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- *Perception of self and response to others*
- *Meditation is listening*

God anoints your lives with the oil of love and compassion and nourishes your lives through love. Your gathering this evening is a product or process that has as its beginning your earliest exposure to the reality and stories of God and God's representatives in your history, in your past. There are many ways of recognizing the past. You can study it, you can hear about it, you can conjure up visions of it, you can sing about it. The many avenues by which you have arrived at this place are varied and yet essential. You are not together just by design of your own making. Your lives are a combination of events of your own control and events outside of your direction, but you have been brought to this place for an important purpose. We speak of place, not in a physical sense, but in a spiritual recognition.

You are where you are because of what comprises your experience—your experience as human beings, your experience as soul entities prior to human life. It is a continuum, that you know. There is no real beginning; there is no end. It is more like an extended present and you are all in the present. It is all you have. When we speak of the past, we speak of the distant reaches of the present.

You are in the present because you have experience in the present. Your lives take shape, not from what happens today or yesterday, but they obtain character, they grow because of all that has taken place in this extended present. As a part of this present, there are events which are constructive and events which are destructive. There are thoughts that are positive and thoughts that are negative. There are responses that are positive and responses that are negative, but all of these seeming opposites are really only parts of the present.

Because you are here as a result of all that has been, there are certain things you cannot change, for life has a natural progression. You move from experience to experience. One experience becomes the foundation of learning for another. That learning may be positive or it may not be, but learning nevertheless takes place.

You wonder about what can be done to change your response to others, to change your own perception of meditation, to change your sense of who you are. In truth, such change as you would seek is not possible in an essential manner. We mean by this, you are who you are because of your own experiences. You cannot change the outer reaches of your present, what you call the past. You are the product of all that has taken place, but you can change your perception. Reality is reality. You cannot change that God exists. You cannot change the fact that there have been prophets that have taught about God. You cannot change the fact that you breathe, that you see, that you feel your lives at this moment, for those are parts of what comprise reality truthfully.

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You can change your perception of that reality. You can change your perception of God, of truth. You can alter your perception of others. You can alter your perception of your own abilities to interact with others, but you have been given all that you will need. You have been given the power to be receptive to others. You have been given the power to be giving, compassionate, loving, patient.

How then is it possible to change your perception of what is already there? That is the crucial question. The answer is by achieving a clearer view of who you really are. If you accept the reality that in your essence you really are pure love, if you accept the reality that such love is unconditional, you acknowledge it, you welcome it, you dwell on that reality, then all that you seek will be yours. It is not a mystery. You are not being asked and you are not asking to be something that you are not already.

If you want to be more effective in your own meditation, allow what is within to consume your view, to free your view. To meditate, indeed to pray, is to listen. When you meditate, when you pray, you must listen to yourself. You must listen to the stirrings from within that are always true. They are always God-directed. They are always loving and supportive. When one prays, it is more efficient, more effective to listen than it is to direct. You pray for others, but in praying for others it does not change God's response when you ask for God's response. God is not waiting to be asked. God is waiting to be heard.

When you pray for others, therefore, being silent and enjoying the process of just being are enough, because in enjoying that process, you are acknowledging it. You are acknowledging what it means to be. It is a gigantic acknowledgment. It is for many the greatest of difficulties to quiet oneself and to allow oneself the luxury of listening to the sound of life, listening to the sound of love.

Accept the fact that although you are divine, you are also human. That comes of course as no surprise, but being human means that there are paths yet to be explored. There are traces to be followed and dreams to be dreamt. Along this path you will make good decisions and bad decisions. You learn from them both. You cannot expect to be perfect in your response to others. You cannot expect to be perfect in meditation. You cannot expect to be perfect in your communication with the energies of another, for you are learning. You are increasingly becoming; you are not arriving. Human life is a process; it is not a product. You are experiencing a process, and all that you experience has value.

When you look back upon a reaction toward another individual with regret, that is a very positive lesson. There is much learned by not doing what you acknowledge to be best. There is much to be learned by acknowledging that what you know to be best, you are incapable at the moment of achieving. That is not failure. That is merely an acknowledgment that the process of life is continuing to evolve. The process is working. When you regret a feeling or an action, the result of that regret is a slowing down of your spiritual growth, for regret is a negative feeling. It is a feeling that asserts some

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kind of failure, and you cannot grow when you are consumed by failure. You grow as you recognize what you would call success. Therefore when you feel one feeling and find it difficult to act upon that when such feeling is positive, acknowledge that in that recognition you are growing and that such experience is positive, is good because it affirms your commitment toward growth.

A plant responds to sunlight. Without that response there is not growth, but the process of plant growth accepts the reality that the plant will be changing in some fashion. It will become larger, it will change direction, it will change color, it will change shape, it will change function. There is some change that takes place. That change cannot take place if there is no effect to be gained from the presence of sunlight.

For you, there is no change that can be gained without your awareness that there is growth yet to be achieved. When you feel there is no growth needed, no growth occurs and you stagnate. It is therefore actually desirable to become aware of those moments when you see yourself less than successful in obtaining the objects that you believe are worthy. This is true of interpersonal relationships, it is true in your relationships with your guides, it is true with your perception of your own soul, it is true in your seeking to listen. When you recognize the value of listening spiritually and you experience the frustration of not listening at a level that you seek, you are drawn toward that listening, the very listening you seek.

The spirit is not capable of being discouraged. The spirit is always encouraged. The spirit is always hopeful. The spirit is always positive. The spirit focuses on what is good, what is loving, what is nourishing. The spirit never focuses on what you cannot do.

Meditation is simply listening—listening not so much with your ears but with your mind, your heart, your demeanor. It is difficult to listen if you are overcome by noise, be that noise something that is heard or something that is felt, either physically or emotionally. You each must pursue opportunities to listen. How long must this listening be, this meditative approach to your soul? It need not be long. It can be but the briefest moment. If in that moment you feel a connection with a loving force that is beyond your immediate presence, that is enough. You are replenished by that.

The transfer rate, if you wish to think of it as such, is extremely quick. How long must you see God in order to know that God exists? How long must you see a mountain to know that a mountain exists? How long must you see another to know that you are not alone? Your soul requires but a mere moment and you are refreshed. For some, meditating for several minutes brings refreshment. For some, a longer time feels more satisfying. There are those who are successful in their meditation, in their listening, when such activity is but a moment. What you are doing is catching a glimpse of your spiritual energy. Fortified by that glimpse, you are able to move forward.

Does it take long to sense the love of another? It can be a touch, it can be a quick glance, it can be a hand on a shoulder, it can be a smile, it can be someone who

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just stops and is willing to be receptive to you at that moment. You do not need to be told for a long time that you are loved by another. The length of such discourse has no relationship to reality. If you are sensitive, if you are open, the mere recognition suffices.

Each of you needs to be tolerant of yourselves. You cannot be tolerant of another without experiencing self-tolerance any more than you can be loving toward another without loving yourself first. When you experience impatience in your dealings with others, it is because you are impatient with yourself. By listening to yourself, you will realize that there is no reason for impatience because you have faith in the process of living and in the guidance that you receive in that process.

When you pray for insight, think for a moment of what you really seek and that is a vision of self. When you wish insight in the resolution of a conflict, seek a vision within. That is insight. Insight does not come from outside; it comes only from within. Such insight as you may seek in your daily living comes from the listening to self, that moment of recognition of the spiritual entity that is a part of every human being.

Your lives are greatly blessed, as are the lives of all human beings. But you are fortunate to be aware that you are blessed, even when you are not always aware of what those blessings are. Acknowledge deeply and personally that you are blessed. Don't occupy yourself with efforts to identify each and every blessing. It is fully sufficient to know that you are blessed. With that recognition, concerns about relationships with others, relationships with your soul, relationship to God become moot.

Therefore, live your life illuminated by an acknowledgment of blessings. Accept that you are blessed, accept that all are blessed. You share that with all living things. You all benefit because of God's presence in life. *All* life—plant, animal, chemical, mineral—all are blessed. Rejoice and be guided by that acknowledgment, and you will find yourselves sustained beyond your understanding, sustained in your searching, sustained in your reaching outward and upward, sustained in your praying.

Amen.