

# MEDICINE AND SPIRITUALITY

By Dr Marlene Nobre

The Brazilian Medical-Spiritist Association (Associação Médico-Espírita do Brasil - AME-Brasil) was founded on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1995, during the Mednesp - National Conference held by the Medical Spiritist Association of Sao Paulo (Associação Médico-Espírita de São Paulo - AME-SP), a pioneer institution, which started its activities on 31st of March 1968, and was the precursor of AME-Brazil.

AME-SP was a conquest, achieved through the efforts of various colleagues in the capital. Among whom we make special note of Dr Antônio Ferreira Filho who was President for several years and one of the association's pillars for around 30 years. Also Drs. Luiz Monteiro de Barros and Eurico Branco Ribeiro, both great idealizers and workers. As well as Dr. Maria Júlia Prieto Peres, the dedicated general secretary for almost two decades.

In February 1990 Prof. Dr. Abrahão Rotberg, also one of its distinguished founders, could no longer lead the board of AME-SP for personal reasons. Therefore I took over the presidency, having occupied various other roles since its foundation. Up until the beginning of 1990, six newsletters had been published and three symposiums had been held: **Brazilian Symposium of Parapsychology and Medicine** (Sibrapame - Simpósio Brasileiro de Parapsicologia e Medicina), at the Federal University of Sao Paulo (USP). There had also been several conferences at the Medical Association of Sao Paulo (Associação Paulista de Medicina) and we also carried out the campaign Clarification about Cures (Campanha de Esclarecimentos sobre Curas), among other events.

At the end of the year I took over, more precisely in the beginning of December 1990, right after the desincarnation of my husband, I received the guidance of our spiritual sponsor Dr Bezerra de Menezes. I was told to organize a Brazilian conference, aiming at uniting colleagues in order to found a national institution. With the decisive support of our colleagues from AME-MG, from Belo Horizonte, and another seven state associations all set-up during the nineteen- nineties, we finally saw the birth of AME-Brasil.

During the decade in which I had the biggest responsibilities, the association published one book and five newsletters, re-published three out of the previous ones and organized three of the Mednesp (Medical-Spiritist) Conferences. The rest of the Medical-Spiritist Conferences (Medenesp) were organized by AME-Brasil. I also organised an International Conference on Transcommunication and three symposiums. In November 2000 I passed the direction of the association over to Dr. Sérgio Felipe de Oliveira, who became the new president.

Today I can better perceive the Divine Plan for the revival of 'Medicine for the Soul' after seeing the numerous publications abroad, especially in the U.S. during the seventies, and more so during the nineties. Even during the 1950's we could already notice the efforts being made by the Higher Spiritualities in this sense, with the adhesion of brave workers rallying to the cause.

Like Herbert Benson who in 1970 started his studies on mentalisation and meditation techniques at *Harvard Medical School* supported by his director and criticised by most of his peers. But he was not discouraged and in the same decade he published the book "The Response of Relaxation" as a result of his research. Since then he has been helping colleagues who do not conform to the materialistic reductionist model, by leading a post-graduate course in 'Medicine and Spirituality'. In 1996 he published his latest book "Spiritual Medicine" in which he affirms with conviction "...in my 30 years of practice in medicine, no curing force is more impressive or universally accessible than the individual's power in taking care of himself, and self-healing". And he highlights "Faith, hope and love are eternal. They are natural trends of the soul that the western set of values represses, but has never been subjugated".

Also Richard Friedman Ph.D., Benson's colleague at the Mind/Body Medical Institute of Harvard's Medical School, and the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Centre. He was responsible for the opening of pathways for the scientific study of the correlation between belief and healing, using the most reliable evaluation and research methods. He died suddenly on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1997. The book *Scientific Research on Spirituality and Health* published in October 1997 by the *National Institute for Healthcare Research* was dedicated to him. It is a collection of panels made by almost seventy healthcare professionals, Friedman being among them. The majority were physicians and psychologists all concerned with scientific research regarding Spirituality and Health. This book states that "the contemporary use of the term 'Spirituality' as separated from religion has a surprisingly short history", having appeared in the nineties as the result of "human knowledge and historic cultural events". While the majority of religions obey rigid rules, being "formally structured", they can inhibit human potential in a certain ways. The term 'spiritual' is reserved for the more sublime and elevated side of life that people cherish, independently of belonging to any religion.

Another important team is being lead by Dr. William R. Miller, Prof. in Psychology and Psychiatry at the New Mexico University. He has a PhD in Psychological Clinic from the University of Oregon, and is a Research Director at the UNM's Centre on Alcohol and Substance Abuse. In his book *Integrating Spirituality into Treatment*, Miller approaches important subjects like *Spirituality and Treatment*, as well as *Professional Coaching in Spirituality*. In the reference sections of these books we can see how many colleagues are involved with Spiritual Medicine. We can also see how many books have already been translated into Portuguese.

William James, the admirable north-American philosopher and Psychologist born at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also inspired this movement, together with other pioneers. His ideas include the basic notion of the emotion being the leading force of religion. The Spiritual Teacher Emmanuel divulges this same concept in Brazil since the 3<sup>rd</sup> decade of last century. He defines religion as being the divine feeling of love in the individual's heart, and affirms that we need "Spiritism and Spiritualism, but even more Spirituality".

After decades of disregard James' ideas have come back with all their strength through the idealisers of this renewing movement, which prefers the term 'Spirituality' considering it more adequate to define "the higher and more sublime side of life".

We can therefore clearly notice that the nineteen-nineties were chosen by the Higher Spirituality to reestablish the idea of the 'Soul's Medicine' with a more solid and definite foundation.

In Brazil, the physicians Adolfo Bezerra de Menezes and Inácio Ferreira were great pioneers of this movement. The first one in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Rio de Janeiro, with his book "Madness under a New Prism". The second one while he was practising psychiatry during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Uberaba (State of Minas Gerais, Brazil), with several published papers like "New Directions for Medicine". His writings and activities helped to pave the way that guides us today.

We are happy to acknowledge that AME-Brazil was set-up at the right time. We noticed that we are still at the edge of a turbulent river, still to be explored. Our scientific contribution is only a draft, a mere promises and our efforts are only embryonic, but it is already a beginning to discover just how small we are.

We notice once more how right Allan Kardec was when he recalled that the maturity of times determines the progress and evolution of human society. Victor Hugo said the following regarding the same subject "There is no strength, nor armies in this world that can hold back an idea, when its time is right." Fortunately the time for Spiritual Medicine has arrived. Let us welcome the progress! May Jesus, the Physician par excellence, inspire us.

**(Text published in the first Newsletter of AME-I)**