



Free Listening Hearts Program Materials

A Primer on Spiritual Discernment: Topic 2

Formulating a Question for Discernment

Good spiritual discernment begins with discerning the question. The desire for the discernment comes from a gnawing concern, one you have been pondering, but unable to resolve. How you word your concern in the form of a question paves the way for all that follows. If you let prayer help shape your discernment question, you yourself undergo a subtle transformation in the process.

The first step is to hold your concern in centered silence for at least ten minutes, with your thoughts and feelings in suspended animation. After that, begin to word the question by addressing it to God: "God, how would you have me...?" This gets it out of your head where it is in your own control and into your spiritual heart, your gut, ready to be informed by the Spirit.

The next step is to word the question so that it is open-ended, hospitable to new possibilities beyond what you currently perceive, so that you are available to be taken to new vistas and see new things. That means no multiple-choice questions, no "yes" or "no" questions. Such questions hem God in and hem you in as well.

Then continue in a prayerful mode until the question becomes a single interrogatory sentence that is clearly focused and open-ended. In spiritual discernment you are not looking for pat answers or blueprints, but for signs that point the direction and illuminate the path ahead.

*Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart
and try to love the questions themselves.*

– Rainer Maria Rilke

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