

Understanding the Nature of Inner Spiritual Guidance

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Basic Conditions Which Facilitate the Reception of Spiritual Guidance

- I. Basic conditions which facilitate the reception of spiritual guidance: Seeking to recognize and follow spiritual guidance is the most important aspect of human life. It is central to the teachings of Jesus and the great religious prophets of history.
 - A. Wanting to do the Father's will more than anything else.
 - 1. A categorical will decision to dedicate one's life to God.
 - 2. The source of an all-pervasive motivation for our lives.
 - 3. Learning to discipline and master our minds—we need to control, guide, and direct our thinking as it is the key of all personality development and growth.
 - a. Develop a habitual spiritual frame of reference.
 - b. Eliminate the garbage and emotional poisons from our thinking.
 - B. Take short retreats for relaxation, thought clarification, and recharging the spiritual resources of our soul.
 - C. Engage in prayer and worship. It is important to understand the essential principles of creative prayer and worship.
 - 1. Prayer and worship are complementary. Prayer has an element of self or creature interest and concern. Worship is the contemplation of God and is an end in itself. Prayer may lead to worship and be an aid to worship.
 - 2. Prayer is communion with God which expands insight. It is both a sound psychological practice which augments self-realization and an effective spiritual technique to expand the soul.

- 3. Prayer is not a technique to escape life's difficulties but a way in which we can learn to face conflict and suffering meaningfully and courageously. Prayer does not change God's mind but it may change the person praying.
- 4. Primitive and immature prayer attempts to plead or bargain with God for health, wealth, power, or preference. Prayer, however, cannot be used to circumvent universe laws and the limits of time and space. The spiritual level of people is revealed by the nature of their prayers; however, the more mature should not criticize or ridicule the naive and the immature.
- 5. Words are not important in prayer; God responds only to the true and sincere attitudes of the mind and soul. We should pray for divine guidance to solve human problems, not for some cosmic, miraculous solution.
- 6. To pray effectively we must face reality honestly and intelligently, attempt to solve problems creatively through spiritual guidance with the resources which we have, be dedicated to doing the will of God, and have living faith. Efficacious prayer should be: unselfish—not alone for oneself, believing—according to faith, sincere—honest of heart, intelligent—according to our insight and knowledge, and trustful—in submission to the Father's all-wise will.
- 7. Only prayers which are rooted in spiritual reality and sustained by faith are answered in the frames of reference of the petitioner. Prayers are answered in terms of true spiritual needs. We should not attempt to use prayer as a substitute for human ingenuity, and action; it cannot be used to escape reality. Some prayers because of their visionary aspirations and all-encompassing nature can only be fully answered in eternity.
- 8. Prayer is a vital and indispensable factor in spiritual growth. Even immature and presumptuous prayers expand the soul's potential. Prayer is a major resource for the achievement of human self-realization, effectiveness, and inner peace. Prayer also has great social repercussions and is an antidote to personality isolation. (See "Conditions of Effective Prayer," The Urantia Book, 91:9.0)
- 9. Worship is spiritual communion with God; it is the part identifying with the Whole. It should not be confused with psychic or mystical experiences. God-consciousness is humanity's greatest opportunity and challenge.

- 10. Worship is the most creative activity of personal growth. It renews the mind, stimulates soul growth, eliminates insecurity and personality isolation, and greatly increases the total resources of the individual. Worship should alter with service; it is ancestor to the highest joys of humankind.
- D. Making decisions and taking action—grappling with specific life opportunities and problems.
 - 1. The clearest spiritual guidance comes through experience, not theoretical contemplation.
 - 2. Spiritual guidance is especially communicated through the process of service to our fellow human beings.
 - 3. The spirit of God can most effectively adjust, guide, and direct when we are engaged in the concrete activities of human life—when there is something tangible to guide and direct.
 - 4. The feed-back of human experience is the most substantial and reliable channel of receiving spiritual wisdom, direction, and vision.
 - 5. The spirit of God indwelling each of us has a plan for our lives. Our greatest adventure in life is discovering and actualizing that plan.

II. How Do We Test the Validity of Spiritual Guidance?

- A. First we must realize that our minds are quite capable of deceiving us. If we do not critically examine our inner leadings, it is easy to mistake our own subconscious will for the will of God (superconscious direction). Even genuine spiritual guidance can be distorted—often leading to half-truths and fanaticism.
 - 1. Spiritual guidance is often on the unconscious level. God's leading is so benign, subtle, and unimposing, so admixed with the ordinary things of life that we often cannot be certain whether our inclinations have their source in our subconscious motivational needs or our superconscious value direction.
 - a. We hear naive, fundamentalistic Christians glibly declaring "God spoke to me..." or "God told me to do this or that." Even as a small boy when my parents attended one of these emotional groups I had some doubts about the 20/20 spiritual vision of some of the statements I heard.

- b. The phenomena of voices heard by the mind's ear and visions seen by the mind's eye have been relatively frequent in religious experience. Such unusual events are impressive to the person experiencing them; however, we should not over-react but apply to them the same tests for validity that we give to the "inner leadings" of our every day life.
 - 2. Who can say for certain that the coincidental circumstances which seem to focus meaning or value in our lives are of divine direction or are merely the chance happenings of experience
 - a. Usually our first response to an inclination, leading, or idea is intuitive. We "feel" it is right, wrong, good, or questionable. Many of our decisions are made at this intuitive level.
 - b. Over the years as one observes these "meaningful coincidences" and ponders their precise timing one begins to suspect and then often believe that some kind of spiritual planning and guidance must have been involved in the production of such meaningful juxtapositions of events.
 - c. Since so much of our spiritual guidance seems to be associated with the common experiences of every day life, one suspects that the presence of God is a matter of using circumstantial manipulation as a communication technique.
 - 3. Following our intuitive reaction to inner leadings, we need to use our common sense and logical thinking to evaluate our inclinations. We ought to be particularly wary of those leadings which logically could have origins in our conscious or subconscious fears and anxieties or those which reinforce our egocentric psychological needs—pride, selfishness, security, justification, importance, prestige, etc. It is dangerous to uncritically accept our own human desires and needs for divinely inspired direction. Conversely, if we have a tendency toward guilt and self-punishment, we ought not reject leading simply because they contribute to our fulfillment as sons-and daughters of God.
- B. All of this subjective difficulty in evaluating and testing spiritual guidance points to the need for some objective standards by which we can assess our inner orientation.
 - 1. We should apply objective criteria to complement our subjective evaluation.
 - a. Is it harmonious with the highest teachings of The Urantia Book? Is it something Jesus would approve?

- b. Is it harmonious with the highest values and thinking of human religious culture?
 - c. Is it contrary to scientifically verified facts and the best scientific orientation?
 - d. What do the people whose judgment I most respect think about it? The approval of others is not of paramount importance but listening to the wisdom of others may be helpful to our discernment.
 - e. How does time and experience affect this leading or sense of mission? We need to "sleep on it," to allow days, weeks, and months to see how inner convictions look over a period of time.
 - f. After we are confident in our thinking that the idea or action contemplated is good and consistent with the highest and best that we know it is time to get experiential validation—we need to act.
- 2. After taking the leap of faith-in action, service, and living what does this experience reveal? How does it measure up to the following seven-fold pragmatic experiential? test
- a. Does it improve one's physical health?
 - b. Does it improve one's mental functioning?
 - c. What social effects does it have — does it promote love and unity or fear, anger, and disharmony?
 - d. Does it contribute to the spiritualization of one's every day life?
 - e. Does it enhance one's appreciation of truth, beauty, and goodness?
 - f. Does it conserve one's most basic and highest values?
 - g. Does it increase one's God-consciousness?
 - h. Does it help bring God to humankind and lead humankind to God?
 - (From 91:7.5 in The Urantia Book)
- 3. The feedback of experience will give us information and wisdom which thinking and theory cannot reveal. In this testing of our "inner leadings" through thought and action, and altering our behavior on the basis of the feedback of

experience we have exhausted our human evaluative capacities. We then must live in faith and inner conviction that we are following the will of God for our lives because we are living and acting on the highest and best that we know. Our lives are then enhanced by the power of the Spirit.