

# Seeking the Dead or the Living

By Rev. T. Miersma

*“And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead?”* Isaiah 8:19

Who is your guide and by what power do you live? This is not an idle question. We are creatures who need to worship something, to stand in awe and wonder, to bow in reverence before something outside of ourselves. This is not merely the weakness of some people, who cannot cope with life and with determining their own way as their own guide. Man did not make the stars of the heavens, nor the beauty of the sunsets. The circumstances of life are no more under our control than the weather. Sickness and health, good times and times of trouble come our way. We do not cause them nor control them. It is common for even that person who regards him or herself as self-sufficient that and strong in their own power and wisdom to speak of luck, fate, or chance, to speak of accidents. In doing so they betray that they know that outside of man there is something more.

Nor do the natural and physical sciences which may more or less accurately describe the world about us provide the answers we need. The answers of modern science do not satisfy the soul. Our medical science, while it may describe and in some measure address the physical causes of disease and sickness, does not resolve the problem. The reality of our life is that there is something basically wrong, out of harmony, in a universe that seems so often against us, whose powers we do not control, and in sickness, disease and death, that reality enters our own bodies.

It is not surprising therefore that our society turns an eager ear to one who comes and tells us that we can control our fate, our future, and make ourselves successful by a positive mental attitude, as if by our mind we could harness the power of the universe or our fate to our own will. It is not surprising that many teachers arise who claim that our problem is that we are out of harmony with the flow of life, with nature, and that if we follow this method or that healing process we will become in tune with the forces and processes of life and find health for our bodies or peace for our souls. Hence we see in our age a multiplying of groups, cults, or movements to promote mental or spiritual healing, or who make claims to some new way to health, healing and bodily harmony.

Moreover there stands before us the reality that man is more than merely a body, that he has an inner life of the soul, a human spirit. We are confronted by the fact that death stands before us, a rending of that union of body and soul which makes an end of our bodily life. What then? Health, healing, harmony in our life, are temporary. They do not solve the problem of circumstances beyond our control, nor the problem of aging and death. These answers are not enough. It is not surprising therefore that this question of death also occupies our age and accompanies these other movements and cults. We are confronted by reports or claims of out-of-body experiences which are supposed to prove survival after death. We are told that a “new age” has dawned, a spiritual age, that we can “channel” the forces of life in nature and the power of the universe so as to control them. We are confronted by claims of communication with the spirits who have died, or with a spirit world, through various means, from individuals who claim to be mediums for communicating with these powers and spirits by the use of objects like crystals to channel them. Even in modern hospitals of scientific medicine, terminal patients are encouraged to use their minds to shrink their disease or are encouraged by health care workers to find a spirit guide who will aid and comfort them, lead them through death to the great beyond. By the guidance and channeling of these spirits of the dead we are told we will find peace of mind, present happiness, and freedom from the fear of death and the morrow. Even witchcraft, fortune telling, astrology, and other such occult practices have made a comeback and are sought after by many.

What may be said about all of this? There are a number of things which could be pointed out. It would be possible to show that for all its claims this is not new at all, particularly the so-called “New Age Movement” with its emphasis on physical health and spiritual healing. One need but read the history of the 1800’s with its cure-all patent medicines, quack healing techniques, spiritualists, cults, and séances to see that the new age is not new. The fact is that many of these cults originated in the 1800’s. Their philosophy is nothing more than warmed over paganism, of non-christian and eastern mystical religious thought. The so-called “New Age,” the astrologers’ “Age of Aquarius,” has brought nothing new to light. It can be pointed out moreover that even these natural, so-called

new physical healing techniques all require faith in the method, religious faith, for them to work for the recipient. They too are really hidden religions, not forms of medicine.

The Christian however, with his Bible in hand has something to say about these things and has a genuine answer to these problems. The Christian truth is that there is a living God Who stands exalted above the universe, the creature which He has made, Who is the author of life and the sovereign governor of the course of the universe and all creatures. Not fate, fortune, luck, or chance, but almighty God is in control. He made man in the beginning to stand in a personal spiritual relationship to Himself. That is why man needs something more in his life. He was made a religious being. Moreover that same Christian Bible reveals that man is fallen from that relationship through proud rebellion and sin and stands guilty before the living God and under judgment - eternal death in hell. We are out of harmony not first of all with nature, but with God. God in His wrath has cursed the life of men and sent sickness, decay, disease, death and sorrow into man's life. "For the wages of sin is death," Romans 6:23. The same Word of God reveals that while man knows that God is and is to be feared, it is man's sin and depravity of heart which leads him to hold that truth in unrighteousness, suppress it and seek his peace and help in the creature, the life process of nature, rather than in God his Creator, Romans 1:19ff. Therefore we read "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness," Romans 1:18. The "new age" and the cults of health and healing are an age of idolatry. It is out of spiritual blindness and folly of sin that men seek help and guidance from the spirits of the dead. The spirits of the dead had no power to overcome death. It has conquered them. It is folly to think that they can help the living.

Over against that folly the Christian gospel is that God has come in Jesus Christ to take away the wrath of God, endure the punishment of death for sin and having died, rose again from the dead. The Christian gospel is not of a dead spirit but of a living Savior, and salvation in the living God by Him. By Jesus Christ God has reconciled to Himself a people chosen unto everlasting life, who should believe on His Name. Therein is an answer to what lies beyond this life, living heavenly glory in the presence of God in Christ Jesus, a living Savior, to them that believe. Therein lies true comfort in an unchangeable mercy of God, who works all things for good, even the troubles of life, to them that love Him and are the called according to His purpose, Romans 8:28. The living God in Jesus Christ is the Christian's guide and strength of his life. "And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?"