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- *Authentic sharing*
- *Meaningful listening*
- *How prayer works*

God, who is the Creator of all that is, surrounds each of you with light and a loving presence.

Your conversation together this evening was centered appropriately around the issues of sharing. The principles, the need for such sharing are obvious, but the challenge comes in securing the tools with which you can more successfully share. We would like to explore that a bit with you at this time.

It is good to know you must find ways of sharing who you are, what your needs are, but how and in what environment? You mention how difficult it is to share your thoughts to receptive ears when others fail to understand what it is you are sharing. Sharing requires first of all a sincere confidence in *who* you are, not *what* you are—*who* you are implying a reflection, a representation of what is permanent within, not *what* you are—what a career may be, or what your obligations may appear to be. To share meaningfully requires you to be absolutely honest with yourselves before you can be fully honest with others.

How often do you find opportunities in your lives to reflect what is truly important to you? You go through the trappings of what seems to be important, what appears to be necessary, what appears to be vital to reach some stated objective. But you must find ways to step back and first acknowledge what is essential for you. Is it your feelings that are essential to acknowledge, or is it your expression of those feelings? Is it the need to express because of external forces, or is the need to express coming from a space deep within your spiritual core? It takes great effort to find what is truly important.

Each individual will recognize a different component of what seems to be important. What is vital to you may be of little interest to someone else. When you feel you are in touch with that which moves you forward as human beings, you must find an appropriate means for expressing that, and here is where sharing comes into play. You can express what you feel to be important and yet not be sharing, for what you identify as being important may be concepts, they may be thoughts related to careers or relationships, but what really is important is the recognition of what is permanent within you. When you express yourselves as a reflection of what is permanent, that expression carries a validity of its own. The listener may not share that sense of importance to what you express, but if you are fully aware of what is important to you, then whatever you express with an open heart is fully justified.

When you express, when you share as a reflection of what is essential, there must not be an expectation that another will respond as you may wish. You share because of your openness, your willingness to be vulnerable, your willingness to

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express that, but you do not share with the expectation that another must respond in a way that you might expect. When you create an overlay that colors that response of another, you are in a sense imposing your own beliefs and understanding on the behavior of another.

No two individuals respond to their own inner selves in the same way. To share means to share. It does not mean to plead or to beg or to cajole or to convince. You share what you share because it is a natural outgrowth of who you are. This is the sharing we refer to.

If you have physical, emotional needs, it is certainly appropriate to express those, but you are expressing them within the context of a spiritual connection. You are where you are in your lives, and you are letting others know where you are. You let others know of your emotional pain, your physical pain. You let others know of your joy, your rejoicing, your relief as well as your agonies, but they are offered just as you offer prayers to God. As you say, you put it out there—what comes, comes.

We have frequently said that you do not activate God through prayer, but you open yourselves to the help that's there. The critical approach in all of this is to open yourselves to what is there. It is not to dictate how you wish God to respond. So it is when you are opening yourselves to another—the needs you have, the pain you feel, the anguish you experience. You put it out there, and then you allow yourselves to be open to what may come. But just as you cannot place a set of expectations on God, you cannot place equal expectations on another human being. Being vulnerable in expressing your needs is important because it is an honest expression, an honest revealing of where you are on your particular pathway of development.

It would be indeed of great benefit to humankind if all individuals could simply say where they are on their journey. If your neighbors were to make such a statement, then it would be easier for you to identify how you could respond to your neighbors in the most meaningful way. But neighbors rarely express those needs, and you go through life with no understanding of the real needs of those around you.

It is the natural state of the spirit to be lovingly supportive. Much gets in the way of that response, but that is the natural response. If you know of the needs of another, you can then respond as you are able to respond, but you are not responding according to the expectations of another, but rather according to how you are led. If you pray for openness, pray for openness to the needs of others, and then pray for clarity on the kind of response that is appropriate. This process only can happen with a free exchange of feelings, a free sharing of where you are on your journey.

Self-knowledge implies an understanding of who you are. What you are is ultimately of no importance. If you are to connect to your spirit center as the genesis for all that is expressed, you must sort through what part is *who* you are and what part is *what* you are. "Whats" change; the "who" does not.

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So who are you? You are human beings who are connected to the Spirit Center of the entirety of creation. You are connected to All That Is. You are connected to the acts of nature. You are connected to everything animate and inanimate. You are part of a continuum of creation. You are the product of creation, and you are the source of creation. You are at the very basic-most level all that is necessary to become pure love, purely loving. That is who you are, but recognizing what it means can require a lifetime of understanding.

Then you must apply that understanding in your relationships with all who surround you. Those relationships are guided by that understanding. That understanding is not a factual understanding. It is absolutely emotional, a total commitment to its reality, not merely an academic recognition of what may be. Connecting to who you are allows you to form a context for expressing your needs, sharing with others at a significant level of honesty.

We ask you to become good listeners because it is only through your developing skills as a listener that you can achieve the insight necessary to respond in appropriate ways. When you have needs of your own, you may pray that others respond appropriately, and that essentially means you pray so that others may hear you, may listen not just to the words you say, but what you intend by those words. Clear listening works as a two-way street. You listen carefully and clearly to others, and others must listen clearly to what you share. That listening is not by words alone. Meaningful listening can be picking up clues from how another behaves, from the expression in their eyes, from various nonverbal symbols that communicate who they are.

As you pray for help, pray not for what specifically you wish to receive, but rather that others may clearly hear what your needs are. Those needs may be very different from the words that are spoken, on your part or on the part of another, expressing needs. You must learn the skills to learn between the lines, to listen between the sentences, to understand the space between the words, and in doing this, you are much clearer about the real needs.

Sometimes what another expresses is not what is important but rather the fear behind what was expressed. When you hear others speaking with great anger, you can be relatively certain that behind that anger is fear. If you respond to anger with anger, it is the same as responding to others who are expressing their needs as fears through anger on your part. You would never willingly be angry at others who express to you their deepest fears, and yet that is what is often done when those deep fears are revealed through anger.

To be a good listener therefore means listening beyond what is being said or what is being acted out, and trying to understand the context for what you perceive in another. It is equally true that you may be fearful and express that fear in anger, and when you ask for support from another, you must think about what that support is as it relates to fear, not as it relates to anger. If you expect a response from another, you

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may have those expectations based on the fear that you feel, and yet another is only aware of the anger that you express. You may then think the response to that anger is entirely inappropriate to the fear or anxiety that you feel.

It is for that reason that we urge you not to place an overlay on your relationships with others that infuses those relationships with expectations. It is also why we urge you to become even more aware of *who* you are and not *what* you are. The “what” may be an angry person; the “who” may be one who is filled with fear, and yet reaches out in faith that somehow those needs are met.

Sharing therefore is a skill that must be practiced. It is a skill that is fulfilled through your awareness of God, through your awareness of your guides. That awareness leads to a clearer understanding of who you are and what it means to be human beings grounded by a spirit center.

God responds to who you are, not what you say. There is no prescribed ordinance on how to pray. There may be traditions, but those are only traditions. Any form of prayer serves to open that individual to the light that is already present. You may refer to God by any term. You may feel that God is so great that there is no name for God. It makes no difference. The acknowledgment that you are connected to God is the only requirement. You pray because you believe there is a response to that prayer, and that is absolutely true, but that response is not God’s response—it is *your* response.

Consider always who you are. Give great effort to understanding the true nature of your human lives and the accompanying grace of Spirit. Such an understanding ensures that when you communicate to others your needs, when you communicate to others through your vulnerability, you will then be open to God’s response.

We are with you always. We respond to your needs before you even express them. Your lives are blessed because you are alive. Your lives are blessed because you are part of creation. You matter because you are part of creation. You are never insignificant. You are never separated from the Spirit Center that is the Creator of all.

Reach out with your hands and grasp the Creator, welcoming that loving force into your lives, and give thanks.

Amen.