

Listen and You Will Hear

by Donne Hayden

“For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

Mark 4:24-25 ESV

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

Matthew 7:7-8 ESV

The Lord God opened to me by his invisible power that every person was enlightened by the Divine Light of Christ.

–George Fox

Then I showed them that God was come to teach his people by his spirit and to bring them off all their old ways, religions, churches, and worship, for all their religions and worship and ways were but talking of other men’s words, for the [ways] were out of the life and spirit that [those] were in [who] gave them forth.

–George Fox

In her book *Entering the Castle*, Caroline Myss tells about a man who “heard” instructions on what to do with his life and knew instantly that this voice came from God. “He had been praying for guidance for a very long time,” she writes,

having lost his job more than a year earlier, but instead of following the instructions, which were that me move to Portland, Oregon, and study yoga, he shared his experience with his friends, all of whom advised him against following these orders. Their negative reactions were not what he had expected and soon he became withdrawn, isolated and depressed, guilty and shamed. He knew that he had had a divine intervention but was not strong enough to act on the guidance. (page 56)

Sometimes, like this man, I’m a slow learner. I am especially slow to learn when I have made up my mind about something, as for instance, about the Bible. Though I received a good foundation in Bible stories from my Southern Baptist childhood, by the

time I was thirteen or so, I had rejected much of what was in the Bible. I could see some wisdom there, but even as a child, I disagreed with much of the interpretation I heard in church. Perhaps I knew intuitively that those who taught me about the scriptures lacked the “life and spirit” of those who “gave them forth.” Among the things I *have* learned is that I may find myself doing something I swore I’d never do, such as when, against all my own expectations, I found myself in seminary. There, as a mature adult I learned to read and understand the Bible in a different way.

Today I’m going to focus on one passage in the New Testament that always bothered me until I read it in a new light. Here is the passage in three variations; first, from the Gospel of Mark:

“For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” Mark 4:24 (ESV)

The Gospel of Matthew: *“For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”* Matthew 13:11-12 (ESV)

The Gospel of Luke: *“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”* Luke 8:17-18 (ESV)

If we understand this statement to refer to material goods—to money or possessions, it seems extraordinarily harsh. Inexplicable, really. I was always annoyed or irritated when I read these words, particularly when they appeared (as they do in Matthew) after a parable about money. Once I realized, however, that Jesus *always* taught about the Kingdom of God, in which everything is topsy-turvy to everything in earthly kingdoms (“the first shall be last,” “the meek shall inherit the earth,” etc.), I understood these words differently. For one thing, I noticed that in most cases, the

preceding lines were about something other than material reality. For instance, listen to the same verses coupled with a preceding verse:

The Gospel of Mark: *And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”* Mark 4:24-25 (ESV)

The Gospel of Matthew: *And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”* Matthew 13:11-12 (ESV)

The Gospel of Luke: *“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”* Luke 8:17-18 (ESV)

Do you hear a difference in meaning? Maybe it has always been obvious to others, but I was delighted when I read this as advice *to listen, to pay attention* and thereby experience revelation of hidden knowledge and truth. Here is my new understanding of these lines. First, we are advised to “Pay attention to what we hear.” If we do, we will receive more of whatever we pay attention to. If we hear and listen to guidance from the still, small voice within, we will receive more guidance. If we ignore it, we will eventually no longer receive guidance from it. The one who hears will be given *even more* to hear; the Spirit won’t waste time, however, on one who does not listen or refuses to hear. If we ignore subtle guidance or dismiss it as “just coincidence,” we will be offered the opportunity less and less. The man Caroline Myss told about, for instance, who received direct divine guidance, but did not follow it, did not move to Portland and study yoga—that man may not be blessed again with such clear and direct communication.

What strikes me about this is that it clearly speaks of continued revelation, a fundamental understanding of the Early Friends, who believed the Scriptures were one source of truth, but not the only—or even the “freshest”—source. As Fox said, “God has come to teach his people himself.” Many of us who are attracted to Quakerism are attracted by this acknowledgement of something we know experientially, i.e., that God is still speaking and we have experienced something we identify as coming from a Divine Source.

So how does this manifest today? How does the Divine Source, the Inner Light, the Christ Within get and keep our attention these days, especially those of us who do not seek spiritual answers in the Scriptures? To what should we “pay attention”? Here are some examples from my own and others’ experience.

First, we should *pay attention* to meaningful coincidence, which I describe as a remarkable coincidence made more so by the fact that its occurrence has significant impact on a person’s life. For instance, those of you who have read Greg Mortenson’s book, *Three Cups of Tea*, may remember the coincidences surrounding one member of the Board of Directors for his charitable organization.

Mortenson had befriended Jean Horni, a scientist and supporter of Mortenson’s work in Afghanistan. In his will, Horni left Mortenson “in charge of a charitable organization with an endowment of nearly a million dollars.” Among those Mortenson asked to be on the board of directors was Horni’s widow, Jennifer Wilson, and her cousin, Julia Bergman. Here is a passage from the book detailing how Julia Bergman was led to that position.

In October 1996, Bergman had been traveling in Pakistan with a group of friends who chartered a huge Russian MI-17 helicopter out of Skardu in hopes of

getting a glimpse of K2. On the way back the pilot asked if they wanted to visit a typical village. They happened to land just below Korphe, and when local boys learned Berman was American they took her hand and led her to see a curious new tourist attraction—a sturdy yellow school built by another American, which stood where none had ever been before, in a small village called Korphe.

“I looked at a sign in front of the school and saw that it had been donated by Jean Horni, my cousin Jennifer’s husband.” Bergman says, “Jennifer told me Jean had been trying to build a school somewhere in the Himalayas, but to land in that exact spot in a range that stretches thousands of miles felt like more than a coincidence. I’m not a religious person,” Berman says, “but I felt I’d been brought there for a reason and I couldn’t stop crying.” (pages 185-186)

A few months later, at Hoerni’s memorial service, Berman met Greg Mortenson and told him she had been there and seen the school.

“I want to help,” she said. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Well, I want to collect books and create a library for the Korphe School,” Mortenson said.

Berman felt the same sense of predestination she’d encountered that day in Korphe. “I’m a librarian,” she said. (page 186)

Here is an example of meaningful coincidence from my own life.

In 1973, I was a teaching in Cuba, a small village on the edge of the Navajo Reservation in northern New Mexico. One weekend, my two-year-old daughter and I were going to visit my parents who lived about 180 miles away. On Friday morning, I took my Volkswagen station wagon to the local mechanic and left it be serviced and tuned up. In those days, most mechanics wouldn’t work on “foreign” cars like VWs

because they didn't have metric tools. But the Lovato brothers were the only auto repair place within 80 miles, so they worked on all kinds of vehicles, at least for minor things. For major repairs, I had to take my VW to the dealer in Albuquerque.

After school, a friend took me to the mechanic's where I picked up my car, then got my daughter from the babysitter, went by the trailer we lived in and loaded a couple of suitcases. By the time we got on the road, it was nearing dark. I figured we would be at Mom's & Dad's by 8:30 or 9:00. Twenty-five miles outside Cuba, the car suddenly lost power and I pulled to the side of the road. The accelerator pedal flopped loose on the floorboard; whatever it had been connected to was gone. After determining I had no idea how to fix it, I sat there considering the possibilities.

I looked for lights that might indicate a ranch house within walking distance. Nothing. No lights except the stars appearing in the dusk sky. I could sit in the car and wait for another car to come by or take my two-year-old daughter and start walking in the direction of a small settlement I knew was about ten miles ahead. In the early 70s, because of local conflicts over the Spanish Land Grants, northern New Mexico was not a particularly safe place for Anglos, especially on a Friday night. Drinking made people mean, and lots of drinking happened in the Cuba bars on weekends.

I was still trying to decide what to do and had gotten out of the car to take Krystin out of her car-seat when I saw headlights approaching. The car was coming from the direction of Albuquerque, however, not Cuba, and as it came closer, I saw that it was a VW bus. I waited with some anxiety to see who was in the car. The fact that it was a VW bus could be good or it could be bad. In those days, mostly hippies drove VW busses, and there were good hippies and Charles Manson-type hippies. As the car pulled over on the other side of the road and stopped, I noted the New Jersey license plate, and to my

relief, saw that the driver and passenger were an elderly man and woman. They climbed out of the VW bus and came across the highway. I told them what had happened with the accelerator, and asked if they would mind giving us a ride back to Cuba, the direction they were heading. The man listened carefully and then said, “That might not be necessary. Let me take a look at it. I’ll get my tools. I’m a retired Volkswagen mechanic—got everything I need here in my bus.”

While the man worked on my car, I talked with the woman; they were on a cross-country trip, having left the East Coast several weeks earlier, and were driving from Albuquerque to Farmington that night. They just happened to be on that deserted stretch of highway near dusk 1800 miles from their home in New Jersey when my VW broke down. Within twenty minutes, the car was repaired and Krystin and I were on our way to Grandma’s house. All the way there, I was filled to overflowing with gratitude and wonder and a sense of having received a gift.

It was early in my life, however, and though I was grateful to this seeming attention from some protecting force, it took other and more experiences for me understand the value of watching for and appreciating encounters with the Divine which might occur in meaningful coincidence, in dreams, or in books that appeared on a shelf before me with just the information I needed when I needed it, or a book falling open to a particular page. Or even a flashing banner on an Internet page—but that’s another story.

When I discovered Quakerism, I understood the importance of sitting in silence, seeking to be quiet, receptive to hearing the still, small voice. I understood that the more I am open to receive, the more I will receive. To put it another way, the more attention I

give to the Light, the more attention I will receive from the Light. If I ignore a spiritual gift, it will seldom be offered again. So remember:

“Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you,” and “everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”