

“Give me, O Lord, an understanding heart”

Twelveacres’ 2009 Annual Meeting Address by Jan Holden, CS of Redwood Shores, California

The title of this talk is an echo of the theme for the annual meeting, “Give me, O Lord, an understanding heart.” This quote is from 1st Kings, when Solomon has been crowned king after the death of his father, David, and is talking to God. He asks God to give him an understanding heart. And God does.

Let’s read that verse about the understanding heart in its context (I Kings 3:5-9). We’re going to look at this story to get a deeper understanding of Solomon. Bible commentators indicate that Solomon was an example of the Christ. We know that an office of the Christ is to be a Way-shower, to show us how we can journey Spiritward. So we can study this story for many lessons on how to progress spiritually.

At the beginning of the story, it tells us where it takes place. Solomon was on the top of Mount Gibeon, which was the highest point of land in the area that he could get to, in order to worship. This was a common way to worship—the higher you were physically, the closer you were to God. This was before he built the temple. He felt the need to do this in order to commune with God, to know God better and to ask God about this very essential point he felt he needed to understand—how to discern between good and bad. That’s what we’re striving to do, to reach that exalted understanding that enables us to heal.

Let’s look at Solomon’s “largeness of heart,” his understanding of God as Mind and then, the discernment between good and bad. I love the verse from the chapter following this story where it says, “And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore” (I Kings 4:29). Matthew Henry’s Commentary has a note about this verse. “It is very desirable that those who have large gifts of any kind should have large hearts to use them for the good of others; and this is from the hand of God...The knowledge which God gives by special favour goes beyond that which man gets by his own labour...Solomon was...a type of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and hidden for use...”

The thing about Solomon that stood out to the neighboring kingdoms around Israel was that he had better understanding and wisdom than even the very best scholars of the empires of Egypt and Persia. His learning and education were top-notch, as were theirs, but his understanding went far beyond anyone else’s and it was widely recognized as having its source in God. Pharaoh’s highest recognition of Solomon

was in offering his daughter to him for a state-sanctioned treaty of marriage.

Mrs. Eddy talks about servant-style leadership in *Miscellaneous Writings* (266:9): “The true leader of a true cause is the unacknowledged servant of mankind. Stationary in the background, this individual is doing the work that nobody else can or will do.” I can see Solomon as being a servant-king for his people, stationary in the background of the legacy of David, his father, as well as in the background between the two great empires of Egypt and Persia, solid, holding his ground for justice and making many advancements in society.

Psalms 119:32 also mentions largeness of heart. “I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.” Mrs. Eddy built on this and wrote, “Love enriches the nature, enlarging, purifying, and elevating it” (*Science and Health* 57:23-24).

I witnessed an example of Love enlarging hearts when I had lost my green card and had to replace it quickly in order to give a talk overseas. There had been a recent change in procedure so you couldn’t walk in to the Immigration and Naturalization Service office. You had to make an appointment. But the earliest ones were at least two weeks out. However, it came to me strongly to go directly to the INS office at a particular time. God said, “I will send an angel to your side, to help.”

I got to the office building, which was usually teeming with people, but this time no one was there. It was empty and locked up, except for one large room with three or four officers at their windows who were finishing their paperwork. I realized later that they closed early that day of the week. So I turned my thought to God and asked which window He wanted me to go to. I was obedient and found myself pouring out my story to an INS officer, who promptly started to berate me for losing my green card until I felt about two inches high. I was stunned. Then the phone rang in the next office and he was called over by an assistant to answer it.

As I collected my thoughts, I said to God, “And this is the angel you sent to help me? Can I please get another one?” Then I got the sense that this was not how God was seeing him to be and that my job, at the moment, was to align my thought with God’s and see him in all his God-given perfection. So I got busy doing just that. I detected the lies about him and firmly rejected them. Then I replaced each counterfeit with its counterfact. After about three or four

minutes I finished, felt completely at peace and felt only love towards him.

Well, the man that got off the phone was definitely not the same man that picked up that phone. I felt like saying, “Who are you and what have you done with that grumpy, rude man that was here before?” This new man was definitely my angel. He couldn’t do enough for me. He was pleasant, kind, bent over backwards to be helpful and couldn’t give me enough advice about how to proceed.

Towards the end of our interactions, he handed me my paperwork, and then paused, looked up at me and said, “This is none of my business and this isn’t a part of any official questions, but ... just what line of work are you in? There’s something so different about you, I can’t quite put my finger on it. It’s something very spiritual-like.” I told him I was a Christian Science practitioner; and then we had a lovely conversation about Christian Science and healing. This dear man felt the power of divine Love enriching his nature and enlarging his heart.

One of the Proverbs, which perhaps Solomon himself wrote, says “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”(Proverbs 3:5). In other words, your own human understanding, your perception of a situation or your opinions about something are not sufficient to heal or to meet the need. As we turn to divine Mind, Mind’s ideas produce change, alteration, expansion, abundance, and healing.

You all know the prophet Samuel, who was the mentor, teacher and practitioner for David, Solomon’s father. I find it interesting that Hannah, Samuel’s mother, was one of the first to understand the concept of God as Mind. The beginning verses of the second chapter of 1st Samuel are Hannah’s prayer of thanksgiving for her healing of barrenness, and for the birth of Samuel. The third verse says, “Talk no more so exceedingly proudly; let not arrogance come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed” (I Samuel 2:3). In other words, “Don’t be proud that you figured something out. God is the source of knowledge, and He knows what actions are right.” So it’s the concept of God as Mind, helping us discern good and bad, just as Solomon prayed.

The prophet Jeremiah records this message from God, “And I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jeremiah 3:15). Our pastor is the *Bible* and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, as Mrs. Eddy ordained in the *Manual of The Mother Church* (58:5).

It was this largeness of heart, along with the largeness of his wisdom, knowledge and understanding, that made Solomon an excellent leader. The application of his gifts, in the name of the Lord and for the sake of his people, gave the country peace and prosperity over several decades. We can apply our gifts, knowing that God is their source, for the sake of our families, our work and our communities. As we do, we, too, are blessed with harmony and abundance.

One of the aspects of Solomon’s wisdom, which is just as available for each of us today, was revealed in his prayer: “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart...that I may discern between good and bad” (I Kings 3:9 (to :)). A key word in that prayer is “discern.” The definition of “discern” from Webster’s 1828 dictionary is “To separate by the eye or by the understanding. To see the difference between two things. To discover.”

Mrs. Eddy uses the word “discover” in the sense of discernment and separation in her paragraph about anatomy. “Anatomy, when conceived of spiritually, is mental self-knowledge, and consists in the dissection of thoughts to discover their quality, quantity, and origin. Are thoughts divine or human? That is the important question. This branch of study is indispensable to the excision of error” (*Science and Health* 462:20). She says this study is indispensable. Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines “indispensable” as “that which cannot be omitted, remitted or spared; absolutely necessary or required.”

Since we are all on the path of goodness, like Solomon, we know the difference between good and bad motives and actions. We probably believe we don’t have too many so-called “bad” thoughts. But if we make an assessment of each thought as to whether it is divine or human, we may find we’re thinking far fewer divine thoughts than we’d like. I think that may be what Solomon was asking for. He already was a good man so he didn’t need help discerning between good and bad motives and actions for himself, but instead to help others fine-tune their motives and actions. In order to do this he may have realized he needed help in discerning between the divine and human and that that was what was needed to elevate society.

Another word that means a line of separation is the word “demarcation.” Mrs. Eddy uses it only three times in her writings. The paragraphs on page 505 of *Science and Health* stood out to me. “Spirit imparts the understanding which uplifts consciousness and leads into all truth...Spiritual sense is the discernment of spiritual good. Understanding is the line of demarcation between the real and unreal. Spiritual understanding unfolds Mind,—Life, Truth, and Love,—and demonstrates the divine sense, giving the spiritual proof of the universe in Christian Science. This understanding is not intellectual, is not the result of

scholarly attainments; it is the reality of all things brought to light” (*Science and Health* 505:16-17, 20-28). Solomon was very well educated and I’m sure he continually pursued his learning and growing, but don’t you think he was asking to understand what was real versus unreal, Spirit versus matter?

In Mrs. Eddy’s little book *No and Yes*, she says, “Human philosophy has ninety-nine parts of error to the one-hundredth part of Truth,—an unsafe decoction for the race” (*No and Yes* 21:2). You could interpret that as saying that whatever it is that we’re thinking, if it’s not the absolute truth of Spirit, God, it’s human, and it’s not true spiritually and is unreal; therefore it’s an unsafe extraction, not just for yourself, but for the whole human race.

So, just how do you go about discerning between divine and human? One way is to ask yourself if this is something that God would say. Try adding “saith the Lord” to the end of the thought. For example, “Oh, my head hurts...saith the Lord?” No! “My co-worker is so rude and impatient... saith the Lord?” No. “I have no money in the bank and I don’t know where the next check is going to come from... saith the Lord?” No. Once you’ve discerned what seems to be true humanly versus what is true spiritually, what do you do with that information? Sometimes, Christian Scientists are good about detecting the error, but don’t take the next essential steps. As I mentioned in the discussion of the INS agent, once we detect the error, we need to reject it and then replace it with its spiritual counterfactuals. Detect, reject, replace.

Let’s take the example of “I have very little money in the bank and I don’t know where my next check is going to come from...saith the Lord?” No, we can easily detect that God didn’t say that. So let’s reject it. NO! That is not my thinking and that’s not a thought from God. I refuse to accept this erroneous suggestion. There is no ceiling of age or ability. There is no ceiling of understanding or intelligence or wisdom. There is no ceiling of abundance. There is no limit of supply. There is no ceiling or floor of any form of matter. There is no matter—all is Spirit. Now let’s replace it with the spiritual counterfactuals. Nothing can frustrate divine Love’s bestowal of good on every one of us. No one can drop out of divine Life’s security and abundant provision. God is the source of all good and is meeting every one of my needs. Spirit, God has infinite resources and is blessing me with these resources every moment, without fail.

The truth that you already know is sufficient to meet your every need. God has already given you your daily bread, and this bread, this truth, is simply to be applied to the situation at hand. These suggestions are not problems, but

opportunities of application. Truth precedes the lie, so you already have all you need.

Let me share with you examples from my own experience. Sometimes a concept grabs your attention so strongly that it ends up spilling over into all areas of your life. Not only does it grab you, but you see the truth in it so vitally, that you grab onto it and let it change how you see existence itself. One sentence about discernment of the divine versus the human did that for me in two instances and has continued to affect me to this day in many other ways as well.

Friends who worked at the Mother Church Center had urged me several times this one particular year to come to Annual Meeting and to bring my children, because of the special activities and workshops that were to be held. I’d prayed many times about it, but the path didn’t seem clear, and frankly I’d given up the idea. The weekend before Annual Meeting another friend urged me to rethink it. As I prayed about it that night, I said to God, “But what about all these things that have to be worked out before I can possibly go?” and proceeded to list about six things that I felt were blocking me, besides the fact that I didn’t have the money for it. Finally, I was silent and waited for His response.

He said to me, “Are you looking at matter or are you looking at Spirit?” In my response to this question, I looked at the list of material items. They appeared very real and problematic. But when I looked at the spiritual reality, every one of the things on the list disappeared! All was harmonious and perfect. Astonished, I looked back into the material perspective and there they were again. I looked into Spirit again and they disappeared. I did this several times until it occurred to me that I needed to keep my mental gaze in Spirit. I trusted that Spirit, God, would take care of everything on the list, although I sure didn’t know how, and that I could go forward in making plans for us to attend the Annual Meeting. It was God’s law of adjustment. I was to be a witness to God and His laws and what He could do for us. God’s perspective was to see only harmonious perfection, not obstacles or problems, and that was to be my viewpoint as well.

From that moment forward, everything about making the trip to Boston with the children fell into place quickly and effortlessly—our flights, hotel room, all of the things on the list, as well as all preparations for the trip, were taken care of within two days, mostly without me having to do anything. Then, a check arrived unexpectedly that completely covered our financial needs. All three of us had a fabulous time reconnecting with old friends, learning a lot, growing spiritually and even had an unplanned reunion with my mom, uncle and cousins, who decided at the last minute to drive down from Canada for the meeting.

My next experience in deepening my understanding of this concept of “Am I looking at matter or am I looking at Spirit?” was less than a month later. Our family went camping in Yosemite and by the second day, I suddenly developed deep holes on the bottom of my foot at the base of my toes. The holes became inflamed and painful and it was very difficult to walk. I tried my best to keep them clean, but when you’re camping, it seems everything is dirty all the time. I tried not to look at the problem or be impressed by it. In my prayers, I also promptly rejected the error and replaced it with the spiritual truths of my being. I was doing my best to follow the guidance given in *Science and Health* (21:10) to “... constantly turn away from material sense and look towards the imperishable things of Spirit.” But after two or three days, I realized the situation was getting worse.

I wanted to get to the root of this problem so I turned my thought to God and asked Him, “Okay, God. What is going on here?” He replied, “Are you looking at matter or are you looking at Spirit?” I thought, “But I’m trying! I know that’s what I’m supposed to do. I’m trying not to even peek at it.” Then it was as if God was shining a bright flashlight on the pattern of my thought and all of a sudden, I could see that I was trying not to peek at a matter situation from a belief that my life was still in matter.

I was NOT seeing myself as God was seeing me. God saw me as being one with Him, in Spirit. My life was God Himself, eternal, perfect. Then I looked at myself from God’s perspective and there was no problem—no problem at all to heal. All was well—spiritual and perfect. I was as perfect as God Himself—as His image. My purpose was to be a constant witness to this truth. And, I felt SO loved and cherished for doing so. From that moment on there was no more pain. Within twenty-four hours, brand-new pink skin had filled in all of the holes. Within another twenty-four hours, there was no sign at all of any problem.

A couple of days later when I thought through what had happened, it reminded me of the account of James Rome, who was in charge of getting the Mother Church Extension built by the dedication date of June 10, 1906. In his letter to Mrs. Eddy that’s included in her writings in *The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany* (60:25 to 62:15) there were several steps his thought took that paralleled my own experience. The obstacles he faced seemed insurmountable to everyone.

First, though, he realized he had to wake up to what was really going on. Next, he fought with the material evidence. Then he lifted his thought to God’s perspective, which could not be limited by any human obstacle. Deep conviction that the work could be accomplished came to him and there was no more doubt. I love what he said next. “I noticed that as

soon as the workmen began to admit that the work could be done, *everything seemed to move as by magic; the human mind was giving its consent.* This taught me that I should be willing to let God work. I have often stood under the great dome, in the dark stillness of the night, and thought, “What cannot God do?”

Let’s review where we’ve journeyed today. We’ve taken a look at the story of Solomon asking God for an understanding heart. We can see this story as an example of the Christ office of Way-showing—showing us how we can progress spiritually. We know that Solomon went to Mount Gibeon, the highest point he could find, to commune with God and we can take our prayers to our highest spiritual standpoint. We considered how Solomon was in the historical shadows of his illustrious father, David, and in the shadows of Egypt and Persia. He, like us, was a “servant of mankind,” doing “work nobody else can or will do.” We know that God enlarged Solomon’s heart to enable him to want to do good and God is doing the same for us. I gave the example of the INS agent having his heart enlarged and fulfilling his role as an angel, helping me with what I needed. We discussed Hannah’s perception of God as the only Mind and Hannah’s connection with Solomon through Samuel and David. And we heard echoes of that perception in Solomon’s prayers.

We focused on the discernment between divine thoughts and human thoughts and how that is indispensable to our progress. One way we can distinguish is to review each thought and add “saith the Lord.” We reviewed the steps of detecting, rejecting and replacing in Christian Science treatment and the question of “Are you looking at matter or at Spirit?” I gave two examples of how that helped me. One in overcoming roadblocks in getting to an Annual Meeting and the other in healing a serious problem with my feet. Finally, we reviewed the building of the Extension and how rejecting the material evidence and focusing on Spirit enabled that project to be completed on time.

Whether it’s the Christ working through Solomon enlarging his heart and enriching his nature in preparation for building the Temple or of the Christ in James Rome’s experience completing the building of The Mother Church Extension or of my own experiences, we all grew in our unfolding understanding of discerning between good and bad, the real and unreal.

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