽¹⁾, discuss it in your group and then answer these questions:

a) What is charity? Is charity the same as alms-giving? Is charity only the donation of money or even time to a specific cause?

b) Should we still be charitable to those who find themselves in a difficulty situation only secondary to their own fault? For example, a drug addict who loses his/her job, friends and family because of the addiction.

886. *What is the true meaning of the word charity as employed by Jesus?*

"Benevolence for every one, indulgence for the imperfections of others, forgiveness of injuries."

(Kardec's comments) Love and charity are the complement of the law of justice; for, to love our neighbor is to do him all the, good in our power, all that we should wish to have done to ourselves. Charity, according to Jesus, is not restricted to alms-giving, but embraces all our relations with our fellow-men whether our inferiors, our equals, or our superiors. It prescribes indulgence on our part, because we need the same ourselves; it forbids us to humiliate the unfortunate, as is too often done. How many, who are ready to lavish respect and attentions on the rich, appear to think it not worth their while to be civil to the poor; and yet, the more pitiable the situation of the latter, the more scrupulously should we refrain from adding humiliation to misfortune. He who is really kind endeavors to raise his inferior in his own estimation, by diminishing the distance between them.

887. *Jesus has also said: Love your enemies. But would it not be contrary to our natural tendencies to love our enemies, and does not unfriendliness proceed from a want of sympathy between spirits?*

"It would certainly be impossible for a man to feel tender and ardent affection for his enemies; and Jesus did not intend to prescribe anything of the kind. To 'love your enemies' means to forgive them, and to return good for evil. By so doing, you become their superior; by vengeance, you place yourselves beneath them."

888. *What is to be thought of alms-giving?*

"To be reduced to beg degrades a man morally as well as physically; it brutifies him. In a state of society based on the law of God and justice, provision would be made for assisting the weak without humiliating them; the means of living would be insured to all who are unable to work, so as not to leave their life at the mercy of chance and of individual good-will."

- *Do you blame alms-giving?*

"No; it is not the giving of alms that is reprehensible, but the way in which it is too often done. He who comprehends charity as inculcated by Jesus seeks out the needy, without waiting for the latter to hold out his hand."

"True charity is always gentle as well as benevolent, for it consists as much in the manner of doing a kindness as in the deed itself. A service, if delicately rendered, has a double value; but if rendered with haughtiness, though want may compel its acceptance, the recipient's heart is not touched by it.

"Remember, also, that ostentation destroys, in the sight of God, the merit of beneficence. Jesus has said: 'Let not your left hand know what your right hand does;' teaching you, by this injunction, not to tarnish charity by pride and vanity."

"You must distinguish between alms-giving, properly so-called, and beneficence. The most necessitous is not always he who begs by the wayside. Many, who are really poor, are restrained from begging by the dread of humiliation, and suffer silently and in secret: he who is really humane seeks out this hidden misery, and relieves it without ostentation.

"'Love one another;' such is the divine law by which God governs all the worlds of the universe. Love is the law of attraction for living and organized beings; attraction is the law of love for inorganic matter."

"Never lose sight of the fact, that every spirit, whatever his degree of advancement, or his situation in reincarnation or in erraticity, is always placed between a superior who guides and improves him, and an inferior towards whom he has the same duties to fulfil. Be therefore charitable; not merely by the cold bestowal of a coin on the mendicant who ventures to beg it of you, but by seeking out the poverty that hides itself from view. Be indulgent for the defects of those about you; instead of despising the ignorant and the vicious, instruct them, and make them better; be gentle and benevolent to your inferiors; be the same for the humblest creatures of the lower reigns; and you will have obeyed the law of God." SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

889. *Are there not men who are reduced to beggary through their own fault?*

"Undoubtedly there are; but if a sound moral education had taught them to practice the law of God, they would not have fallen into the excesses which have caused their ruin. It is mainly through the generalization of such education that the improvement of your globe will be ultimately accomplished."

Group II. Without Charity There Is No Salvation

Please, read the following texts A and B, discuss them in your group and then answer these questions:

- a) Define "neighbor".
- b) In the "Parable of the Good Samaritan", the Good Samaritan employs his material resources (time and money), as well as his emotional ones (care, attention and dedication) towards the robbed individual. What does this tell us toward the way we should practice charity?
- c) Why is charity the highest of the moral qualities?

Text A. The Parable of the Good Samaritan⁽²⁾

²⁵On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'".

²⁸"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Text B. The Spirit's Book⁽³⁾

3. All the moral teaching of Christ resumes itself in the need for charity and humility, that is to say, in the two virtues which are contrary to selfishness and pride. In all of His teaching Jesus indicates these two virtues as being the ones which lead to eternal happiness. He said that the poor in spirit, that is to say the humble, were blessed because the Kingdom of Heaven would be theirs: Blessed are those who have pure hearts;

Blessed are the gentle and the peacemakers; Blessed are the merciful. He also taught the need to love one's neighbor as oneself, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, to love our enemies, to forgive all offences if we wish to receive forgiveness, to do good without ostentation and to judge ourselves before we judge others. So then charity and humility are the two things which Jesus never ceased to recommend and for which He stands as an example. He also never ceased to combat pride and selfishness. Nor did He limit Himself to the mere recommending of charity, but put it in very clear and explicit terms as being the only condition for future happiness.

With respect to the description given by Jesus of the Final Judgment, we must separate, as in many other cases, that which is only form or allegory. The people to whom Jesus spoke, being still unable to understand totally spiritual questions, made it necessary for Him to offer them material images which would both shock and impress. Therefore in order for them to better understand what was being said to them, Jesus was obliged to keep closely to the form of the ideas of those times, always reserving for the future the real interpretation of His words and the points which at that time were unable to be clearly explained. But alongside the accessory or figurative parts of this explanation, there is one dominant feature: that of the happiness reserved for the just and the unhappiness awaiting those who are evil.

What then are the considerations of sentence according to that supreme judgment? On what has the indictment been based? Does the judge perhaps ask if the person under interrogation has fulfilled this or that formality, if they have more or less observed this or that external practice? No, he will ask but one question: if charity has been practiced; and then make the pronouncement: "Go to the right all who have helped their brothers and sisters. Go to the left all those who have been unyielding." Is it said, by any chance, what is the orthodoxy of their faith? Is any distinction made between those who believe in this or that manner? No, because Jesus places the Samaritan, considered by some to be a heretic, who practiced love towards his fellow creature above any orthodoxy which lacks charity. So do not consider charity to be merely one of the conditions for salvation. But instead, consider it to be the only condition. If there were others to be met, then Jesus would have mentioned them. Since He put charity in first place, it is because it implicitly embraces all the other virtues such as humility, kindness, benevolence, indulgence, justice, etc., and also because it is the absolute negation of pride and selfishness.

Group III. **Charity towards Criminals**

Please, read the following text⁽⁴⁾, discuss it in your group and then answer these questions:

- a) How do you define "criminal"? Can we be considered "criminals" in face of God's Laws?
- b) Is charity towards criminals a disrespect towards the criminal's victims?
- c) Give some examples of how you would practice charity toward criminals.

14. True charity constitutes one of the sublime teachings which God has given the world. Complete fraternity should exist amongst all true followers of His doctrine. Those who are unfortunate and wretched, by this we mean criminals, should be loved as God's

creatures which they are. Pardon and mercy will be given to them, just as much as to you, if they repent of all offences committed against His law. Consider yourselves to be more reprehensible, more guilty, than those to whom you deny pardon and commiseration because, as often as not, they do not know God as you do and consequently less will be asked of them than is asked of you. Do not judge! Oh! Never make a complete judgment, my friends. In as much as the verdict you pronounce will be applied even more severely to yourself, so you will need indulgence for those sins you so unceasingly incur. Are you ignorant of the fact that there are many actions considered as crimes in the eyes of God, who symbolizes pureness, that the world does not deem as even small offences.

True charity does not consist of only giving alms, nor even in the consoling words you may add to your donation. No, this is not the only thing God demands of you. Sublime charity, as taught by Jesus, also consists in the constant use of benevolence in all things pertaining to your neighbor. This sublime virtue can also be used in your relationships with those to whom the giving of alms would have no utility, but to whom a few words of consolation, encouragement and love would raise them up to the Lord.

The time approaches, we repeat, when a great fraternity will reign on this planet; one in which all mankind will obey the laws of Christ. These laws will offer both restraints and hopes and will conduct all souls to the happy realms. Love one another then as sons and daughters of the same Father; never establish differences between those who are unhappy, nor despise any living creature, seeing that God desires everyone to be equal. God permits great criminals to be found amongst you so that they may serve as a lesson. In the near future, when mankind finds itself submitted to the true laws of God, there will no longer be any need for these lessons, *because all impure and rebellious Spirits will have been relegated to the inferior worlds in accordance with their inclinations.*

It is your duty to help those of whom I have spoken with your prayers; that is true charity. It is not your place to say to a criminal: "You are despicable and should be purged from the face of the Earth. The death penalty is much too good for the likes of you." No! This is not the way to talk! Take note of that model on whom we should base ourselves - Jesus. What would He have said if He found one of those unfortunates at His side? He would have wept over them and considered them to be sick and therefore deserving of pity and would then have extended a helping hand. In actual fact, you cannot as yet do the same thing, but at least you can pray for them and help their Spirits during the time they still have to pass on Earth. Perhaps they will be touched by repentance if you pray with all your faith. They are our neighbors just as much as the best of mankind. Their souls, having strayed and become rebellious, were created as was your own, to be perfected. Help them then, to get out of the quagmire and pray for them. - Elizabeth of France (Havre, 1862).

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1) Charity according to Jesus meant: "Benevolence for every one, indulgence for the imperfections of others, forgiveness of injuries."

2) “To 'love your enemies' means to forgive them, and to return good for evil. By so doing, you become their superior; by vengeance, you place yourselves beneath them.”

3) “No; it is not the giving of alms that is reprehensible, but the way in which it is too often done”.

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(4) Idem, chapter XI, item 14.

APPENDIX:

(1) Altruism, from Wikipedia, January 2008

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altruism>)

Altruism is selfless concern for the welfare of others. It is a traditional virtue in many cultures, and central to many religious traditions. In English, this idea was often described as the Golden rule of ethics. Some newer philosophies such as egoism have criticized the concept, with writers arguing that there is no moral obligation to help others.

Altruism can be distinguished from a feeling of loyalty and duty. Altruism focuses on a motivation to help others or a want to do good without reward, while duty focuses on a moral obligation towards a specific individual (for example, God, a king), a specific organization (for example, a government), or an abstract concept (for example, patriotism etc). Some individuals may feel both altruism and duty, while others may not. Pure altruism is giving without regard to reward or the benefits of recognition.

The word "altruism" (derived from French *autre* "other", in its turn derived from Latin *alter* "other") was coined by Auguste Comte, the French founder of positivism, in order to describe the ethical doctrine he supported. He believed that individuals had a moral obligation to serve the interest of others or the "greater good" of humanity. Comte says, in his *Catechisme Positiviste*, that "[the] social point of view cannot tolerate the notion of rights, for such notion rests on individualism. We are born under a load of obligations of every kind, to our predecessors, to our successors, to our contemporaries. After our birth these obligations increase or accumulate, for it is some time before we can return any service.... This ["to live for others"], the definitive formula of human morality, gives a direct sanction exclusively to our instincts of benevolence, the common source of happiness and duty. [Man must serve] Humanity, who we are entirely." As the name of the ethical doctrine is "altruism," doing what the ethical doctrine prescribes has also come to be referred to by the term "altruism" — serving others through placing their interests above one's own.

Philosophers who support egoism have argued that altruism is demeaning to the individual and that no moral obligation to help others actually exists. Nietzsche asserts that altruism is predicated on the assumption that others are more important than one's self and that such a position is degrading and demeaning. He also claims that it was very uncommon for people in Europe to consider the sacrifice of one's own interests for others as virtuous until after the advent of Christianity.

Advocates of altruism as an ethical doctrine maintain that one ought to act, or refrain from acting, so that benefit or good is bestowed on other people, if necessary to the exclusion of one's own interests

(2) Philanthropy, from Wikipedia, January 2008

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philanthropy>)

Philanthropy is the act of donating money, goods, time, or effort to support a charitable cause, usually over an extended period of time and in regard to a defined objective. In a more fundamental sense, philanthropy may encompass any altruistic activity which is intended to promote good or improve human quality of life. Someone who is well known for practicing philanthropy may sometimes be called a philanthropist. Although such individuals are often very wealthy, people may nevertheless perform philanthropic acts without possessing great wealth.

Philanthropy is a major source of income for artistic, musical, religious, and humanitarian causes, as well as educational institutions ranging from schools to universities.

During the past few years, philanthropy has become more mainstream in terms of press coverage, owing to the high profile of rock star Bono's campaign to alleviate Third World debt to developed nations; the Gates Foundation's massive resources and ambitions, such as its campaigns to eradicate malaria and river blindness; and billionaire investor and Berkshire Hathaway Chair Warren Buffett's donation in 2006 of \$30 billion to the Gates Foundation. At the same time, young, rich, socially conscious entrepreneurs such as eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin are trying to change philanthropy through unique networks and new forms of giving. (...)The concept of measurable life change, with direct investments and follow-up to track results, is gaining more recognition through the above big names, but also through smaller organizations.



The motto *Ordem e Progresso* ("Order and Progress") in the flag of Brazil is inspired by Auguste Comte's motto of positivism: *L'amour pour principe et l'ordre pour base; le progrès pour but* ("Love as a principle and order as the basis; Progress as the goal"). It was inserted due to the fact that several of the people involved in the military coup d'état that deposed the monarchy and proclaimed Brazil a republic were followers of the ideas of Comte.

By the conventional definition of philanthropy, donations are dedicated to a narrowly defined cause and the donation is targeted to make a recognizable change in social conditions. This often necessitates large donations and financial support sustained over time.

The need for a large financial commitment creates a distinction between philanthropy and charitable giving, which typically plays a supporting role in a charitable organization initiated by someone else. Thus, the conventional usage of philanthropy applies mainly to wealthy persons, and sometimes to a trust created by a wealthy person with a particular cause or objective targeted.

Many non-wealthy persons have dedicated – thus, donated – substantial portions of their time, effort and wealth to charitable causes. These people are not typically described as philanthropists because individual effort alone is seldom recognized as instigating significant change. These people are thought of as charitable workers but some people wish to recognize these people as philanthropists in honor of their efforts.

Lesson 10**Maternal and Filial Love****OBJECTIVES:**

- To explain what is maternal and filial love.
- To reflect about the mission of a mother in the world.
- To analyze the causes of filial ingratitude.

METHODS:

1. The coordinator should make a 5 – 10 minute introduction about divorce and the causes of family dissolution. The material in the Appendix section can be used or, otherwise, a new material may be provided.

2. After the initial and brief explanation, the coordinator will divide the class into 2 groups. Each group will read the assigned texts, but both must answer these questions:

- a) Is maternal love a human virtue or is it instinctive to all animals?
- b) How does maternal love express itself?
- c) What are the characteristics of maternal love on Earth?
- d) How to reconcile the maternal mission with the demands of modern life?
- e) Comment this sentence: “The mother is the equilibrium point in the home”.
- f) What should it be understood by filial love?
- g) How to avoid familial disunion? How to keep a united family besides the differences among its members?
- h) Analyze the reasons for filial ungratefulness.
- i) What is the role played by the father in the children’s education?

Group I:**Filial Devotion⁽¹⁾**

3. The commandment: 'Honor your father and your mother' is an inference from the general laws of charity and love towards one's fellow beings, seeing that those who do not love their mother and father cannot then love their fellow creatures. But with regard to parents, here the word *honor* contains an extra obligation, which is filial devotion. God wishes to show us that respect, esteem, obedience, caring, submission and deference should be joined to love. All these put together involve an obligation for each person to carry out what is demanded by charity with regard to one's neighbor, and which implies an even more rigorous duty towards parents. This duty naturally extends itself to those who take the place of a mother or father, and whose merit is much greater because their devotion has nothing of obligation. God will rigorously punish all violations of this commandment.

To honor your mother and father consists in not only showing respect, but also helping them in their needs, offering them rest in their old age and surrounding them with care; just as they themselves did for us during our infancy. Above all, it is necessary to demonstrate true filial devotion to destitute parents. Do you think this commandment is being kept by those who, believing they are doing a great deal of good, offer only the strictest necessities to their parents, so as to avoid them dying from hunger, while they deprive themselves of nothing? Or when, so as not to leave them unsheltered, they relegate them to the worst rooms in the house, while reserving the best and most comfortable for themselves? The parents are even fortunate when this is not done with ill-will, or when they are obliged to pay heavily for the rest of their lives by being forced to run the home!

Is it then that old and feeble parents must serve their children who are younger and stronger? Did their mother make them pay for the milk they suckled? Did she count the sleepless nights when they were ill? Or the steps she took in order to guarantee they lacked nothing? No, children do not owe their parents only the strictest necessities; they also owe them, according to their possibilities, all those little extras like thoughtfulness and loving care which are nothing more than interest on what they themselves received, the payment of a sacred debt. This then is the only filial devotion which pleases God.

Alas for those who forget what they owe to those who sustained them in their hour of weakness, who, with the giving of a physical life, also gave them moral life, and many times imposed upon themselves great privations in order to guarantee the well-being of their children! Woe unto all those who are ungrateful, for they shall be punished with ingratitude and abandonment; they will be hurt in their dearest affections, *sometimes even in the present life*, but certainly in a future one, wherein they will suffer themselves what they have made others suffer!

It is true that some parents neglect their duty and are not all they should be to their children. However, it is only God who has the competence to judge, and not the children. These are not competent to be able to judge because they have perhaps deserved their parent's behavior. If the law of charity demands that evil be paid with goodness, that we be indulgent with the imperfections of others, that we should not speak against our neighbor, that we forget and forgive all grievances, that we love even our enemies, how much greater must be our obligations when related to our parents! Therefore children, in matters relating to their parents, should take as a rule of conduct all those principles of Jesus concerning our fellow beings. They must be aware that all reprehensible behavior towards strangers is even more reprehensible when related to parents. Also, what might be only a small offence in the first case, may be considered as a serious crime in the second, because here the offence of lack of charity is joined to that of ingratitude.

4. God said: 'Honor your father and your mother so that you may live a long time in the land that the Lord your God shall give you.' Why did He promise earthly life as a recompense and not heavenly life? The explanation lies in the words: 'that God shall give you', which having been omitted in the modern formula of the Decalogues, has altered the meaning. But first, in order to be able to understand clearly, we must go back to the situation and the ideas existing amongst the Hebrews at that time. They still knew nothing of a future life as they were unable to see anything beyond the physical. They had then to be impressed more by what they saw than by what they could not see. So God spoke to them in a language well within their reach of understanding, and as one would

expect to do with a child, put them into a perspective which could satisfy them. At that time they were still in the desert; the land to be given by God was the Promised Land, the object of their aspirations. They wished for nothing more, and God said that they would live there for a long time. That is to say, they would possess the land for a long time if they kept His commandments.

Now by the time of the advent of Jesus, they had more advanced ideas. The time had come for them to receive less material nourishment and Jesus Himself began to teach about spiritual life by saying: "My kingdom is not of this world; it is there and not here that you will receive recompense for all the good works you have practiced." With these words the Promised Land ceases to be material and transforms itself into a spiritual Homeland. This is why, when we are called upon to keep the commandments: 'Honor your father and your mother,' it is not this world that is promised, but Heaven. (See chapters 2 & 3.)

Group II: **Physical and Spiritual Families**

Text A: The Spirits' Book⁽²⁾

890. *Is maternal affection a virtue, or is it an instinctive feeling common to men and to animals?*

"It is both. Nature has endowed the mother with the love of her offspring in order to ensure their preservation. Among the animals, maternal affection is limited to the supply of their material needs; it ceases when this care is no longer needed. In the human race, it lasts throughout life, and assumes a character of unselfish devotion that raises it to the rank of a virtue; it even survives death, and follows the career of the child from beyond the grave. You see, therefore, that there is in this affection, as it exists in man, something more than as it exists among the animals".

891. *Since maternal affection is a natural sentiment, why is it that mothers often hate their children, and even, in some cases, before their birth?*

"The absence of maternal affection is sometimes a trial chosen by the spirit of the child, or an expiation for him if he have been a bad father, a bad mother, or a bad son, in some previous existence. In all cases, a bad mother can only be the incarnation of a bad spirit, who seeks to throw obstacles in the path of the child, in order to make him succumb in the trial he has chosen. But such a violation of the laws of nature will not remain unpunished, and the spirit of the child will be rewarded for surmounting the obstacles thus thrown in his way".

892. *When parents have children who cause them sorrow, are they not excusable for not feeling for them the same tenderness they would have felt had their conduct been different?*

"No; for the training of their children is a task that has been confided to them, and their mission is to make every possible effort to bring them back into the right road.. Besides, the sorrows of parents are often the consequence of the bad habits they have allowed their children to contract from the cradle; a reaping of the evil harvest of which they themselves have sown the seeds."

Text B: The Gospel According to Spiritism⁽³⁾

8. Blood ties do not necessarily create bonds between Spirits. The body comes from the body. But the Spirit does not proceed from the Spirit, since the Spirit already existed before the formation of the body. The parents do not create the Spirit of the child; they do nothing more than supply the material wrapping, although it is their duty to help the intellectual and moral development of their child, in order to further its progress.

Those incarnated in the same family, especially as close relations, are as often as not congenial Spirits linked by past relationships, which express themselves during their earthly lives by their reciprocated affections. But it can also happen that these people are complete strangers to each other, or they may be distant from each other due to past aversions which while on Earth are translated into mutual antagonisms which serve as probations. The real family ties are not those of blood then, but those of mutual sympathy and the communion of ideas which hold spirits together, *before, during and after* their incarnations. From this it follows that two people born of different parents may be more like brothers or sisters than if they were of the same blood. They can attract each other, search for each other and so feel happy together; whereas two blood brothers may be repelled by each other, as is frequently seen. This moral problem is one that only Spiritism can resolve through the explanation of the plurality of existences. (See chapter 4, item 13.)

So, there are two kinds of families: *Families through spiritual ties and families through bodily ties*. In the first case these ties are durable and strengthen with purification, perpetuating in the spiritual worlds by means of the various migrations of the soul. In the second case, the ties are as fragile as the physical body itself, extinguishing with them and in many instances dissolving morally even in the actual existence. This was what Jesus was trying to make comprehensible when He said to His disciples: "Here is my mother and my brothers by spiritual ties, because all those who do the bidding of My Father, who is in Heaven, are my brothers, my sisters and my mother." The hostility felt by His blood brothers is clearly expressed in this narrative from Saint Mark, when it says that they had intentions of laying their hands on Jesus, under the pretext that He had *lost His Spirit*, or gone out of His mind. On being informed of their arrival and knowing full well the sentiments they harbored against Him it was only natural for Jesus, speaking in spiritual terms, to refer to His disciples as His brothers and sisters. Although His mother was accompanying His brothers, Jesus generalized the teachings which in no way implies He intended to declare that His mother, according to the physical body, was nothing to Him in spirit nor that she deserved only indifference, as He proved on many occasions.

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1. In a planet of Trials and Reconciliations like Earth, families might represent the reunion of sympathetic spirits or the reencounter of past enemies in order to work their differences through family ties.

2. No matter the circumstances, children have the obligation to assist their parents, especially at old age, while parents have the mission to give the best moral education possible to their children, especially at an early age.

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APPENDIX:

(1) Religion and Divorce. From Wikipedia, January, 2008
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_and_divorce)

I) Islam

In Islam, divorce is allowed, though discouraged. A commonly mentioned Islamic ruling is that divorce is the least liked of all permissible acts. Islam considers marriage to be a legal contract; and the act of obtaining a divorce is essentially the act of legally dissolving the contract. According to Sharia law, there is a required waiting period before a divorce is considered valid. A man must announce his intentions, effectively "divorcing", three times over a period of three months - during which time he may change his mind and renege. If he completes the three-month period, still intent on separating from his wife, then the couple are not allowed to remarry each other without first entering other relationships to help determine the cause of their original separation.

II) Judaism

Judaism has always accepted divorce as a fact of life, though an unfortunate one. Judaism generally maintains that it is better for a couple to divorce than to remain together in a state of bitterness and strife. It is said that peace in the home is a desirable state.

In general, it is accepted that for a Jewish divorce to be effective the husband must hand to the wife - and not vice versa - a bill of divorcement, called a *get*, which also acts as proof of the divorce. From ancient times, the *get* was considered to be very important to show all those who needed to have proof that the woman was in fact free from the previous marriage and free to remarry. In Jewish law, besides other things, the consequences of a woman remarrying and having a child while still legally married to another is profound: the child would be a *mamzer* ("bastard"), to be avoided at any cost. Also, the woman would be committing adultery should she remarry while still legally married to another. Since the enactment by rabbis of a ruling called the Herem de-Rabbenu Gershom it became prohibited for the husband to divorce his wife against her will.

III) Christianity

Most Christian churches treat divorce negatively; however, different Christian denominations vary in their toleration of it. The Roman Catholic Church treats all

consummated sacramental marriages as permanent during the life of the spouses, and therefore does not allow remarriage after a divorce if the other spouse still lives and the marriage has not been annulled. However, divorced Catholics are still welcome to participate fully in the life of the church so long as they have not remarried against church law, and the Catholic Church generally requires civil divorce or annulment procedures to have completed before it will consider annulment cases. Other Christian denominations, including the Eastern Orthodox Church and many Protestant churches, will allow both divorce and remarriage even with a surviving former spouse, at least under certain conditions.

IV) Dharmic Religions

Dharmic religions do not have a concept of divorce. However, the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 applicable to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains in India does have provisions for divorce under some circumstances.

(2) Implications of Divorce, from Wikipedia, January/2008

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Implications_of_divorce)

Divorce is often one of the most traumatic periods in a person's life. Studies show it is the second-most stressful event in life, after the death of a spouse. Separation and Divorce is often associated with deep grief-based emotions over the loss of the desired-for relationship. Emotions may include sadness, lethargy, depression, anxiety, anger, and other emotions.

The emotional trauma can be exacerbated when the couples chooses an adversarial approach to the legal divorce, which itself adds additional stresses over and beyond the normal grieving. When in the anger-phase of grief, it can be tempting for a spouse to become adversarial, which can easily make things worse.

Mental health therapy can be extremely beneficial during a divorce, in order to address the many expectable emotions. Non-adversarial methods of dispute resolution, such as mediation and collaborative divorce are less likely to add to the emotional trauma, and are better suited when an ongoing relationship is contemplated, such as for future parenting.

(I) Financial implications

Divorce leads to the creation of two households rather than one, with consequent increased costs. All parties suffer these effects. As more women are awarded child custody, many of the roles and difficulties described below may be reversed, although men who are awarded custody have historically been less likely to be awarded child support or alimony.

There are significant societal costs to divorce. By any measure or study, a significant percentage of societal ills are over-represented by individuals who have not been reared by both biological parents. This is true of all juvenile delinquency and the adult prison population, as well as measures of school drop-outs and unemployment. The rate of unmarried teen pregnancy is the highest among young women who have not been living with both biological parents. These facts are often not discussed openly or discussed in professional papers, as it does appear to diminish the valiant and successful efforts of many single parents, whether that has been initiated by divorce or widow(er)hood.

Women often financially suffer as a result of divorce due to lower earning potential in many countries, and to their greater historical role in rearing children, and there may be some relationship between these two factors. They more often obtain exclusive custody of children after the divorce, reducing their ability to pursue high-paying employment. Child support collection can be quite difficult: some fathers feel that they only have an obligation towards their children and not their mother (who may have initiated an unwanted divorce), some may not want to meet their obligation towards their children, and others, while intending to meet their obligation may not be able to fulfill it. Many national and local governments provide some kind of welfare system for divorced mothers and their children. Public family support for male headed households, in the absence of a disability, are far less common. It is important to note that divorce is the number one contributor to bankruptcy in the United States.

Men are also often victims of divorce, both financially and in other ways. Court-ordered alimony and child support can be beggaring, often pegged to large percentages of the higher-earning spouse's income. Such obligations can make it impossible for paying spouses to remarry, and if they do remarry, the law often puts the payor's prior obligations before his and his new family's needs. Groups such as Families Need Fathers claim that non-custodial spouses (more often men) are often blocked from access to their children. Currently in the United States, federal law makes non-payment of child support a felony, whereas refusal to honor court-ordered visitation decisions is not, and seldom results in any punishment or compulsion to change.

Most states in the US apply a standard of "equitable" division of property, attempting to address the many complexities involved in separating out years of financial sharing. In such states judges have greater power to balance various contributions to the marriage.

Another significant financial implication of divorce is the actual cost of the divorce itself. Attorneys fees are often an extreme hardship, particularly if the spouses choose an adversarial process rather than non-adversarial process, such as mediation or collaborative divorce.

A prenuptial agreement before marriage may reduce conflict over financial division should a divorce be undertaken later, although they can also lead to litigation over the agreement itself.

II) Medical and psychological implications

Recent sociological studies have pointed to a variety of long-term economic, social, physical, and mental health consequences of divorce, although the full extent of such effects remains hotly debated. All the studies to date suffer from an inherent methodological weakness which researchers have not yet found a solution to: establishing the relevant baseline for comparisons. By definition, all divorces are of unhappy couples; meanwhile, those who do not divorce are some mix of happy couples and of unhappy ones who stayed married. Comparisons of life outcomes or well-being along the simple divorced/not divorced axis will therefore always show poorer outcomes for the group which is composed entirely of unhappy couples, demonstrating simply that being part of a happy couple is better than being part of an unhappy one.

Recent longitudinal studies have reported that some divorced people are no happier after divorce. University of Chicago sociologist Linda Waite analyzed the relationships between marriage, divorce and happiness using the National Survey of

Family and Households. She reported that unhappily married adults who had divorced were no happier than those who had stayed married. Some studies report that cohabitation before marriage is correlated with an increased divorce rate.

Attempts to assess the impact of divorce on children are inherently compromised by the same methodological problem as with adults: establishing the relevant baseline for comparisons. By definition, virtually all children of divorce are from unhappy families; meanwhile, children whose parents never divorced are from some mix of happy families and unhappy ones (parents who stayed married despite an unhappy marital relationship). Comparisons of life outcomes or well-being along the simple divorced/not divorced axis naturally always show poorer outcomes for the group that is composed entirely of children of unhappy families, demonstrating simply that being the child of happy parents is better than being the child of unhappy ones. The actual question of interest is whether being a child of unhappy parents who divorce is better or worse than being a child of unhappy parents who do not divorce. Establishing data for that comparison would require being able to identify with reasonable certainty the subset of nondivorced parents who are nonetheless deeply unhappy with each other, something no researcher has found a way to do at a meaningful scale.

From work that has been done along the flawed axis described above, it was until recently generally assumed that children's difficulties with divorce, while common, were short-lived. However, recent authors have argued that a major cost to children comes long after: when they attempt to form stable marriages themselves. There is extensive and heated debate over just how much harm, just how many children are harmed to what extent, what factors mediate the harm, and so on. Mavis Hetherington (a University of Virginia professor) reports that 70% of children coming from divorced families consider divorce an adequate answer to marital problems (even if children are present), compared to only 40% of children from non-divorced families.

Children of divorced parents (those entirely from unhappy families) are reported to have a higher chance of behavioral problems than those of non-divorced parents (a mix of happy and unhappy families). Studies have also reported the former to be more likely to suffer abuse than children in intact families, and to have a greater chance of living in poverty. A 2002 article in *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* discusses a variety of health consequences for children of the unhappy couples that do divorce. Constance Ahron, who has published books suggesting there may be positive effects for children, interviewed ninety-eight divorced families' children for *We're Still Family: What Grown Children Have to Say About Their Parents' Divorce*. Since by definition all children of divorced parents had lived in unhappy homes, they unsurprisingly reported numerous unhappy experiences. Numerous subjects said things like "I saw some of the things my parents did and know not to do that in my marriage and see the way they treated each other and know not to do that to my spouse and my children. I know [the divorce] has made me more committed to my husband and my children." Ahron's method of asking adult children of divorce how they feel about it also has the well-known weaknesses of "self-report" studies.

Researchers have reported that in cases of extremely high conflict, divorce can be positive. An article in the *Oklahoma Bar Journal* defines "high conflict" in terms of ongoing litigation, anger and distress, verbal abuse, physical aggression or threats of physical aggression, difficulty in communicating about and cooperating in child care, or

other court-determined factors. Studies have claimed that people who have been in divorced families: have higher rates of alcoholism and other substance abuse compared to those who have never been divorced. Robert H. Coombs, Professor of Behavioral Sciences at UCLA, reviewed over 130 studies measuring how marital status affects personal well-being.

- have higher rates of clinical depression. Family disruption and low socioeconomic status in early childhood increase the long-term risk for major depression.
- seek formal psychiatric care at higher rates. Studies vary, suggesting from 5 to 21 times the risk, and vary over whether men or women are more seriously affected.
- in the case of men, are more likely to commit suicide at some point in their lives, according to a study by Augustine Kposowa, a University of California at Riverside sociologist. This study quantified earlier work that estimated an increased risk of 2.7 times for men.
- have lower life expectancies overall.

Studies have also claimed positive correlations between divorce and rates of:

- stroke
- cancer. Married cancer patients are also more likely to recover than divorced ones.
- acute infectious diseases, parasitic diseases, respiratory illnesses, digestive illnesses, and severe injuries.
- Some research suggests that childhood trauma, including parental divorce, can lead to much greater risk of heart attack in later life. Combined with job stress, divorce led to a 69% increase of death rate among men with above average risk of heart disease.
- rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis. A 2002 article in the Journal of Rheumatology shows a 30% increase in risk at any given age. A 2003 article in the Canadian Journal of Public Health finds that parental divorce leads to increased risk of arthritis for children later in life.
- sexually transmitted diseases. For example, in Uganda "Results from a baseline survey of HIV-1 infection in the cohort of over 4,000 adults (over 12 years old) showed a twofold increase in risk of infection in divorced or separated persons when compared with those who are married".

(3) History of divorce. From Wikipedia, January, 2008

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divorce>)

Divorce existed in antiquity, dating at least back to ancient Mesopotamia. The ancient Athenians liberally allowed divorce, but the person requesting divorce had to submit the request to a magistrate, and the magistrate could determine that the reasons given were insufficient. Although liberally granted in ancient Athens, divorce was rare in early Roman culture. As the Roman Empire grew in power and authority, however, Roman civil law embraced the maxim, "matrimonia debent esse libera" ("marriages ought to be free"), and either husband or wife could renounce the marriage at will. Though civil authority rarely intervened in divorces, social and familial taboos guaranteed that divorce occurred only after serious circumspection. The Christian emperors Constantine and Theodosius restricted the grounds for divorce to grave cause, but this was relaxed by Justinian in the 6th century. After the fall of the empire, familial

life was regulated more by ecclesiastical authority than civil authority. By the 9th or 10th century of the Christian era, the frequency of divorce had been greatly curtailed by the influence of the Christian church. The Christian church considered marriage a sacrament instituted by God and Christ indissoluble by mere human action.

Although divorce, as known today, was generally prohibited after the 10th century, actions allowing the separation of husband and wife and annulment of the marriage were well-known. What is today referred to as "separate maintenance" (or "legal separation") was termed "divorce a mensa et thoro" ("divorce from bed-and-board"). The husband and wife physically separated and were forbidden to live or cohabit together; but their marital relationship did not fully terminate. Because the marriage did not end, the husband had a continuing duty to support his wife (alimony). From the earliest years of the Christian age until the 18th century, annulment was the only means by which a marriage could be dissolved, and the circumstances under which annulment was proper was solely within the province of ecclesiastical courts. The common-law courts had no power over marriage since it was a status granted by the Church. The grounds for annulment were determined only by Church authority. Annulment was known as "divorce a vinculo matrimonii," or "divorce from all the bonds of marriage," for canonical causes of impediment existing at the time of the marriage. The Sacrament of Marriage produced one person from two, inseparable from each other: since husband and wife became one person upon marriage, that oneness could only be dissolved if the parties improperly entered into the marriage initially.



Henry VIII of England is known for founding the Anglican Church partly in order to obtain a divorce.

Marriage later came to be considered a civil contract, and civil authorities gradually asserted their power to decree divorce. Since no precedents existed defining the circumstances under which marriage could be dissolved, civil authorities heavily relied on the previous determinations of the ecclesiastic courts and freely adopted the requirements set down by those courts. Although the common-law courts gradually assumed the power to dissolve marriages, divorce was considered contrary to public policy, and the courts strictly construed those circumstances under which they would grant a divorce.

Because marriage could not be terminated except in the most extreme circumstances, common-law courts refused the grant of a divorce if evidence revealed any hint of complicity between the husband and wife to divorce, or if they attempted to manufacture grounds for a divorce. Divorce was granted only because one party to the marriage had violated a sacred vow to the "innocent spouse." If both husband and wife were guilty, "neither would be allowed to escape the bonds of marriage." Eventually, the idea that a marriage could be dissolved in cases in which one of the parties violated the sacred vow gradually allowed expansion of the grounds upon which divorce could be granted from those grounds which existed at the time of the marriage to grounds which

occurred after the marriage, but which exemplified violation of that vow, such as abandonment, adultery, or “extreme cruelty.”

II) Causes of Divorce

A 2006 survey by DivorceMagazine.com asked readers what had caused their separation or divorce. Taking both genders into consideration, 22.8% of respondents claimed infidelity as the strongest factor, followed by communication problems at 21.6%, basic incompatibility at 18.2%, and emotional or physical abuse at 16.8%. However, it is worth noting that the poll results differed somewhat between men and women. 27.4% of men chose basic incompatibility as the strongest factor; communication problems came second at 24.5%, followed by infidelity at 19.1% and abuse at 11.4%. (1033 women answered the poll, as opposed to only 481 men).

An annual study in the UK by management consultants Grant Thornton estimates the main causes of divorce based on surveys of matrimonial lawyers.

The main causes in 2004 (2003) were:

- Extramarital affairs - 27% (29%)
- Family strains - 18% (11%)
- Emotional/physical abuse - 17% (10%)
- Mid-life crisis - 13% (not in 2003 survey)
- Addictions, e.g. alcoholism and gambling - 6% (5%)
- Workaholism - 6% (5%)

Emotional and physical abuses were more evenly split, with women affected in 60% and men in 40% of cases. In 70% of workaholism-related divorces it was men who were the cause, and 30% women.

The 2004 survey found that 93% of divorce cases were petitioned by women, very few of which were contested. 53% of divorces were of marriages that had lasted 10 to 15 years, with 40% ending after 5 to 10 years. The first 5 years are relatively divorce-free, and if a marriage survives more than 20 years it is unlikely to end in divorce.

Regarding divorce settlements, as defined by this survey women obtained a better or considerably better settlement than men in 60% of cases. In 30% of cases the assets were split 50-50, and in only 10% of cases did men achieve better settlements (down from 24% the previous year). The 2004 report concluded that campaigns like that of Fathers 4 Justice must succeed in increasing the percentage of shared residence orders, in order for more equitable financial divisions to become the norm.

Lesson 11	Respect to Temporal Laws, other Religions and Human Rights.
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OBJECTIVES:

- To understand why respect towards temporal laws, other religions and human rights reflect spiritual evolution.
- To analyze the causes which lead human beings of disrespecting one another.

METHODS:

1. The Coordinator should begin the session with a brief (10-15 min) presentation/discussion about human rights. Define what they are, their history, development and understanding during human progress. The material in the Appendix section may be used.

2. Propose to the class the following questions. Annotate and comment the group's answer to the questions.

a) What do you understand by: "Do unto others as you would like others to do unto you"?

b) Do other people always treat you as you would like to be treated? If not, do you think this allows you to also mistreat others?

c) Do you think that to respect the rights of others safeguards that our own rights will be respected? And when our own rights are not respected as much as we would appreciate what should our attitude be?

3. Read with the whole class the following questions and answers⁽¹⁾. Incorporate them into your initial presentation about Human Rights and the answers from the questions proposed on item 2 (above).

All Class.

Natural Law

873. *Is the sentiment of justice natural or the result of acquired ideas?*

"It is so natural that your feeling spontaneously revolts at the idea of an injustice. Moral progress undoubtedly develops this sentiment, but it does not create it. God has placed it in the heart of man, and for this reason you often find, among simple and primitive people, notions of justice more exact than those of others who are possessed of a larger amount of knowledge."

874. *If justice be a law of nature, how is it that men understand it so differently, and that the same thing appears just to one, and unjust to another?*

"It is because your passions often mingle with this sentiment and debase it, as they do with the greater part of the natural sentiments, causing you to see things from a false point of view.

875. *How should justice be defined?*

"Justice consists in respect for the rights of others."

- *What determines those rights?*

"Two things: human law and natural law. Men having made laws in harmony with their character and habits, those laws have established rights that have varied with the progress of enlightenment. Your laws, at this day, though still far from perfect, no longer consecrate what were considered as rights in the Middle Ages; those rights, which appear to you monstrous, appeared just and natural at that epoch. The rights established by men are not, therefore, always conformable with justice; moreover, they only regulate certain social relations, while in private life there are an immense number of acts that are submitted only to the tribunal of conscience."

876. *Independently of the right established by human law, what is the basis of justice according to natural law?*

"Christ has told you: 'Do unto others whatsoever you would that others should do unto you.' God has placed in the heart of man, as the true rule of all justice, the desire which each of you feels to see his own rights respected. When uncertain as to what he should do in regard to his fellow-creature in any given conjuncture, let each man ask himself what he would wish to have done to himself under the same circumstances; God could not give him a safer guide than his own conscience."

(Kardec's comments): The true criterion of justice is, in fact, to desire for others what one would desire for one's self; not merely to desire for one's self what one would desire for others, which is not precisely the same thing. As it not natural to desire harm for one's self, we are sure, in taking our personal desires as the type of our conduct to wards our neighbors, never to desire anything but good for them. In ail ages and in all beliefs, man has always sought to enforce his personal rights; the sublime peculiarity of the Christian religion is its taking of personal right as the basis of the right of the neighbor.

877. *Does the necessity of living in society impose any special obligations on mankind?*

"Yes, and the first of these is to respect the rights of others; he who respects those rights will always be just. In your world, where so many neglect to practice the law of justice, you have recourse to reprisals, and this causes trouble and confusion in human society. Social life gives rights and imposes corresponding duties."

878. *It is possible for a man to be under an illusion as to the extent of his rights; what is there that can show him their true limit?*

"The limit of the right which he would recognize on the part of his neighbor towards himself under similar circumstances, and vice-versa."

- *But if each attributes to himself the rights of his fellow-creatures, what becomes of subordination to superiors? Would not such a principle be anarchical and destructive of all power?*

“Natural rights are the same for all men, from the smallest to the greatest; God has not fashioned some men from a finer clay than others, and all are equals in His sight. Natural rights are eternal; the rights which man has established perish with his institutions. But each man feels distinctly his strength or his weakness, and will always be conscious of a sort of deference towards him whose wisdom or virtue entitles him to respect. It is important to mention this, in order that those who think themselves superior may know what are the duties that will give them a right to deference. There will be no insubordination when authority shall be attributed only to superior wisdom.”

879. *What would be the character of the man who should practice justice in all its purity?*

"He would be truly righteous, after the example of Jesus; for he would practice the love of the neighbor and charity, without which there can be no real justice."

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1. “When uncertain as to what he should do in regard to his fellow-creature in any given conjuncture, let each man ask himself what he would wish to have done to himself under the same circumstances; God could not give him a safer guide than his own conscience”.

REFERENCES:

(1) Kardec, Allan, *The Spirits’ Book*”, questions 873 – 879, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.

APPENDIX:

1. Human Rights, from Wikipedia, accessed January 2008

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights)

Human rights refers to "the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled". Examples of rights and freedoms which are often thought of as human rights include civil and political rights, such as the right to life and liberty, freedom of expression, and equality before the law; and social, cultural and economic rights, including the right to participate in culture, the right to work, and the right to education

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The history of human rights covers thousands of years and draws upon religious, cultural, philosophical and legal developments throughout recorded history. Though several ancient documents and later religions and philosophies included a variety of concepts that may be considered to be human rights, the Anglocentric concept is that human rights as a legal right stem primarily from the precedent set by the Magna Carta.

The Magna Carta is an English charter originally issued in 1215. The Magna Carta influenced the development of the common law and many constitutional documents, such as the United States Constitution, especially its Bill of Rights, and is considered one of the most important legal documents in the history of democracy, being one of the most significant early influences on the extensive historical process that led to the rule of constitutional law today.

The Magna Carta was one of the first legal documents to limit the power of government in order to protect the rights of its citizens. For modern times, the most enduring legacy of the Magna Carta is considered the right of habeas corpus. This right arises from what are now known as clauses 36, 38, 39, and 40 of the 1215 Magna Carta. The Magna Carta also included the right to due process.

Two major revolutions occurred during the 18th century, in the United States (1776) and in France (1789). The Virginia Declaration of Rights of 1776 set up a number of fundamental rights and freedoms. The later United States Declaration of Independence includes concepts of natural rights and famously states "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Similarly, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen defines a set of individual and collective rights of the people. These are, in the document, held to be universal - not only to French citizens but to all men without exception.

Philosophers such as Thomas Paine, John Stuart Mill and Hegel expanded on the theme of universality during the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1831 William Lloyd Garrison wrote in a newspaper called *The Liberator* that he was trying to enlist his readers in "the great cause of human rights" so the term human rights probably came into use sometime between Paine's *The Rights of Man* and Garrison's publication. In 1849 a contemporary, Henry David Thoreau, wrote about human rights in his treatise *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* which was later influential on human rights and civil rights thinkers. United States Supreme Court Justice David Davis, in his 1867 opinion for *Ex Parte Milligan*, wrote "By the protection of the law, human rights are secured; withdraw that protection and they are at the mercy of wicked rulers or the clamor of an excited people".



Magna Carta or "Great Charter" was one of the world's first documents containing commitments by a sovereign to his people to respect certain legal rights.

Many groups and movements have managed to achieve profound social changes over the course of the 20th century in the name of human rights. In Western Europe and North America, labor unions brought about laws granting workers the right to strike, establishing minimum work conditions and forbidding or regulating child labor. The women's rights movement succeeded in gaining for many women the right to vote. National liberation movements in many countries succeeded in driving out colonial powers. One of the most influential was Mahatma Gandhi's movement to free his native India from British rule. Movements by long-oppressed racial and religious minorities succeeded in many parts of the world, among them the civil rights movement, and more recent diverse identity politics movements, on behalf of women and minorities in the United States.

The foundation of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the 1864 Lieber Code and the first of the Geneva Conventions in 1864 laid the foundations of International humanitarian law, to be further developed following the two World Wars.

Several theoretical approaches have been advanced to explain how and why human rights become part of social expectations.

One of the oldest Western philosophies on human rights is that they are a product of a natural law, stemming from different philosophical or religious grounds.

Other theories hold that human rights codify moral behavior which is a human social product developed by a process of biological and social evolution (associated with Hume). Human rights are also described as a sociological pattern of rule setting (as in the sociological theory of law and the work of Weber). These approaches include the notion that individuals in a society accept rules from legitimate authority in exchange for security and economic advantage (as in Rawls) - a social contract.

Natural law theories base human rights on a "natural" moral, religious or even biological order which is independent of transitory human laws or traditions.

Socrates and his philosophic heirs, Plato and Aristotle, posited the existence of natural justice or natural right (*dikaion physikon*, *δικαιον φυσικον*, Latin *ius naturale*). Of these, Aristotle is often said to be the father of natural law, although evidence for this is due largely to the interpretations of his work of Thomas Aquinas. The development of this tradition of natural justice into one of natural law is usually attributed to the Stoics.

Some of the early Church fathers sought to incorporate the until then pagan concept of natural law into Christianity. Natural law theories have featured greatly in the philosophies of Thomas Aquinas, Francisco Suárez, Richard Hooker, Thomas Hobbes, Hugo Grotius, Samuel von Pufendorf, and John Locke.

In the Seventeenth Century Thomas Hobbes founded a contractualist theory of legal positivism on what all men could agree upon: what they sought (happiness) was subject to contention, but a broad consensus could form around what they feared (violent death at the hands of another). The natural law was how a rational human being, seeking to survive and prosper, would act. It was discovered by considering humankind's natural rights, whereas previously it could be said that natural rights were discovered by considering the natural law. In Hobbes' opinion, the only way natural law could prevail was for men to submit to the commands of the sovereign. In this lay the foundations of the theory of a social contract between the governed and the governor.

Hugo Grotius based his philosophy of international law on natural law. He wrote that "even the will of an omnipotent being cannot change or abrogate" natural law, which

"would maintain its objective validity even if we should assume the impossible, that there is no God or that he does not care for human affairs." This is the famous argument *etiamsi daremus (non esse Deum)*, that made natural law no longer dependent on theology.

John Locke incorporated natural law into many of his theories and philosophy, especially in *Two Treatises of Government*. Locke turned Hobbes' prescription around, saying that if the ruler went against natural law and failed to protect "life, liberty, and property," people could justifiably overthrow the existing state and create a new one.

The Belgian philosopher of law Frank van Dun is one among those who are elaborating a secular conception of natural law in the liberal tradition. There are also emerging and secular forms of natural law theory that define human rights as derivative of the notion of universal human dignity.

The term "human rights" has replaced the term "natural rights" in popularity, because the rights are less and less frequently seen as requiring natural law for their existence.

The Swiss-French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau suggested the existence of a hypothetical social contract where a group of free individuals agree for the sake of the common good to form institutions to govern themselves. This echoed the earlier postulation by Thomas Hobbes that there is a contract between the government and the governed - and led to John Locke's theory that a failure of the government to secure rights is a failure which justifies the removal of the government.

The relationship between government and the governed in countries which follow the English common law tradition is a fiduciary one. In equity law, a politician's fiduciary obligations are not only comprised of duties of good faith and loyalty, but also include duties of skill and competence in managing a country and its people. Originating from within the Courts of Equity, the fiduciary concept exists to prevent those holding positions of power from abusing their authority. The fiduciary relationship between government and the governed arises from the government's ability to control people with the exercise of its power. In effect, if a government has the power to abolish any rights, it is equally burdened with the fiduciary duty to protect such an interest because it would benefit from the exercise of its own discretion to extinguish rights which it alone had the power to dispose of.

The Golden Rule, or the ethic of reciprocity states that one must do unto others as one would be treated themselves; the principle being that reciprocal recognition and respect of rights ensures that one's own rights will be protected. This principle can be found in all the world's major religions in only slightly differing forms, and was enshrined in the "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic" by the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993.

The philosopher John Finnis argues that human rights are justifiable on the grounds of their instrumental value in creating the necessary conditions for human well-being. Interest theories highlight the duty to respect the rights of other individuals on grounds of self-interest:

The biological theory considers the comparative reproductive advantage of human social behavior based on empathy and altruism in the context of natural selection.

Lesson 12	The Characteristics of Moral Perfection and the Obstacles to Obtaining it.
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OBJECTIVES:

- To cite the characteristics of moral perfection and how to obtain it.
- To explain the differences between vices and passions, and to understand why both are obstacles to human progress.

METHODS:

1. With the whole class, brain storm on the meaning of the following words: perfection, vice, passion, virtue and duty. Present to the class the dictionary definitions and ask about the moral implications of these concepts.

2. Divide the class into 2 groups. Each group will work its assigned set of texts and questions. Then, bring the class together and address the questions.

Group I: Moral Perfection

In your group, please read texts A and B and address these questions.

- What are the characteristic signs of moral imperfection?
- What are the characteristic signs of moral perfection?
- How can we achieve moral perfection?

Text A. Be Perfect⁽¹⁾

1. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans do the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect (Matthew, 5: 44 & 46-48).

2. Since God possess infinite perfection in all things, the proposition: "Be perfect as your Celestial Father is perfect," if taken literally would presuppose the possibility of attaining absolute perfection. If it were given to Man to be as perfect as his Creator, then he would become his equal, which is inadmissible. But the people to whom Jesus spoke did not understand this nuance, which caused Him to limit Himself to the presentation of a model and tell them that they must strive to reach it.

Those words then must be understood in the sense of relative perfection, that which humanity is capable of achieving and which most nearly approaches the Divinity. What does this perfection consist of? Jesus said: "In loving one's enemies, in doing good to those who hate us, in praying for those who persecute us." In this way He shows that

the essence of perfection is charity in its most ample form, because it implies the practice of all the other virtues.

In fact, by observing the results of all the vices and even of simple defects, it can be recognized that there is not one which does not more or less disfigure the sentiment of charity, because all of them have their beginnings in selfishness and pride, which are the negation of it. This is due to the fact that everything which over-stimulates our self-esteem destroys, or at least weakens, the elements of true charity which are: benevolence, indulgence, abnegation and devotion. Love for one's fellow creatures, when extended to love for one's enemies, cannot be allied to any defect which is against charity. Therefore for this reason it is always an indication of a greater or lesser moral superiority. From this it follows that the degree of perfection is in direct relation to the extent of this love. It was for this reason that Jesus, after having given His Disciples the rules of charity and all that they contain of the most sublime, said to them: "Be perfect, as your Celestial Father is perfect."

Text B. The Good Person⁽²⁾

3. The truly good person is one who complies with the laws of justice, love and charity in their highest degree of purity. If they examine their conscience concerning their own actions they will ask themselves if they have violated those laws, if they have practiced any evil, if they have done all the good *that was possible*, if they have voluntarily disregarded any occasion to be useful, if anyone has any complaint to make of them and finally, if they have done to others everything that they would wish done to themselves.

They deposit their faith in God, in His goodness, in His justice and in His wisdom. They know that without His permission nothing can happen. So they submit themselves in all things to His will. Good people have faith in the future, which is the reason to put spiritual possessions before those of a temporary nature. They know that all vicissitudes of life, all pain and all deceptions are trials or atonements and accept them without murmuring.

Men and women who possess the sentiments of charity and love do good for the sake of goodness, without waiting for payment of any kind. They repay evil with good, take up the defense of the weak against the strong and always sacrifice their own interests in the name of justice.

These kind of people encounter satisfaction in the benefits they are able to spread, in the service they are able to render, in the happiness they promote, in the tears they are able to dry and in the consolation they offer to those who are afflicted. Their first impulse is always to think of others before themselves and to look after these interests before looking after their own. On the other hand, the selfish person always calculates the benefits and losses arising from any generous action.

The good person is always good, humane, and benevolent with everyone, without distinction as to *race or creed*, because they see all men and women as brothers and sisters. They respect all sincere convictions in others and never launch reprobation against those who think otherwise.

Charity guides them in every circumstance, because they know that those who prejudice others with evil words, who injure others with their pride by disregarding their susceptibilities, or who knowing they could avoid it, do not draw back at the thought of

causing suffering or yet a contrariety, however small, lack the obligation to love one's neighbor and so do not deserve the clemency of the Lord.

They do not harbor rancor, hate nor yet desire vengeance. Instead they follow the example of Jesus by forgiving and forgetting all offences, only remembering the benefits received, because they know that we ourselves shall be forgiven only in as much as we are able to forgive others.

These kind of people are indulgent with the weaknesses of others because they know that they also need indulgence, remembering that Christ said: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." They do not take pleasure in looking for defects in others, nor in calling attention to them, and if necessity obliges them to do so, they always try to look for the good qualities so as to lessen the bad ones.

Good people study their own imperfections and work unceasingly to combat them, using all their strength, so that tomorrow they will be able to say that they are just a little better than they were the day before.

The good person never tries to emphasize the importance of their own spirit or talents at the expense of others. But on the contrary, they take every opportunity to highlight in others whatever these people may have that is useful. They are not conceited about their riches, nor of any personal advantage, knowing that everything that has been given to them may be taken away.

They use, but do not abuse, the possessions which have been conceded to them because they are only a deposit, for which they will be required to give full account. They know that the most detrimental employment that these riches can be put to is the satisfaction of their own passions.

If then, by social order, a good person has been placed in a position of command over their fellow creatures; they treat them with kindness and benevolence, because before God all men are equal. They use their authority to rise up the morale of these people and never to crush them with their own pride. They avoid everything which might cause a subordinate position to be even more painful than necessary.

On the part of those who are subordinate, let it be understood that the duties which go with this position must be clearly appreciated and conscientiously fulfilled.

Finally, a good person is always one who respects the rights of their fellow beings, as assured by the laws of nature, in the same way that they would wish their own to be respected.

These are not all the qualities which distinguish a good person, but anyone who tries hard to possess those which have been mentioned will find themselves on the road which leads to all the rest.

Group II. **Virtues, Vices and Passions**

In your group, please read texts A and B and address these questions.

- Define and give the distinctions between vices and passions
- Can we say that there bad and good passions?
- What is the most serious obstacle to perfection and how to combat it?

Text A. **Virtues and Vices⁽³⁾**

893. *Which is the most meritorious of all the virtues?*

"All virtues are meritorious, for all of them are signs of progress on the upward road. There is virtue in every act of voluntary resistance to the seductive influence of evil tendencies; but the sublimity of virtue consists in the sacrifice of self-interest to the good of others. The highest of all virtues is that which takes the form of the widest and most disinterested kindness."

894. There are persons who do good from a spontaneous impulse, without having to overcome any opposite feeling; is there as much merit in their action as in that of others who, in doing good, have to struggle with their own nature, and to surmount an opposing impulse?

"Those who have no longer to struggle against selfishness are those who have already accomplished a certain amount of progress. They have struggled and triumphed in the past, and their generosity, therefore, no longer costs them any effort. To do good seems to them to be perfectly natural, because they have acquired the habit of kindness. They should be honored as veterans, who have won their grades on the field of battle.

"As you are still far from perfection, such persons strike you with astonishment, because their action contrasts so strongly with that of the rest of mankind, and you admire it in proportion to its rarity; but you must know that what is the exception in your world is the rule in worlds of more advanced degree. In those worlds goodness is everywhere spontaneous, because they are inhabited only by good spirits, among whom even an evil intention would be considered as an exceptional monstrosity. It is this general prevalence of goodness that constitutes the happiness of those worlds; it will be the same in your earth when the human race shall have been transformed, and shall rightly comprehend and practice the law of charity."

895. Besides the defects and vices in regard to which no one can be mistaken, what is the most characteristic sign of imperfection?

"Selfishness. Virtuous appearances are too often like gilding upon copper, that cannot stand the application of the touchstone. A man may possess good qualities which make him pass in the eyes of the world for virtuous, but those qualities, though proving him to have made a certain amount of progress, may not be capable of standing trial, and the slightest disturbance of his self-love may suffice to show his real character. Absolute disinterestedness is indeed so rare a thing in your earth, that you may well regard it with wonder, as something phenomenal.

"Attachment to material things is a sign of inferiority, because the more a man cares for the things of this world, the less does he understand his destiny; his disinterestedness, on the contrary, proves that he has arrived at a wider and clearer view of the future."

896. There are persons who are generous, but without discernment, and who lavish their money without doing any real good, from the want of a reasonable plan for its employment; is there any merit in their action?

"Such persons have the merit of disinterestedness, but they have not that of the good they might do. If disinterestedness be a virtue, thoughtless prodigality is always, to say the least of it, a want of judgment. Fortune is no more given to some persons to be thrown away than to others to be locked up in a safe; it is a deposit of which they will

have to render an account, for they will have to answer for all the good they might have done, but failed to do, for all the tears they might have dried with the money they have wasted on those who had no need of it."

Text B. **Passions**⁽⁴⁾

907. *As our passions have their roots in nature, are they evil in themselves?*

"No; it is only their excess that is evil, for excess implies a perversion of the will. But the principle of all his passions has been given to man for his good, and they may all spur him on to the accomplishment of great things. It is only their abuse that does harm."

908. *How can we define the limit at which the passions cease to be good or bad?*

"The passions are like a horse that is useful when under control, but dangerous when it obtains the mastery. A passion becomes pernicious the moment when you cease to govern it, and when it causes an injury to yourselves or to others."

(Kardec's comments) The passions are levers that increase man's powers tenfold, and aid him in the accomplishment of the designs of Providence but if, instead of ruling them, he allows himself to be ruled by them, he falls into every sort of excess, and the same force which, held well in hand, would have been useful to him, falls upon and crushes him.

All the passions have their source in a natural sentiment or a natural want. They are therefore not evil in themselves, since they constitute one of the providentially-appointed conditions of our existence. What is usually meant by "passion" is the exaggeration of a need or a sentiment.

But this exaggeration is the excessive action of a motive-power, and not the power itself; it is this excessive action which becomes an evil, and leads to evil consequences of every kind.

Every passion that brings man nearer to the nature of the animals takes him further from the spiritual nature. Every sentiment that raises man above the nature of the animals is evidence of the predominance of his spiritual nature over his animal nature and brings him nearer to perfection.

917. *By what means can selfishness be destroyed?*

"Of all human imperfections, the most difficult to root out is selfishness, because it is connected with the influence of matter, from which man, still too near his origin, has not yet been able to enfranchise himself, and which his laws, his social organization, his education, all tend to maintain. Selfishness will be gradually weakened as your moral life obtains predominance over your material life. Through the knowledge which Spiritism gives you of the reality of your future state, stripped of allegoric fables. Spiritism, when it comes to be rightly understood, and identified with the beliefs and habits of the human race, will transform all your customs, usages, and social relations. Selfishness is based on the importance you attribute to your own personality; Spiritism, on the contrary, when rightly understood, causes you to look at everything from a point of view so elevated that the sentiment of personality is lost, so to say, in the contemplation of immensity. In destroying the sentiment of self-importance, by showing its real nature, Spiritism necessarily combats selfishness.

"Man is often rendered selfish by his experience of the selfishness of others, which makes him feel the need of defending himself against them. Seeing that others think of themselves and not of him, he is led to think of himself rather than of others. But let the principle of charity and fraternity become the basis of social institutions, of the legal relations between nation and nation and between man and man, and each individual will think less of his own personal interests, because he will see that these have been thought of by others; he will experience the moralizing influence of example and of contact. Amidst the present overflow of selfishness, much virtue is needed to enable a man to sacrifice his own interests for the sake of others, who often feel but little gratitude for such abnegation; but it is above all to those who possess this virtue that the Kingdom of Heaven is opened, and the happiness of the elect assured: while, at the day of judgment, whoever has thought only of himself will be set aside, and left to suffer from his loneliness." (FÉNÉLON.)

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1) Moral perfection is the state in which the spirit is in complete attunement with God's will. It is attainable through the constant working of the spirit, incarnated or disincarnated onto his/her imperfections.

2) Passions and vices attach us to material elements and therefore, are an obstacle to moral perfection.

REFERENCES:

(1) Kardec, Allan. "The Gospel Explained by Spiritism", chapter 17, item 1 and 2, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.

(2) Idem, item 3.

(3) Kardec, Allan, "The Spirits' Book", questions 893 – 896, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.

(4) Idem, questions 907, 908 and 917.

APPENDIX:

From Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2001

(1) Perfection: (a) the highest degree of excellence; (b) the act or process of perfecting.

(2) Vice: (a) a moral fault or failing; (b) an undesirable behavior pattern in a domestic animal.

(3) Passion: (a) often capitalized, the sufferings of Christ between the night of the Last Supper and his death; (b) strong feeling; also the emotions as distinguished from reason; (c) rage, anger; (d) an object of affection or enthusiasm.

(4) Virtue: (a) conformity to a standard of right, morality; (b) a particular moral excellence; (c) a commendable quality, merit

(5) Duty: (a) conduct or action required by one's occupation or position; (b) assigned service or business; (c) a moral or legal obligation.

Lesson 13**Care with Body and Spirit****OBJECTIVES:**

- To explain the popular saying: "Health Mind, Health Body".
- To understand how to reconcile the necessities of the spirit with those of the body.

METHODS:

1. The coordinator should brain storm with the whole class the sentence: "Health Mind, Health Body".
Ask the class what this sentence means to them, if they agree with it or any other question that the coordinator judge related to the theme.
2. Divide the class into 2 groups. Each group should read the assigned material and work on the proposed questions. After that, reunited the groups and discuss the questions with the whole class.

Group I.**Voluntary Privations.**

Please, as a group, read the following text⁽¹⁾ and answer these questions:

- a) Are human beings allowed to provide for their physical existence or are poverty a desirable physical state in order to achieve spiritual evolution?
- b) When are privations from material life useful for our spiritual evolution?
- c) Are mortifications of the body like self-inflicted wounds useful for our spiritual evolution?

718. Does the law of self-preservation make it our duty to provide for our bodily wants?

"Yes; without physical health and strength, labor is impossible."

720. Are voluntary privations, in view of a voluntary expiation, meritorious in the sight of God?

"Do good to others, and you will thereby acquire more merit than is to be acquired by any self-imposed privations."

-Is any voluntary privation meritorious?

"Yes; the self-privation of useless indulgences, because it loosens man's hold on matter, and elevates his soul. What is meritorious is resistance to the temptation that solicits to excess or to indulge in what is useless; it is the cutting down even of your necessities that you may have more to give to those who are in want. If your privations are only a vain pretence, they are a mere mockery."

721. *At every period in the past, and among all peoples, there have been men who have lived a life of ascetic mortification; is such a life meritorious from any point of view?*

"Ask yourselves to whom such a life is useful, and you will have the reply to your question. If such a life is only for him who leads it, and if it prevents him from doing good to others, it is only a form of selfishness, whatever the pretext with which it is colored. True mortification, according to the dictates of Christian charity, is to impose privation and labor upon yourselves for the good of others."

725. *What is to be thought of the mutilation of the bodies of men or of animals?*

"What is the use of asking such a question? Ask yourselves, once for all, whether a thing is or is not useful. What is useless cannot be pleasing to God, and what is hurtful is always displeasing to Him. Be very sure that God is only pleased with the sentiments that raise the soul towards Him. It is by practicing His law, and not by violating it, that you can shake off your terrestrial matter."

726. *If the sufferings of this world elevate us through the manner in which we bear them, are we elevated by those which we voluntarily create for ourselves?*

"The only sufferings that can elevate you are those which come upon you naturally, because they are inflicted by God. Voluntary sufferings count for nothing when they are not useful to others. Do you suppose that those who shorten their lives by superhuman hardships, like the bonzes, fakirs, and fanatics of various sects, advance their progress thereby? Why do they not rather labor for the good of their fellow-creatures? Let them clothe the naked; let them comfort those who mourn; let them work for the infirm; let them impose privations upon themselves for the sake of the unfortunate and the needy; and their life will be useful, and pleasing to God. When your voluntary sufferings are undergone only for yourselves, they are mere selfishness; when you suffer for others, you obey the law of charity. Such are the precepts of Christ."

727. *If we ought not to create for ourselves voluntary sufferings that are of no use to others, ought we to endeavor to ward off from ourselves those which we foresee, or with which we are threatened?*

"The instinct of self-preservation has been given to all beings to guard them against dangers and sufferings. Flagellate your spirit, and not your body; mortify your pride; stifle the selfishness that eats into the heart like a devouring worm; and you will do more for your advancement than you could do by any amount of macerations out of keeping with the age in which you are living."

Group II. **Look after both Body and Spirit**

Please, as a group, read the following text⁽²⁾ and answer these questions:

- a) If spiritual evolution is our primary goal in physical life, why is it important to keep the body health?
- b) Cite ways to achieve a balanced body and spiritual life.

11. Does spiritual perfection depend on the mortification of the body? In order to resolve his question I will base myself on elementary principles and begin by

demonstrating the need to take care of the body, which according to the alternatives of health and sickness, has a very important influence upon the soul, because we must consider it to be a prisoner of the flesh. So that this prisoner can live, move itself and even have an illusion of liberty, the body must be sound, of good disposition, and be vigorous. Let us then make a comparison. Let us suppose that both are in perfect condition; what should be done to maintain the balance between their aptitudes and their necessities, which are so very different?

In this case two systems are confronting each other: that of the ascetics who wish to bring down the body, and that of the materialists who wish to diminish the soul. Two forms of violence, each one almost as foolish as the other. Alongside these two great parties seethe the indifferent multitudes who, without either conviction or passion, love with tepidness and are economic with their pleasure. Where then is wisdom? Where then is the science of living? Nowhere at all! And this great problem would still remain to be solved if Spiritism had not come to help the researchers and demonstrate to them the relationship which exists between the body and the soul, and to tell them that as they are both reciprocally necessary, it is indispensable that both are looked after.

So then, love your soul and also look after your body which is the instrument of the soul. To pay no attention to these needs, which Nature itself indicates, is to ignore God's laws. Do not castigate your body due to failings which your free-will can induce you to commit, and for which it is just as responsible as is the badly driven horse for the accidents it causes. Perchance, will you be more perfect if by tormenting your body you do not become less selfish, less prideful and more charitable towards your neighbors? No, perfection is not to be found in this manner, but exclusively in the reformation to which you submit your Spirit. Discipline it, subjugate it and mortify it; this is the way to make it more docile to God's will, and is the one and only way which leads to perfection - GEORGES, a Protecting Spirit (Paris, 1863).

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1. The physical body is the instrument that the spirit uses in incarnated life to accomplish his/her evolution. Therefore, a healthy body is one of life's goals.
2. There is no value in self-inflicted mortifications or privations, unless they are for our spiritual benefit or of somebody else.

REFERENCES:

(1) Kardec, Allan, *The Spirits' Book*", questions 718, 720, 721, 725-727, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.

(2) Kardec, Allan. "The Gospel Explained by Spiritism", chapter 17, item 11, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.

APPENDIX

Flagellation, from Wikipedia (accessed January, 2008)
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flagellation>

- Christianity

The Flagellation refers in a Christian context to the Flagellation of Christ, an episode in Jesus' physical degradation leading to the Crucifixion. The practice of mortification of the flesh for religious purposes was utilized in the Christian Flagellant movements of the 13th century, and is still very common, to this day, in the Philippines and Latin America. Some strict monastic orders such as the Carmelites still practice mild self-flagellation using an instrument called a "discipline", a cattail whip made of light chains with small spikes or hooks on the end, which is flung over the shoulders repeatedly during private prayer. Practitioners are cautioned against over- or underuse of the device. However most Christians are opposed to such behavior.

- Islam

While Self Harm is forbidden in Islam a few Shi'a Muslims perform self-flagellation to mourn the death of Hussain during Muharram. Most usually beat their chests with their hands. The practice is common among Shiites in the Middle East and Asia.

Flagellation (or flogging) is also used as a form of punishment in some fundamentalist Muslim countries. The most well-known of those countries are Saudi Arabia and Iran. In those states, flogging is used to punish the crimes of: fornication (sex outside of marriage), drinking alcohol, taking drugs and defamation of Islam.

In Islam, lashes are to be performed with the Koran under one arm to minimize the swing, are not supposed to leave permanent scars, and when the number of lashes are high, are frequently done in batches to minimize risk of harm.

- Ecstatics and Mystics

Because practices such as starvation, sleep denial and flagellation are known to induce altered states, flagellation may be used by religious ecstatics and mystics as part of ritualistic practices or ceremonies to achieve unusual states of mind.

II) Asceticism, from Wikipedia, accessed January, 2008
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascetics>

Asceticism describes a life characterized by abstinence from egoistic pleasures especially to achieve a spiritual goal. Those who practice ascetic lifestyles do not perceive their practices as virtuous and pursue this life style with the aim of becoming egoless. Many ascetics believe the action of purifying the body helps to purify the soul, and thus obtain a greater connection with the Divine or find inner peace. This may take the form of self-mortification, rituals or renunciations of pleasure. However, ascetics maintain that self-imposed constraints bring them greater freedom in various areas of their lives, such as increased clarity of thought and the ability to resist potentially destructive temptations.

The adjective "ascetic" derives from the ancient Greek term askēsis (practice, training or exercise). Originally associated with any form of disciplined practice, the term ascetic has come to mean anyone who practices a renunciation of worldly pursuits to achieve higher intellectual and spiritual goals. Many warriors and athletes, in Greek society, applied the discipline of askēsis to attain optimal bodily fitness and grace. The manner of life, the doctrine, or principles of someone who engages in askēsis is referred to as an ascetic

- Hinduism

Sadhus, men believed to be holy, are known for the extreme forms of self-denial they occasionally practice. These include extreme acts of devotion to a deity or principle, such as vowing never to use one leg or the other, or to hold an arm in the air for a period of months or years. The particular types of asceticism involved vary from sect to sect and from holy man to holy man.

- Jainism

Asceticism, in one of its most intense forms, can be found in one of the oldest religions known as Jainism. Jainism encourages fasting, yoga practices, meditation in difficult postures, and other austerities. According to Jains, one's highest goal should be Moksha (i.e., liberation from samsara, the cycle of birth and rebirth). For this, a soul has to be completely passionless and without attachment. This can be achieved only by the monks and nuns who take five great vows: of non-violence, of truth, of non-stealing, of non-possession and of celibacy.

Some of the common ascetic practices or characteristics of Jain monks (and nuns) are:

- Monks and nuns renounce all relations and possessions.
- Jain ascetics practice complete non-violence. They do not hurt any living being, be it an insect or a human. They carry a special broom to sweep any insects that may cross their path. Some Jains wear a cloth over the mouth to prevent accidental harm to airborne germs and insects.
- Jain ascetics do not use electricity as it involves violence. They do not use any devices or machines.
- They travel from city to city, often crossing forests and deserts, and always barefoot.
- They sleep on the floor without blankets and sit on special wooden platforms.
- Jain ascetics follow a strict vegetarian diet without root vegetables. Shvetambara monks do not cook food but solicit alms from householders. Digambara monks have only a single meal a day. Neither group will beg for food, but a Jain ascetic may accept a meal from a householder, provided that the latter is pure of mind and body and offers the food of his own volition and in the prescribed manner. During such an encounter, the monk remains standing and eats only a measured amount.
- Fasting (i.e., abstinence from food and sometimes water) is a routine feature of Jain asceticism. Fasts last for a day or longer, up to a month. Some monks avoid (or limit) medicine and/or hospitalization out of disregard for the physical body.
- Other austerities include meditation in seated or standing posture near river banks in the cold wind, or meditation atop hills and mountains, especially at noon when the sun is at its fiercest. Such austerities are undertaken according to the physical and mental limits of the individual ascetic.

Jain ascetics are (almost) completely without possessions. Some Jains (Shvetambara monks and nuns) own only unstitched white robes (an upper and lower garment) and a bowl used for eating and collecting alms. Male Digambara monks do not wear any clothes and carry nothing with them except a soft broom made of shed peacock feathers (pinchi) and eat from their hands.

Jain monks and nuns practice complete celibacy. They do not touch or share a sitting platform with a person of opposite sex.

Jain ascetics do not stay in a single place for more than two months to prevent attachment to any place. However during four months of monsoon (rainy season) known as chaturmaas, they continue to stay at a single place to avoid killing of life forms that thrives during the rains.

Every day is spent either in study of scriptures or meditation or teaching to lay people. They stand aloof from worldly matters.

Many Jain ascetics take a final vow of Santhara or Sallekhana (i.e., a peaceful and detached death where medicines, food, and water are abandoned). This is done when death is imminent or when a monk feels that he is unable to adhere to his vows on account of advanced age or terminal disease

- Judaism

The history of Jewish asceticism goes back thousands of years to the references of the Nazirite and the Wilderness Tradition that evolved out of the forty years in the desert. The prophets and their disciples were ascetic to the extreme including many examples of fasting and hermitic living conditions.

Asceticism is rejected by modern day Judaism; it is considered contrary to God's wishes for the world. God intended for the world to be enjoyed, in a permitted context of course. The Talmud says that "if a person has the opportunity to taste a new fruit and refuses to do so, he will have to account for that in the next world".

There are different categories of pleasure. From simple, short lived things, like eating something tasty, to more complex pleasures, such as the satisfaction of succeeding in a difficult task. The closest Judaism comes to asceticism is when it tries to teach people to enjoy the more intellectual and spiritual pleasures, and not to chase after the simpler pleasures.

However, Judaism does not encourage people to seek pleasure for its own sake but rather to do so in a spiritual way. An example would be thanking God for creating something enjoyable, like a wonderful view, or tasty food. As another example, sex should be enjoyed while remembering that a person may be fulfilling the commandments of marriage and pru-urvuv (procreation), but that it should also be enjoyed. Food can be enjoyed by remembering that it is necessary to eat, but by thanking God for making it an enjoyable processes, and by not overeating, or eating wastefully.

Jews believe that God could just as easily have made food nutritious but bland, or sex could be an uncontrollable drive, however that is not what God wanted. God wanted people to take pleasure in living in his world.

- Christianity

Asceticism within Christian tradition includes spiritual disciplines practiced to work out the believer's salvation, and express one's repentance for sin, with the ultimate aim of purifying the heart and mind, by God's grace, for encounter with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although certain monks and nuns today such as those in the Roman Catholic religious orders of the Carthusians, and Cistercians, are known for especially strict acts of asceticism, even more rigorous ascetic practices were common in the early Church. The deserts of the middle-east were at one time said to have been inhabited by thousands of hermits, amongst the most revered include St. Anthony the Great, St. Mary of Egypt, and St. Simeon Stylites. Scriptural examples of asceticism could be found in the lives of John the Baptist, Jesus, the twelve apostles and Saint Paul.

To the uninformed modern reader, early monastic asceticism may seem to be only about sexual renunciation. However, sexual abstinence was merely one aspect of ascetic renunciation. The ancient monks and nuns had other, equally weighty concerns: pride, humility, compassion, discernment, patience, judging others, prayer, hospitality, and almsgiving. For some early Christians, gluttony represented a more primordial problem than sex, and as such the reduced intake of food is also a facet of asceticism.

- Islam

The Prophet Muhammad is quoted to have said, "What have I to do with worldly things? My connection with the world is like that of a traveler resting for a while underneath the shade of a tree and then moving on." He advised the people to live simple lives and himself practiced great austerities. Even when he had become the virtual king of Arabia, he lived an austere life bordering on privation. His wife Ayesha says that there was hardly a day in his life when he had two square meals.

Muslim scholars, one being Muhammad Asad wrote that he found the Qur'an to say "Yes to action, No to passivity. Yes to life, No to asceticism." Asad believed that Allah did not simply provide men and women with bodily needs, only to expect them to suppress such needs and concentrate on their spirit. Rather the Qur'an and Hadith offer much practical advice concerned with the earthly affairs of men and women. Thus scholars such as Asad point out that, the Qur'an and Hadith show a path where the needs of flesh and spirit are both harmoniously balanced.

Lesson 14**Spiritist Conduct: Living the Gospel****OBJECTIVES:**

- To understand why the conduct of a spiritist should be the same as living the Gospel.
- To explain why Spiritism is Christianity in its purest and straightforward form.

METHODS:

1. The coordinator should brain storm with the class the following 4 passages from the Gospel (new International Version). Discuss the meaning of “advocate” (or “counselor”), what the future role of the “counselor” will be, etc.

John, 14:15-18

¹⁵“If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

John, 14:25-26

²⁵“All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John, 15:26-27

²⁶“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father — the Spirit of Truth who goes out from the Father — he will testify about me. ²⁷And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

John, 16:12-15

¹²“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

2. Divide the class into 2 groups. Ask each group to work on their text and questions. After the work is finished, re-united the class and discuss the proposed questions.

Group I. The Promised Counselor

Read the following text⁽¹⁾ and answer, as complete as possible the proposed questions.

a) Why is Spiritism the “Promised Counselor”?

4. In this passage from John, Jesus promises another consoler: the Spirit of Truth, which the world did not yet know because it was not sufficiently mature to be able to understand. This is the consoler sent by the Father to teach mankind all things and to call to mind all that Christ had said. Therefore, if this Spirit of Truth was to come at a later date to teach these additional matters, then it was because Christ had not told everything. If the Spirit of Truth was to come to remind us of what Christ had said that is because it had been forgotten or not properly understood.

Spiritism has come at the predicted time to fulfill Christ's promise. Presided over by the Spirit of Truth, it calls Man to observe the law and reveals all manner of things so making understandable what Jesus had said only in parable form. Christ himself had given the warning: "Listen all those who have ears to hear." Spiritism has come to open man's eyes and ears because it speaks without figuration or allegory, so lifting up the veil which had been intentionally cast upon certain mysteries. Finally, then, it has come to bring supreme consolation to the disinherited of this Earth and to all who suffer by showing them the just cause of their suffering and the useful purpose of all pain.

Christ said: "Blessed are the afflicted for they shall be consoled." But how can anyone feel fortunate if they do not know why they suffer? Spiritism shows the cause of suffering to be in past existences and in the destiny of this planet, on which Man makes atonement for his past. It explains the object behind suffering by showing it as a salutary process which produces a cure and also as a means of purification, both of which guarantee future happiness. From this it is possible for Man to understand that he deserves all his sufferings and to believe that this is just. He also learns that his suffering and pain will help him to progress and so is able to accept it without complaining, just as a worker accepts the work which will guarantee his salary. Spiritism gives Man an unshakable faith in the future so that he is no longer troubled by this consuming doubt within his soul. He is also enabled to see things from on high, which makes the importance of his earthly vicissitudes disappear on the vast and splendid horizon which Spiritism sets before him. The prospect of the happiness which awaits therefore gives him patience, resignation and courage to continue to the end of his path.

In this manner Spiritism realizes what Jesus said of the promised Consoler, by bringing knowledge of those things which allow Man to know where he came from, where he is going and why he is on Earth; so attracting mankind towards the true principles of God's law and offering consolation through faith and hope.

Group II. The Spirit of Truth

Read the following text⁽²⁾ and answer, as complete as possible the proposed questions.

a) Who/What is the “Spirit of Truth”?

b) Explain the sentence: “Spiritists! Love one another, that is the first precept; educate yourselves is the second”.

I have come, as I came on another occasion to those misguided sons and daughters of Israel, to bring the truth and to dissipate the darkness. Harken unto me! As my words in the past have done, so must Spiritism remind the incredulous that above them reigns the immutable truth which is the existence of the good God, the great God, who causes the plants to germinate and the waves to rise up. As a reaper, I have gathered in sheaves the scattered goodness in the breasts of humanity and said: "Come unto me, all you who suffer."

But Man with ungratefulness has moved away from the straight and wide path which leads to the Kingdom of my Father and has followed the bleak pathways of impiety. My Father does not wish to annihilate the human race; He wants the living and the dead, that is to say those who are dead according to the flesh because death does not exist, to assist each other mutually and listen no more to the voice of the prophets and apostles, but listen instead to those who no longer live upon Earth and who proclaim: "Pray and believe! Death is the resurrection and life is an ordeal you seek, during which the virtues you have cultivated will grow and develop, even as the cedar tree."

Those of you, who are weak and know the obscurity of your own minds, do not deviate from the beacon which divine clemency has put into your hands so as to enlighten your pathway and reconduct you, who are lost children, once again to the bosom of the Father.

I am too much overcome with compassion for your miseries and by your immense weakness not to extend a helping hand to all those unhappily misguided who, while looking up to Heaven, fall into the pit of error. Believe, love, and meditate on these things which are revealed unto you. Do not mix the chaff with the good seed, nor the Utopias with the truth.

Spiritists! Love one another, that is the first precept; educate yourselves is the second. Within Christianity you will find all the truths. The errors in which Man has become enrooted are all of human origin. Here from beyond the grave, where you thought there was nothing, voices clamor: "Brothers and sisters! Nothing perishes! Jesus Christ is the victor over all evil, you can be the victors over impiety." - THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH (Paris, 1860).

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

1. "Spiritism gives Man an unshakable faith in the future so that he is no longer troubled by this consuming doubt within his soul".
2. "Within Christianity you will find all the truths. The errors in which Man has become enrooted are all of human origin".

REFERENCES:

- (1) Kardec, Allan. "The Gospel Explained by Spiritism", chapter 6, item 4, edited by Brazilian Spiritist Federation, translated by Anna Blackwell.
- (2) Idem, item 5.

Lesson 15	Review
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OBJECTIVES:

- To review the acquired knowledge from this and all previous workbooks.

METHODS:

1. Divide the class into 5 Groups, assigning one of the topics to each one of them. The groups will work through the indicated material and prepare a presentation to the whole class.

- a) The existence of God.
- b) The immortality of the soul.
- c) Reincarnation.
- d) Mediumship.
- e) Multitude of the Inhabited Worlds.

Group I: **The Existence of God.**

Read carefully the following text⁽¹⁾ and answer (as complete as possible) the proposed question.

- a) Explain the saying “There is not effect without a cause” and “An intelligent effect demands an intelligent cause”.
- b) Explain the following attributes of God: eternal, unchangeable, immaterial, unique, all-powerful and sovereignty just and good.

1. What is God?

"God is the Supreme Intelligence-First Cause of all things."¹

4. What proof have we of the existence of God?

"The axiom which you apply in all your scientific researches: 'There is no effect without a cause.' Search out the cause of whatever is not the work of man, and reason will furnish the answer to your question."

(Kardec's comments). To assure ourselves of the existence of God, we have only to look abroad on the works of creation. The universe exists, therefore it has a cause. To doubt the existence of God is to doubt that every effect has a cause, and to assume that something can have been made by nothing.

5. What is to be inferred from the intuition of the existence of God which may be said to be the common property of the human mind?

"That God exists; for whence could the human mind derive this intuition if it had no real basis? The inference to be drawn from the fact of this intuition is a corollary of the axiom. 'There is no effect without a cause.'"

6. May not our seemingly intuitive sense of the existence of God be the result of education and of acquired ideas?

"If such were the case, how should this intuitive sense be possessed by your savages?"

(Kardec's comments). If the intuition of the existence of a Supreme Being were only the result of education It would not be universal, and would only exist, like all other acquired knowledge, in the minds of those who had received the special education to which it would be due.

7. Is the first cause of the formation of things to be found in the essential properties of matter?

"If such were the case, what would be the cause of those properties? There must always be a first cause."

(Kardec's comments). To attribute the first formation of things to the essential properties of matter would be to take the effect for the cause, for those properties are themselves an effect, which must have a cause.

8. What is to be thought of the opinion that attributes the first formation of things to a fortuitous combination of matter, in other words, to chance?

"Another absurdity! Who that is possessed of common sense can regard chance as an intelligent agent? And, besides, what is chance? Nothing."

(Kardec's comments). The harmony which regulates the mechanism of the universe can only result from combinations adopted in view of predetermined ends, and thus, by its very nature, reveals the existence of an Intelligent Power. To attribute the first formation of things to chance is nonsense for chance cannot produce the results of intelligence. If chance could be intelligent, it would cease to be chance.

9. What proof have we that the first cause of all things is a Supreme Intelligence, superior to all other intelligences?

"You have a proverb which says, 'The workman is known by his work.' Look around you, and, from the quality of the work, infer that of the workman."

(Kardec's comments). We judge of the power of an intelligence by its works as no human being could create that which is produced by nature, it is evident that the first cause must be an Intelligence superior to man. Whatever may be the prodigies accomplished by human intelligence, that intelligence itself must have a cause and the greater the results achieved by it, the greater must be the cause of which it is the effect. It is this Supreme Intelligence that is the first cause of all things, whatever the name by which mankind may designate it.

13. When we say that God is eternal, infinite, unchangeable, immaterial, unique, all powerful, sovereignty just and good, have we not a complete idea of His attributes?

"Yes, judging from your point of view, because you think that you sum up everything in those terms; but you must understand that there are things which transcend the intelligence of the most intelligent man, and for which your language, limited to your ideas and sensations, has no expressions. Your reason tells you that God must possess those perfections in the supreme degree; for, if one of them were lacking, or were not possessed by Him in an infinite degree, He would not be superior to all, and consequently would not be God. In order to be above all things, God must undergo no vicissitudes; He must have none of the imperfections of which the imagination can conceive."

(Kardec's comments). God is *eternal*. If He had had a beginning, He must either have sprung from nothing, or have been created by some being anterior to Himself. It is thus that, step by step, we arrive at the idea of infinity and eternity.

God is *unchangeable*. If He were subject to change, the laws which rule the universe would have no stability.

God is *immaterial*, that is to say, that His nature differs from every-thing that we call matter, or otherwise. He would not be unchangeable, for He would be subject to the transformations of matter.

God is *unique*. If there were several Gods, there would be neither unity of plan nor unity of power in the ordaining of the universe.

God is *all-powerful* because He is unique. If He did not possess sovereign power, there would be something more powerful, or no less powerful, than Himself. He would not have created all things and those which He had not created would be the work of another God.

God is *sovereignty just and good*. The providential wisdom of the divine laws is revealed as clearly in the smallest things as in the greatest and this wisdom renders it impossible to doubt either His justice or His goodness.

Group II: **The immortality of the soul.**

Read carefully the following text⁽²⁾ and answer (as complete as possible) the proposed question.

- a) Define soul according to the materialistic, spiritualistic, pantheistic and spiritist points of view.
- b) Define vital principle (or fluid).

There is another word of which it is equally necessary to define the meaning, because it is the keystone of every system of morality, and also because, owing to the lack of a precise definition, it has been made the subject of innumerable controversies; we refer to the word soul. The divergence of opinion concerning the nature of the soul is a result of the variety of meanings attached to this word. A perfect language, in which every idea had its own special term, would save a vast deal of discussion; for, in that case, misunderstanding would be impossible. Some writers define the soul as being the

principle of organic life, having no existence of its own, and ceasing with the life of the body. According to this purely Materialistic belief, the soul is an effect, and not a cause.

Others consider the soul as being the principle of intelligence, the universal agent, of which each being absorbs a portion. According to them, there is, in the entire universe, only one soul, which distributes sparks of itself among all intelligent beings during their life ; each spark, after the death of the being it has animated, returning to the common source, and blending again with the general whole, as brooks and rivers return to the ocean from which they were produced. This opinion differs from the preceding one, inasmuch as, according to the latter hypothesis, there is in us something more than matter, something that remains in existence after our death; but, practically, it is much as though nothing remained of us, since, no longer possessing individuality, we should retain no consciousness of our identity.

According to this hypothesis, the universal soul is God, and each being is a portion of the Divinity. It is a species of Pantheism. According to others, again, the soul is a moral being, distinct, independent of matter, and preserving its individuality after death. This acceptation of the word soul is certainly the one most generally received; because, under one name or another, the idea of a being that survives the body is found as an instinctive belief, and independently of all teaching, among all nations, whatever their degree of civilization. This doctrine, according to which the soul is a cause and not an effect, is that of the spiritualists.

Without discussing the value of these opinions, and considering the subject merely under its philological aspect, we say that these three applications of the word soul constitute three distinct ideas, each of which demands a different term. "Soul" has, therefore, a triple meaning, and is employed by each school according to the special meaning it attributes to that word. In order to avoid the confusion naturally resulting from the use of the same word to express three different ideas, it would be necessary to confine the word to one of these three ideas; it would not matter to which, provided the choice were clearly understood. We think it more natural to take it in its most common acceptation; and for this reason we employ the word SOUL to indicate the *immaterial and individual being which resides in us*, and survives the body. Even if this being did not really exist, and were only a product of the imagination, a specific term would still be needed to designate it.

For want of such a term for each of the other ideas now loosely understood by the word soul, we employ the term vital principle to designate the material and organic life which, whatever may be its source, is common to all living creatures, from the plant to man. As life can exist without the thinking faculty, the vital principle is something distinct from independent of it. The word vitality would not express the same idea. According to some, the vital principle is a property of matter; an effect produced wherever matter is found under certain given conditions; while, in the opinion of the greater number of thinkers, it resides in a special fluid, universally diffused, and of which each being absorbs and assimilates a portion during life, as inert bodies absorb light; the vital principle being identical with the vital fluid, which is generally regarded as being the same as the animalized electric fluid, designated also as the magnetic fluid, the nervous fluid, etc.

However this may be, one fact is certain, for it is proved by observation, viz., that organic beings possess in themselves a force which, so long as it exists, produces the

phenomena of life ; that physical life is common to all organic beings, and is independent of intelligence and thought; that intelligence and thought are faculties peculiar to certain organic species; and, lastly, that, among the organic species endowed with intelligence and thought, there is one which is endowed with a special moral sense that gives it an incontestable superiority over the others, viz., human species.

It is evident that, being employed according to various acceptations, the term soul does not exclude either Materialism or Pantheism. Spiritualists themselves understand the term soul according to one or other of the first two definitions, without denying the distinct immaterial being, to which, in that case it would give some other name. This word, therefore, is not the representative of an opinion; it is a Protean term, defined by each after his own fashion, and thus giving rise to interminable disputes.

Group III: **Reincarnation**

Read carefully the following text⁽³⁾ and answer (as complete as possible) the proposed question.

1. Explain reincarnation as one of the manifestations of God's Justice and as a chance for the spirit to progress.

171. What foundation is there for the doctrine of reincarnation?

"The justice of God, and revelation; for, as we have already remarked, an affectionate father always leaves a door of repentance open for his erring children. Does not reason itself tell you that it would be unjust to inflict an eternal privation of happiness on those who have not had the opportunity of improving themselves? Are not all men God's children? It is only among selfish human beings that injustice, implacable hatred, and irremissible punishments are to be found."

(Kardec's comments). All spirits tend towards perfection, and are furnished by God with the means of advancement through the trials of corporeal life; but the divine justice compels them to accomplish, in new existences, that which they have not been able to do, or to complete, in a previous trial.

It would not be consistent with the justice or with the goodness of God to sentence to eternal suffering those who may have encountered obstacles to their improvement independent of their will, and resulting from the very nature of the conditions in which they found themselves placed. If the fate of mankind were irrevocably fixed after death God would not have weighed the actions of all in the same scales, and would not have treated them with impartiality.

The doctrine of reincarnation - that is to say, the doctrine which proclaims that men have many successive existence - is the only one which answers to the idea we form to ourselves of the justice of God in regard to those who are placed, by circumstances over which they have no control, in conditions unfavorable to their moral advancement; the only one which can explain the future, and furnish us with a sound basis for our hopes because it offers us the means of redeeming our errors through new trials. This doctrine is indicated by the teachings of reason, as well as by those of our spirit-instructors.

He who is conscious of his own inferiority derives a consoling hope from the doctrine of reincarnation. If he believes in the justice of God, he cannot hope to be

placed, at once and for all eternity, on a level with those who have made a better use of life than he has done but the knowledge that this inferiority will not exclude him for ever from the supreme felicity, and that he will be able to conquer this felicity through new efforts, revives his courage and sustains his energy. Who does not regret, at the end of his career that the experience he has acquired should have come too late to allow of his turning it to useful account? This tardily acquired experience will not be lost for him; he will profit by it in a new corporeal life.

Group IV: Mediumship.

Read carefully the following text⁽⁴⁾ and answer:

a) What is a medium?

b) Define and explain these types of mediumship: Physical, Sensitive or Impressionable, Hearing, Speaking, Seeing, Somnambolic, Healing, Pneumatographic, Writing, Inspirational and Presentient.

159. Every one who is in any degree influenced by spirits is, by that very fact, a medium. This faculty is inherent in man, and is therefore no exclusive privilege; in fact, there are few persons in whom some rudiments of medianimity are not found. We may therefore assume that every one, or nearly every one, is a medium. Nevertheless, this qualification is only practically applicable to those in whom the medianimic faculty is clearly characterized, producing well-marked results and this depends upon the greater or less degree of sensitivity of the organization. This faculty does not reveal itself in all cases in the same manner: each medium has generally a special aptitude for some special order of phenomena; so that there are as a great a variety of mediums as of phenomena. (...)

1. Physical Mediums.

160. *Physical mediums* are more especially fitted for producing physical phenomena, such as the movement of inert bodies, noises, etc. They may be divided into two categories, *Voluntary mediums*, and *Natural or Involuntary mediums*. Voluntary mediums are those who exert their power consciously, and obtain spirit-phenomena by an act of their will. (...)

161. *Natural or Involuntary mediums* are those who are influenced without their knowing it. They have no idea of their power, and the abnormal occurrences which take place around them and do not appear to them at all extraordinary. Their peculiar faculty seems to them to be a part of themselves, as is the case with persons who are endowed with second-sight, and who have no suspicion that such is the case. (...)

2. Sensitive or Impressionable Mediums.

164. We give this designation to persons who are able to recognize the presence of spirits by a vague impression, a sort of shuddering sensation, running through their whole body, and for which they cannot account. This variety of medianimity has no very decided characteristic. All mediums being necessarily impressionable, this quality maybe regarded as being general rather than special; but it is an indispensable condition of all other forms of medianimity. (...)

3. Hearing Mediums.

165. These mediums hear the voice of spirits: some times, as we have observed when speaking of pneumatophony, it is an inner voice that speaks to the interior consciousness; sometimes it is an exterior voice, clear and distinct as that of a person in the flesh.

4. Speaking Mediums.

166. Hearing mediums, who only transmit what is said to them by spirits, are not what are properly called *speaking mediums*, who very frequently hear nothing; the spirit merely acting upon their organs of speech, as he acts upon the hand of writing mediums. A spirit, when he wishes to communicate, makes use of the most flexible organ that he finds in the medium; from one, he borrows the hand; from another, the voice from a third, the hearing. The speaking medium generally speaks without knowing what he says, and often gives utterance to instructions far above the reach of his own ideas, knowledge, and intelligence. (...)

5. Seeing Mediums.

167. Seeing mediums are those who are endowed with the faculty of seeing spirits. There are some who possess this faculty in their normal state and when they are perfectly awake, and who preserve an exact recollection of what they have seen. Others only see spirits when they are in a somnambulatory state, or one bordering on it. This faculty is rarely permanent; it is almost always the effect of a momentary and passing crisis. We may place in the category of seeing mediums all persons endowed with second-sight. The possibility of seeing spirits in dreams, results, undoubtedly, from a sort of medianimity; but, properly speaking, it does not constitute the seeing medium. (...)

6. Somnambulatory Mediums.

172. Somnambulism may be regarded as a variety of the medianimic faculty, or rather, we should say, that these two orders of phenomena are found very frequently united. The somnambulist acts under the influence of his own spirit; it is his own soul which, in its moments of emancipation, sees, hears, and perceives, beyond the limits of the senses what he expresses he draws from himself. His ideas are generally more just than in his normal state, and his knowledge is more extended, because his soul is free; in a word, the somnambulatory state is a sort of foretaste of the spirit-life. The medium, on the contrary, is the instrument of an intelligence exterior to himself; he is passive; and what he says does not come from himself. In other words, the somnambulist expresses his own thoughts, and the medium expresses those of another. But the spirit who communicates through an ordinary medium may do so through a somnambulist; the soul-emancipation of somnambulism often rendering spirit-communication even more easy.

7. Healing Mediums.

175. We only allude here to this variety of mediums in order that we may not seem to overlook them; for this subject requires more ample treatment than we can give to it in this place. We will now only remark that this kind of medianimity consists principally in the gift, possessed by certain persons, of healing by the laying-on of hands, by the look, by a mere gesture, without the help of medication. It will no doubt be said that this is

nothing but mesmerism. It is evident that the animal-magnetic fluid has much to do with it; but when this phenomenon is carefully examined, we perceive that there is in it something more. The ordinary mesmeric treatment is a regular one, followed up according to rule and method; the medianimic treatment is quite different. (...)

8. *Pneumatographic Mediums*

177. This name is given to mediums who obtain direct writing; a faculty which has hitherto remained an exceptional one, though it may probably be developed by exercise. As previously remarked, its practical utility is mainly limited to the evident proof thus afforded of the intervention of an occult power. Experience alone can show whether a person possesses it or not; each can try for himself, asking the aid of his spirit-protector. According to the degree of the medium's power, he obtains simple strokes, signs, letters, words, phrases, or entire pages. It is usually sufficient to place a folded sheet of paper in the place designated by the spirit, leaving it there for a few minutes, a quarter of an hour, or a longer time, as the case may be. (...)

9. Writing mediums.

178. Of all our means of communicating with spirits, manual writing is the simplest, most convenient, and most complete, for it enables us to establish regular and continuous relations with spirits, and thus to ascertain their nature and quality, to learn their thoughts, and to appreciate them at their true value. The faculty of writing, moreover, is the one which is most susceptible of being developed by exercise. (...)

When a spirit acts directly on the medium's hand, he gives to it an impulsion altogether independent of its owner's will, causing it to write on uninterruptedly as long as he has any thing to say, and to stop when he has finished.

The most interesting and valuable characteristic of this mode of medianimity is the unconsciousness of the medium in regard to what he is writing, and of which he has often not the remotest idea; this absolute unconsciousness constitutes what are called *passive* or *mechanical* mediums, and is an exceedingly precious faculty, because it excludes all doubt as to what is written being independent of the medium's mind. (...)

180. A spirit can also transmit his thought through the intermediacy of the soul of the medium himself. The disincarnate spirit does not, in this case, cause the medium to write by acting on his hand; for he neither holds nor guides it, but acts directly upon the incarnate soul, with which he temporarily identifies himself.

The soul of the medium, under this impulsion, directs his hand, and the hand moves the pencil. (...)

181. In the case of purely mechanical mediums, the movement of the hand is independent of the will; with the intuitive medium, that movement is voluntary. The semi-mechanical medium participates in the qualities of both the others; he feels an impulsion that is given to his hand, independently of his will, but, at the same time, he knows, as he goes on, what he is writing. With the mechanical medium, the thought *follows* the act of writing; with the intuitive medium, it *precedes* it; with the semimechanical medium, it *accompanies* it. These last-named mediums are the most common of all.

10. Inspirational Mediums.

182. Every one who, either in the normal state or in trance, receives an influx of thoughts that are foreign to the action of his own mind may be included in the category of *inspirational mediums*. They are, in fact, a variety of the *intuitive medium*, with this difference, that the intervention of an occult power is much less evident in their case; so that, with inspirational mediums, it is even more difficult to distinguish their own thought from that which is suggested, than in the case of the intuitive medium.

The peculiar characteristic of the inspirational medium is *spontaneousness*.

11. Presentient Mediums.

184. The kind of impression which we call *presentiment* is a vague intuition of future things. This faculty, more or less developed in certain mediums, is sometimes the result of a sort of second-sight, by which they obtain glimpses of the consequences of things present, and thus perceive the filiations of events to come; but it is also, in many cases, the result of occult communications. It is to persons who are thus endowed, and who constitute a variety of the *inspired mediums*, that we give the appellation of *presentient mediums*.

Group V: **Multitude of the Inhabited Worlds.**

Read carefully the following text⁽⁵⁾ and explain what should be understood by: "Multitude of Inhabited Worlds".

172. *Do we accomplish all our different corporeal existences upon this earth?*

"Not all of them, for those existences take place in many different worlds. The world in which you now are is neither the first nor the last of these, but is one of those that are the most material, and the furthest removed from perfection."

173. *Does the soul, at each new corporeal existence, pass from one world to another or can it accomplish several existences on the same globe?*

"It may live many times on the same globe, if it be not sufficiently advanced to pass into a higher one."

- *We may, then, re-appear several times upon the earth?*

"Certainly".

- *Can we come back to it after having lived in other worlds?*

"Assuredly you can; you may already have lived elsewhere as upon the Earth."

174. *Is it necessary to live again upon this earth?*

"No; but if you do not advance, you may go into a world no better than this one, or even worse."

176. *Can spirits come to this world, for the first time, after having been incarnated in other worlds?*

"Yes; just as you may go into other ones. All the worlds of the universe are united by the bonds of solidarity; that which is not accomplished in one of them is accomplished in another."

177. In order to arrive at the perfection and the supreme felicity which are the final aim of mankind, is it necessary for a spirit to pass through all the worlds that exist in the universe?

"No; for there are a great number of worlds of the same degree, in which a spirit would learn nothing new."

- How, then, are we to explain the plurality of his existences upon the same globe?

"He may find himself, each time he comes back, in very different situations, which afford him the opportunity of acquiring new experience."

178. Can spirits live corporeally in a world relatively inferior to the one in which they have already lived?

"Yes; when they have to fulfill a mission in aid of progress; and in that case they joyfully accept the tribulations of such an existence, because these will furnish them with the means of advancement."

- May this not occur also as an expiation and may not rebellious spirits be sent by God into worlds of lower degree?

"Spirits may remain stationary, but they never retrograde; those who are rebellious are punished by not advancing, and by having to recommence their misused existences under the conditions suited to their nature."

- Who are they that are compelled to recommence the same existence?

"They who fail in the fulfillment of their mission, or in the endurance of the trial appointed to them."

179. Have all the human beings who inhabit any given world arrived at the same degree of perfection?

"No; it is in the other worlds as upon the earth; there are some who are more advanced, and others who are less so."

180. In passing from this world into another one, does a spirit retain the intelligence which he possessed in this one?

"Undoubtedly he does; intelligence is never lost. But he may not have the same means of manifesting it for that depends both on his degree of advancement and on the quality of the body he will take."

181. Have the human beings who inhabit the other worlds bodies like ours?

"They undoubtedly have bodies, because it is necessary for the spirit to be clothed with matter in order to act upon matter; but. this envelope is more or less material according to the degree of purity at which each spirit has arrived, and it is these gradations of purity that decide the different worlds through which we have to pass; for in

our Father's house are many mansions, and therefore many degrees among those mansions. There are some who know this, and possess the consciousness of this fact, while upon the earth; and there are others who have no such intuition."

184. Has a spirit the choice of the new world which lie is to inhabit?

"Not always; but he can make his demand, and it may be granted, but only if he have deserved it; for the various worlds are only accessible to spirits according to the degree of their elevation."

185. Is the physical and moral state of the living beings of each globe always the same?

"No; worlds, like the beings that live in them, are subject to the law of progress. All have begun, like yours, by being in a state of inferiority; and the earth will undergo a transformation similar to that which has been accomplished by the others. It will become a terrestrial paradise, when the men by whom it is inhabited have become good."

188. Do the pure spirits inhabit special worlds, or are they in universal space without being attached to any particular globe?

"The pure spirits inhabit certain worlds, but they are not confined to them as men are confined to the earth; they possess, in a higher degree than any others, the power of instantaneous locomotion, which is equivalent to ubiquity."

CONCLUSIONS:

The lesson will have been accomplished if the whole class can satisfactorily conclude that:

- 1) Jesus is the role model for all of us.
- 2) There is no salvation outside charity.

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