



Free Listening Hearts Program Materials

A Primer on Spiritual Discernment: Topic 13

Discernment as Withdrawal and Return

Spiritual discernment taps into our yearning to enter the flow of the Spirit, so that we may be carried to a place of new perspective relative to an issue that concerns us. In Listening Hearts, this involves letting our mind descend to the center of our being, which is our spiritual heart, where God dwells most intimately within us.

We begin in the head, considering the question for discernment with our rational faculties. We then slow down and become more reflective, meandering at the semi-conscious level for a while. From there, we go deeper toward our very center.

The center is a place of stillness where thoughts and feelings are suspended. We are at the level of God's universal truth—and universal love. We are at one with all of creation. We are in the realm of the collective unconscious. At the center, God's creative energy is most concentrated, most intense.

Sometimes there is something that we know deep inside, but do not realize we know, that begins to come into focus and rise to consciousness. At other times, the light of Christ within us illuminates a situation so that we start to see something that had not been visible to us before. At other times, we suddenly we find ourselves viewing the issue from an entirely new angle, from which it looks very different. Any of this is discernment emerging.

Listening Hearts involves a movement of withdrawal and return. Once we have lingered in the unconscious, we begin the return. First we identify signs of the Spirit we have experienced or observed. Next we try to get a sense of where those signs are pointing—to develop a sense of direction in relation to the question for discernment. After that, we articulate the primary thing we think God is trying to tell us. We next determine what we intend to do in response. Then we are ready to step back into the world of everyday life to act on our discernment.

*... the word is very near to you;
it is in your mouth and in your heart,
so that you can do it. (Deut. 30:14 – RSV)*

A word of caution: God does not work according to any timetable that we may set. Rather, God reveals to us what we are ready to hear when we are prepared to hear it. If we stay open and attentive to the divine presence, God will show us the way ahead, step-by-step, as we seek to move forward on our true path, one day at a time.

– Suzanne Farnham, Spring 2018 *Explorations*, Vol. 28 Number 2, pp. 1-2

