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- *Listening with the heart*
- *Anger comes from fear of loss*
- *God does not judge or punish*

The God to whom you pray knows so completely what it is that you seek. When you consider God, you consider a presence that is love. The response of God through love is echoed by all souls through the exercising of a simple but profound truth. The truth we speak of is the importance of listening. We have spoken about connecting healing and beauty, but there is more to be shared as it relates to listening.

We speak often of seeing with the heart and not just the eyes, and we must emphasize that an important foundation for all listening is not just listening with the ears but listening with the same heart. By heart, we're not implying specifically and only the organ but rather the spirit. Of course, society speaks of the heart as a loving presence, but that presence is not actually specifically limited to the heart. It is the presence of spirit. And so it is with that understanding that we wish to address the exercise of listening, the practice of listening, listening from the spirit, listening from the soul, from the Spirit Center that is a part of each of you.

In its simplest forms, listening may entail concentrating on the words being spoken, the ideas being expressed, but we speak of a listening that travels much more deeply into the consciousness, and it is this listening with the heart, with the spirit. Part of the art of listening is sifting through what is being said in order to grasp more completely what is meant.

Words in all languages are really forms of representation. A child learns that what is seen or felt can be represented by certain sounds, and those sounds become codified. They become a language. When you do not understand a language, you fail to understand the code that is used, and in missing the code, you misunderstand what is meant. So language at best is merely a representation of what reality is.

What we speak of is part of the effort of bypassing the inordinate significance placed on representation and focusing more on what is really meant. How can you understand meaning without representation? How do you know what is in the heart of another when you are less than able to decode the sounds that represent the meaning?

It is at this threshold where representation is inadequate that you are left with one alternative, and that is the presence of spirit in the communication, in the listening. It is when words fail, and you reach out and embrace with unselfish love that you then begin the true journey of listening with the heart. It is when you face such moments of heart-based listening that you become more aware of the potential that is opening, such that this listening does not have to wait until those coded sounds no longer suffice, and ultimately you begin a relationship with others at the heart listening stage. What we are saying in effect is the goal is to learn from the start to listen with love, to focus your

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attention on what is really being expressed. When you become more sensitized to that, you are more able to provide another with the true hand of God.

Too often it is easy to be lost in the war of words and to lose all sense of real communication. You concentrate on what is being said, and you respond to those words. When those words are words of anger, you can respond with anger. When those words are words of fear, it is often easy to be encased in those fears. But those words are only the proverbial tip of the iceberg. It is not for you to be so engaged with what is visible but rather to immerse yourself whenever possible with all that lies beneath the surface.

You respond to life around you as a consequence of your experience of that life. There is no other human being that experiences life in the same way you do. It is impossible for you to express your experience of life in a matter of a few words, and therefore you cannot expect those who hear what you are expressing to place themselves squarely in the center of your perception of life based on your own life experiences. That connection does not happen.

When you experience real pain, and others respond meaningfully, they are responding to the pain that you feel. They are not responding to the words you use. You may feel abandoned, and yet your words are words of anger. If others respond to your anger, they do not respond to the abandonment that you truly feel. God responds to the abandonment that is felt. It is not God's response to anger that is expressed.

And so it is with all people. The expression that you cannot truly walk in another's shoes carries a great truth. Only you can walk in your shoes. Only your neighbor can truly walk in your neighbor's shoes. They may feel comfortable when you look at them, and you may imagine there is no discomfort, but the neighbor may be in great discomfort.

So you must find a way of listening to your neighbor just as another must obtain some skills to listen, not to your anger but to your abandonment or fear, whatever is at the source of what is being expressed through representational sounds. For you to be the hand of God truly in your life, it means you get beyond what is being said, and you understand a number of basic truths. One of those truths is that anger comes from a fear, a fear of loss. Loss is always a part of anger, and fear is always a part of that sense of loss. The person who is angry is the person who is fearful. Anger is not a manifestation of strength, of a sense of righteousness. Anger always comes from fear.

When someone therefore utters expressions of anger, the listener with spirit, the listener through the heart, recognizes immediately that what needs to be responded to is someone in fear. If someone said to you, "I am fearful of something," it is easier for you to connect to that fear, but it could also be that such a representational sound as saying you are fearful is expressing something even beyond the fear, and the fear is merely what is tossed out for others to believe.

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Human beings are filled with the need for protection, as you observed, and that protection may often be presented as a kind of barrier between what you mean and what you say. We are not suggesting that you don't believe what people say, but rather that you listen to what is being said and try to understand, try to imagine that perhaps there is a barrier between the words that you hear and the meaning that is being given to those words.

An important component of this listening with the heart is being still. Listening with the heart never is accompanied by some kind of rebuttal. When you listen with your heart, you listen. It is not an opportunity to criticize. It is not a time for judgment. It is also very frequently not a time to be giving advice, for what is being expressed is being shared for the purpose of sharing through the desire to communicate something that is important, and that communication is one of giving out and does not imply that receiving immediate feedback is most appropriate.

Therefore, learn to listen, to be quiet, to be present, to be unhurried, and accepting of the way in which another expresses through these representations. You can evaluate on your own. You can try to find the true meaning on your own. You can try to understand what is behind what is being said on your own. That can take much time. The most appropriate responses to those in need is first of all to let them express what they can and wish to express.

Each of you wishes to reach out to others, to comfort, but you also wish to reach out and guide. Just as you wish to keep the hand of a child off a hot burner, you wish to protect another from making decisions which could ultimately be destructive. Part of experiencing love, of course, is the desire to protect another, and we are not questioning that. In the past, you have had individuals come to you expressing what's important to them, and you will continue to have others express to you what is important. That is the time to be open with the heart. That is the time to listen with love. It is the time to listen with compassion. It is the time to let others simply share. If they want to know what you feel or how you feel about what they share, they will ask.

Listening can only be effective through the heart. Listening with the intellect is often responded to through arguments, through trying to convince others that they are wrong, and that's not listening.

God does not judge, and therefore God does not punish. God listens and accepts and supports and affirms. It is that unconditional love that is offered by God that is the greatest comfort, and to be the hand of God, you must try to listen with the heart as God listens. Accept others even when you disagree. Accept others even when you experience fear of your own. Accept others when they express themselves in anger with the understanding that they are really expressing fear, a fear of loss. You may not fully comprehend what loss they perceive, but that is not important. What is important is the fear that generates so much misunderstanding between people, communities, nations, religious groups, and social groups.

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There are so many divisions that you are aware of daily, and those divisions are not in themselves what is important. What is important are the people, the human beings themselves, the sacredness of each life. A life surrounded by fear is no less sacred than another, and therefore a life consumed by anger is no less significant.

All life is connected through spirit, and it is through your awareness of that connection that you are joined as one, and as you feel that oneness, there is no space for judgment. There is only affirmation, one heart to another. There is only that strong thread of love that binds you with all human beings. Life is to be lived, of course, but life is not to be exercises in judgment. It is not the building of walls between people. It is the tearing down of misunderstanding. It is the tearing down of mistrust, of suspicion. It is the elimination of judgment. That is the goal for all, and this abolishing of judgment happens only as a direct consequence of your abilities to listen with the heart.

Have faith that all people are the same. Have faith that all people experience fear, not just you, not just those you know and love. Fear comes from uncertainty. Fear comes from moving from a place that is known to a place that is unknown. Fear is when you sense a loss of balance in your life, but it is through listening that you become a means by which balance can be restored for others and for yourself. You listen to others when you listen to yourself.

When you feel that anger, when you feel that something is fearful, take a look inside. Go to the core of who you are. Acknowledge what you are feeling, and acknowledge that it is God and your guides that respond to what is inside. As you acknowledge what is within you, you are then more able to acknowledge God's response, a response that comes from the Spirit Center, a response that comes from someone standing nearby, the hand of God.

You are blessed when you offer God's hand, and you are blessed when God's hand is offered to you. Be grateful always when you see God's hand and when you hear and listen to God's response.

Amen.