

The Spiritual Philosophy of...

The
Prodigal
Soul



M. L. Stolte



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Chapter One

NATURAL DISCERNMENT: FEELING TRUTH

Spiritually speaking, it is only religious practices that can be taught. People can learn church doctrine, religious traditions and rituals, and can memorize scriptures and prayers. But the act of achieving true spirituality has to be felt; it must be revealed and experienced.

Consider trying to explain the experience of falling in love to people who have never felt it. Chances are, some measure of love is experienced through family. Thinking they must certainly know what love is, many conclude that love is love, period. Intellectually, it is easy to understand what it would be like to want to share life with another person. But the scope and depth of the difference in feeling cannot be fully comprehended until they themselves have fallen in love for the first time. Then, they would discover a unique love, deeper and fuller than they had known before—a love beyond confinement or denial—a love outside of intellectual explanation. This unique emotion must be experienced first hand and cannot otherwise be conveyed beyond the fact that it does exist.

Spirituality
must be revealed
through experience.

The ability to achieve a spiritual existence, to actually feel it and live it, is something we are born with. Existing within a spiritual environment is the deepest desire of the soul. The soul yearns for the conscious rediscovery of the spiritual self, aware that it is as natural as opening our eyes when we wake up. Because God is so very loving, we get as many chances to discover our genuine nature as the sun gets to rise.

Realizing there is a difference between what can be taught and what must be experienced is important to understanding the Bible. The principals in the Bible are based upon interpretations of ancient words translated from age-old languages and are directed toward an intended audience. English versions are written using modern language and are based upon what the translators' understanding was, as well as what they believed at the time to be correct. These interpretations, designed to be understood by the masses, have been taken for fact without consideration of other possible significance.

Here is a specific example of how easily interpretations can skew the intent of spiritual messages. Most people are familiar with the saying, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Taken the way this saying is usually presented, it seems to indicate that it is an absolute impossibility for a rich person to attain heaven. It appears to be an obvious interpretation since a camel would never be able to fit physically through the eye of a needle. But is the exclusion of the rich from heaven the spiritual intent of the message?

In 1897, an American visitor to Jerusalem documented many of the events of the day in a long, handwritten letter. I personally uncovered, authenticated, and transcribed this unique, first-hand account. This letter, while describing the walls and gates around the city, told of how the huge gates were closed at night to protect against robbers. It went on

to explain what happens when one of these gates was approached by a late arriving caravan, and contained the following passage:

If a caravan of camels is belated ... what is to be done? There is a small hand gate in the great iron studded door ... The camels one by one are made to kneel. The man walks through and pulls the camel's head through, he lifts or crams the camel's knees over the sill, and then with forcible persuasion if necessary, the camel bends and wriggles through, stripped of all its load. This little gate is called the 'eye of the needle' and to the practical eye of an Easterner he sees a similarity between the pointed arch of the gate and the head of a farm laborers wooden needle used for sacking. So our Saviour, who had – doubtless – often watched the operation, and who gathered his wonderful parables from every day life said 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.'

A camel *can* go through the eye of a needle! This reexamination of the text changes the meaning of the teaching from a seemingly absolute impossibility to an illustration that the attainment of heaven takes effort. It shows that reaching heaven is not easy but, with persistence, can be accomplished.

A camel can go through the eye of a needle!

The exclusionary interpretation keeps people from God while the actual meaning excludes no one, but illustrates that the state of heaven can be reached with sufficient effort. There is great danger in allowing other people to make spiritual decisions for you as they can lead to separation from God.

THE BARNACLE ENCRUSTED SHIP OF TRUTH

Spiritual truth, as often expressed in this world, can be compared to a vessel that has sunk to the bottom of the sea. Religious doctrines, practices and interpretations are like colonies of barnacles attached to the original vessel, covering it with ever expanding growth. Over time, the vessel of spiritual truth has become so thick with layer upon layer of these barnacles that its original form has been completely covered and distorted. Even the barnacles themselves, grown from many different varieties, do not agree upon the truth to which they have attached themselves. So complete is the earthly covering that from the outside it is impossible to see anything but the barnacles without “digging” for the original truth. That is why it is so vitally important to strive to uncover spiritual intent rather than rely solely upon the interpretations of others.

Despite what the world would have us believe, we all already know somewhere inside of us what is true. All truth is spiritual truth. Instead of continuing to react from what has been learned from the various religious teachings of the world, consider other relevant possibilities by discerning spiritual messages through your own soul. This should always be undertaken while praying for divine guidance for the fulfillment of the wonderful Will of God.

The difference between right and wrong normally does not have to be taught. Yes, it needs to be nurtured and directed in children and adults alike, but a basic understanding of the two opposite extremes already exists in everyone. Each soul is born with that knowledge as a direct result of being a child of God. As His actual offspring, we are capable of being like Him, and we inherently know the difference between what is “of God” and what is not. I am not talking

about an innate knowledge of human laws or customs, but rather the basic understanding of what is honest and just, naturally being able to distinguish between good and bad.

When each of us contemplates a decision, we naturally know the difference between what we *want* to do and what we *should* do. There is no doubt that the incessant bombardment of negativity in this world has escalated to a point where this natural discernment has, in many cases, been pushed far back into the unconscious mind. However, if you look for it, the fundamental ability to recognize what is “of God” is always there. The moment we consider our soul in connection with decision-making, the choices become very clear. Your soul is always able to discern spiritual integrity and provide clear direction. To test this theory for yourself, approach the next decision you make, small or large, from a spiritual perspective. To help accomplish this, simply ask, “What would God, being loving, forgiving and merciful, want me to do?” You will know the answer almost immediately.

Choices become very clear
when your eternal soul
is considered.

Many people have completely forgotten to give consideration to the soul during the daily, basic decision-making process. If all people considered the spiritual aspect while making decisions, many of the problems of the world would immediately cease to exist.

The more often spiritual discernment is exercised, the easier it is to remember to do on a regular basis. Without this discernment, we continually battle between what we feel and what we think, trying to find balance between intellect and emotion. For every time we have been told to

“follow your heart,” we have also been told that only fools follow their hearts without intellectual rationalization. When you listen to the voice of your soul, you will come to trust that your feelings about truth are usually right. This is because, deep inside, you already know the answer.

Your feelings about truth are usually right.

The more spiritually conscious one becomes, the more automatic it will be to view everything in a spiritual light. Seeing things from a spiritual perspective becomes instinctive, since it is the root of our true nature as God’s children. But we have to do more than simply uncover the loving nature of the soul. There is a big difference between knowing what is spiritually appropriate and actually doing what is spiritually appropriate. Once we start thinking and acting spiritually, we will begin to be spiritual people.

Over time, it will become obvious that decisions that come from the soul are the only decisions that make life fulfilling, both day to day and eternally. Since these decisions are not based upon the material world, they cannot be altered by someone else or be taken away.

Once we start thinking spiritually,
we will begin to be spiritual people.