

The importunate friend

(Luke 11:5-13)

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?”

This is a parable which brings out the necessity of persistent asking for the best of yourself and your Principle. Jesus had given his disciples the Lord's Prayer because one of them had said, “Lord, teach us to pray,” and then he gave this parable.

We are always being roused to true sonship, and true sonship demands activity. It is fairly easy to stay “in heaven” with your books and your thoughts about love or infinite supply or whatever it may be, but the real challenge is to find it “on earth” as well as “in heaven.” The challenge is to find and see demonstrated the coincidence of the human and the divine. The divine and the human are

one, but they appear to us to be two. This is indicated by the two men in the parable — one who had the need, the other who had the answer to that need but had to be roused to the activity of thought and expression which caused him to supply the answer. We have to see that these two coincide. Our human self recognizes the need, but the answer is in our divine selfhood, which must be roused into action.

For instance, we may recognize that we have a need to express more love. If we are importunate about this, we shall set about expressing it at once without any more dilly-dallying as to whether we have or have not the capacity to love. We may then say that this love has come to us because we asked God to give it to us, but how does God do so? Through our Christ consciousness, our Christ expression of God. "Who would stand before a blackboard, and pray the principle of mathematics to solve the problem? The rule is already established, and it is our task to work out the solution" (S&H 3:4-7). In this case our Christ expression of the mathematical idea will solve the problem, and in the other case love will be expressed by us through our true selfhood, which already has it, in response to the demand of our human selfhood, which believes it needs it.

Often when we call upon our higher selfhood, we find it "in bed" in self-satisfaction; the door is shut against any claim on activity. We may feel quite content with our study and thinking and even feel we want to be left alone with it. When someone comes or some situation presents itself in need of the bread of Truth, we have to rouse ourselves to ask of Principle the answers to the need, the call. If we begin to argue that it is not the right time and try to close our thought to the opportunity, we must persist and allow our sense of Principle to stir us out of laziness. The call would not have come unless Principle had sent it, therefore we have the answers and are able and willing to express them. We were brought to this hour in order to be what this hour requires. So we have to rouse ourselves from complacency about the fine and lovely thoughts or "children" we are already in bed with, already resting with, and which seem quite good enough until this new demand arises. Now we need "three

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loaves" — the healing power of Principle expressed through Life, Truth, and Love. We need to be able to give that which has life; we need to show that it is the truth; and that it has the reward and warmth of Love. And we need to do it *now*. We can be fast asleep in a sense that we are growing in Science and have wonderful thoughts but cannot demonstrate Science *now*. In the parable the man wanted the bread at once and persisted until at last the friend got up and joined in with the fact that he had what was needed and therefore could share it.

Suppose that someone feels a need for money; if he is importunate about that need and knows that it is not a mere selfish desire but that it is right for him to have it, he will find his higher selfhood beginning to discern means of meeting that need, either through service and payment for it or through some other intelligent action. The money in itself has no substance, but is merely the response to a man's intelligent reflection of his Christ selfhood. Only in this way can any of us understand the statement, "Divine Love always has met and always will meet every human need" (S&H 494:10-11). Divine Love could not recognize a human need, but *we* recognize it and then our divine selfhood (that is, the coincidence of the divine with the human) will show us ways and means of intelligently meeting that human need.

Someone may say, "I had a human need, and I turned to divine Love and knew it was right, and then I became importunate about it and dwelt with its rightness until I was quite clear that it was not mere personal desire, but a genuine need, and in this case someone else supplied the need. How do you explain that?" The answer is that Mind is not limited for its expression of intelligence to one individual. Through spiritual influences to which everyone is subject that other person could have heard and felt your cry, and unknown to himself have been influenced to respond to your need. But this is the unusual way. If we knew more of the power and range of thought, we would understand more how it can influence areas outside our own cognizance of being, but the place to look first is in our own area, our own selfhood, and realize that we have the answers in our Christ

selfhood to the calls of our human selfhood. Because that Christhood is the reflection or expression of Principle, it is through that selfhood that Principle or divine Love meets our human need. Our divine self, which is the expression of intelligence and other attributes of God, answers the need in a way that is acceptable by human standards.

An instance of this was when Jesus and his students required money with which to pay a tax. Jesus did not cause pennies to rain from heaven. He called upon the intelligence of Peter and that aspect of Peter which expressed intelligence through fishing and told him, "go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up: and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee" (Matthew 17:27). Jesus did not demand of Peter something unnatural. He called on him for that which was natural to him in his own field of activity. But Peter needed that direction to his Christ selfhood, and in the fish's mouth he found the money required. Since the Master was there with his clear understanding, the money was found in the fish's mouth, but had Peter been alone with his Christ manhood rousing him to respond to the call, he could have sold the fish he caught and thus supplied the need. Jesus acted as he did to show Peter how a right human action divinely directed can have results far outdistancing the normal human expectancy of reward. That which goes far ahead of human comprehension is often called miraculous, but this is a mistake, for the manifestation of good is always natural, as we come to learn through our progress in Science.

So when we recognize a need and know it to be an honest need, we should importunately call upon our higher selfhood until we are shown ways and means whereby that need is met. This will always take place, as human history has shown. Thousands upon thousands have felt the need of money and this has roused them to call on their higher selfhood and they have then found channels for intelligent activity, resulting in the money coming to hand. There has been nothing mysterious about it, because the answer was there before the call which occasioned the answer.

At first sight this may sound like sensible human reasoning and

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activity with little of the divine about it, but on reflection even rousing oneself from a lethargic acceptance of lack and becoming determined to find a way of overcoming it does call into play facets of character-expression — intelligence, willingness, appreciation, for instance — which are in themselves spiritual and divinely bestowed. When through this activity an individual finds a means of service, such as a job, this again entails qualities of character-expression which are spiritual and outside the physical. He does not go to the job, sit down, do nothing, and still expect to receive his salary, but alerts himself to express qualities based on service, intelligence, obedience, and so forth, all of which are spiritual. Therefore the phrase “co-incidence of the divine with the human” does apply.

It may be asked how supply can be obtained by someone who through the belief of being incapacitated or elderly feels unable to take the steps normally taken. Such an individual may be said to be blessed in that he is driven much more to the divine for his answers than are most other people. We all have to learn that the Mind which gives ideas whereby to obtain human supply is the same Mind which is not dependent on the human and will therefore impel its purpose of good beyond the limits of human comprehension. An admission of this causes us to be capable of receiving that good, irrespective of human conditions or reasoning. It was the full acknowledgment of this truth by Jesus which enabled him to feed — and to feed amply — the four thousand and five thousand, for here the human estimate of supply fell hopelessly short, as indicated by the disciples’ plaintive cry, “We have here but five loaves, and two fishes” (Matthew 14:17).

So we need constantly to rebuke human reasoning with a full acceptance of the fact that the divine is divine and will operate divinely, making the human but the language for us of its own established and immovable divinity. All forms of supply are but human symbols of the divine fact of the relationship between God and His man, Principle and idea, which must include the supply of all that that idea needs in order to fulfil its purpose as Principle’s idea — through being healthy, satisfied, fearless, for example. It is a question of dismissing every kind of ignorance about the relationship of God and man, Principle and

idea, and accepting what that relationship means and involves.

The rule must be to utilize human reasoning based on sound principles, but never to admit that the divine is circumscribed by the human. The healthy individual is always alert to his ability under divine guidance, but also alert to the fact that that divinity will operate in *spite* of him and yet *for* him, no matter what the finite measure of his capacity.

We have to silence the claim that the meeting of a need is impossible and that there would have to be a miracle before it could be met. There are no miracles in Science, for in the final analysis the call can only come because the answer is present which causes the call. This truth is found in the Science which spelt out those words in Isaiah: "before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

If a man wants health, let him bestir himself first of all out of the "bed" of believing that he lacks it in any direction, on the basis that an idea of Principle is healthy in its entire expression. Then let him see to it at once that he puts health into action in his thinking through thoughts which are healthy and true about himself, about others, about his world. Let him see to it that he wakens himself out of any form of laziness in allowing thoughts which are un-Principled to stay with him, when he is fully equipped to replace them with the ideas about which they are lies. Every error must be a lie about a truth, or it would not be an error; "by reversal, errors serve as waymarks to the one Mind" (S&H 267:24). Therefore let him pick up the claim in the specific line of its false claiming and rouse himself to find the specific truth about which it is a lie. Let him reject the lie and accept the truth, and keep this up until the truth alone remains with him.

If we want companionship, again it is wise to rouse ourselves from the belief of incompleteness and begin to rejoice in the completeness bestowed on man by his being an expression of the one complete and perfect Principle. If we accept the fully rounded-out completeness which is ours, express it, and also see it expressed in others, we are preparing ourselves for a true companionship, either with one individual or with many other individuals — whichever Principle has

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designed. Jesus' statement, "he that hath, to him shall be given" will be confirmed in our experience and a proper and fruitful form of companionship will come into being, one in which individuals each balanced in the expression of true manhood and womanhood come together to find a multiplication and enlargement of all that is good in their experience and appreciation of life.

Was Jesus saying in this parable that anyone is entitled to anything he wants and as much "as he needeth" if he is importunate enough in asking for it? The first thing to note is that the man in the story was not importunate on his own behalf, but on behalf of his friend. Whatever it is we ask for, our motive has to be unselfed to be in line with Principle. Selfishness dies of its own lack of energy, whereas unselfed love never tires — it goes on and on and on. A mother, for instance, will never give up, but will be continually importunate about supplying the needs of her family, whereas if she was concerned merely with herself she might not be so importunate. Therefore we need to be importunate in getting rid of self and seeing that our motive is consistently an unselfed love for an ideal or for another or for Science.

If we analyze further this unselfed love, we see that it is part of our expression of ourselves that we do something for the sake of someone else or some ideal. What the Christ in us urges us to express to someone else is an expression of ourselves. So it is all one activity of seeking and finding ourselves, even when it seems to be through blessing others.

The motive is the deciding factor. If a man asks importunately for wealth just for the sake of accumulating riches with a view to self-aggrandizement, it is true that he may labour and acquire wealth in the sense of bank accounts, property, the control of businesses, and so forth, but if that is his only motive, he may appear to have wealth from a material standpoint, but will find himself no better off than before; in fact he could be deprived and poor from the standpoint of the real things of substance, such as happiness and love. If on the other hand he works for wealth so as to use it in the channels and expression of good, that wealth will contribute to his means of ful-

filling those motives, which are spiritual in essence. Then it will be true wealth for him as well as for others. He will not have accumulated matter, but gathered the means of doing spiritual good.

A healthy child spells out to himself what he really wants, he asks for it, and sees that he gets it. But he values it for the freedom and joy of thought-expression which it brings him. For instance, he may love the freedom which flying presents to him, and so he longs for a model aeroplane. Eventually he acquires one of his own and he holds it in his hand and his ideal of flying lives for him in a way which is entirely satisfying. It does not matter to him whether the aeroplane is roughly made or a superb model, whereas to the adult observer the material value is far more important than it is to the child. What the child is asking for is the expression of his own nature. At that stage the aeroplane is the means of that expression, but later something else will spell out for him the same freedom from materiality; and all the time the persistent, indestructible importunate factor is himself responding to the instinct of freedom from all encumbrance. Every individual is on one persistent road to find and feel what he really is now. In this process he may outline at different stages what he needs to satisfy him, but the real importunateness of his nature will continue throughout.

So if a man wants something for the freedom of spiritual expression it will allow him and the closeness it will bring him to the highest he sees of heaven, he wants it in the best spirit, he finds himself asking for it importunately, and it will come to him through his rousing himself to express qualities in line with what he seeks.

We often visualize what we want and then pull down the shutters on it, but Principle says that we can have what we really want. If we ask importunately and selflessly for anything, we can have it, but it is above all a question of rousing our Christ selfhood to get out of "bed" and be active. The man in the parable could not stay where he was and produce the loaves from under the bedclothes. We cannot stay in "bed" with ideas — that is, do nothing about them and still expect them to operate as ideas. An idea is an expression of Mind and therefore a thing of action and consequently unless we identify

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ourselves with its purposefulness, it is not an idea as far as we are concerned, but only a dream, and there is no point in dwelling in dreamland.

If we want to do even a simple thing like going to the nearest city, we get nowhere as long as we dream in bed of a lovely train on its way there — we have got to get on that train! An idea never becomes an idea to us until we identify ourselves with it and its purpose. We have to be able to say to an idea, “I will follow and rejoice All the rugged way.” It is no good dreaming of standing on the top of Everest unless we identify ourselves with the whole idea at every point, however rugged the path appears. We can contemplate an idea with much pleasure, but until we actively ally ourselves with it, it might just as well be on a shelf and we are not bringing it into our experience in the coincidence of the divine with the human. If we do identify ourselves with its purpose and become active in a direction which is Principle-impelled and Principle-developed, then we have got out of the “bed” of a wrong concept of ideas. Ideas are not dreams, but realities, and when we identify ourselves with them, they become to us what they are — expressions of Principle, endowed with purposeful fulfilment.

Therefore if we yearn for something, whether it be termed by us spiritual or human, we should take stock of what we already have in that line of yearning. We should become aware of why we have it — that is, that Principle has given it to us — and make sure that we identify our whole being with the exercise of it. Then because all is Spirit and spiritual, what follows is that whether we define our yearning as divine or human, our response to the Science involved in our yearning will yield all the results embraced in our desire. So if we want love, for instance, we should see how much we have and how we can best put it to use in our immediate area. Or if we want supply, we should see what we have and put it into use. When Elijah came to the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16), because she had what seemed a dire human need, she told him what she had, and he asked her to put it into use by making first of all “a little cake” for him. As a result of her obedience to the instructions of an individual

who she realized knew more than she did about spiritual laws and their supremacy, she discovered the source of supply and how that source fulfils its own requirements.

Every such instance spells out laws which are unchallengeable and have been served by men and women through all ages in every realm of activity where they found themselves directed for their expression.

There would have been no Jesus Christ, with all that was accomplished for mankind, if Jesus had "stayed in bed" with his "children." The human Jesus had a resort to his higher self and relation to the Father, in order to find rest and refreshment, but also to recuperate himself for *action*. (See No.36:12-26.) Whenever he saw an error, it roused his Christ selfhood, which had the answer. He was moved immediately to call on that higher selfhood, for others as well as himself. That is the sign of love. We are too often lazy and complacent until the ball lands in our own court.

Jesus said to his disciples on a later occasion, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." We should ask importunately to overcome every belief that stands in the way of our having the symbols of good which express good to us, and let no doubts intervene or interfere with our expectancy. We should ask for that which we are willing to receive, not ask for something with reservations about whether it is right for us to have it. Martyrdom is a form of selfishness. Through honest asking and the response to it from our Christ selfhood, which already has the answer, but often has to be roused to supply its expression, we shall find what we really want and need. And so "ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

In this parable the importunate friend asks for three loaves of bread, indicating three specific avenues of thinking where he needs help, and Jesus brings out that by his honest persistence in seeking an answer and by his turning to Principle alone through his understanding of what Principle is and what it requires of him the operation of Principle ensures that he gets just what he needs. The Master now covers three avenues through which any of us may have a need,

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as individuals or for our friends, and shows the correct manner in which these needs will be met.

“If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?” If someone comes to us with a specific need for the bread of Truth to supply him with health in any channel of human experience, and we turn to Principle, Principle will always cause us to direct our thoughts to the need as it stands and to the meeting of that need. Principle will not allow any deviation from the immediate purpose, any evasion of the actual issue, by providing instead of bread a stone, or teaching of a generalized and theoretical nature, however correct and necessary that must always be at other times. Having turned to the Principle which is Love, we shall help our friend to see the specific answer to his need, even whilst acknowledging that that answer has its place in the theory and the teaching, the stone or calculus of Science. Mrs Eddy was emphatic that teaching and healing should have separate departments (see Rud.15:16), and that healing should be directed to the purpose at hand. So if someone has a specific need of health or has a particular fear to overcome, the answer should be channelled to that need and the supplying of it, as it would be in the case of a true father.

If someone came to us because his accounts were in a mess, the principle of arithmetic would supply us with direct answers to put those accounts right and at that point we would not dole out mathematical theory to our friend. A cook does not give an explanation to a hungry man of how bread is made and all the processes involved, but puts some bread before him. And so if we turn straight to Principle when someone comes for help, we see what is wanted and give what is wanted and do not get carried away with our own understanding of Science and system. As with Jesus, there is no scattering of fire.

“Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?” If a man longs above all for inspiration and the joy of the multiplication of spiritual ideas in his thinking, symbolized here by the fish (as used in the fifth day of the symbolic Genesis story), Principle would never give him ideas adulterated in any degree with materiality and therefore poisoned from their original purity. And so if anyone asks us for

inspiration, we should be alert to keep to the language of Principle, the direct reasoning of Principle, and the ideas of Principle, all of which are purely spiritual and uncontaminated or poisoned by elements foreign to Principle. For instance, if a man is depressed because he is unemployed and he asks for inspiration, he needs to be shown what he is as a spiritual being and that he is fully employed now as an idea of Principle, expressing every attribute of Principle, and can immediately be at work in the service of Principle in every direction of his thought. If he becomes convinced of this, it will certainly be translated in his experience into the human activity in which he employs himself in a fully satisfying manner. (The Master's words, "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" apply very clearly in an instance like this.) If on the other hand we tell him that he will probably get a job because he is fully qualified in some sphere, we have introduced an argument which could subtly poison the pure reasoning of Principle. It could also catch him out and disappoint him, because it presupposes that there is unemployment and that he will merely be lucky to avoid it. It often happens that a man's qualifications drop away when Principle's knowledge of what he is takes him out of his previous niche and places him in a line of work totally different from what he himself might have planned. So unless he is shown what Principle cognizes without any admixtures — that there is no lack of inspiration, purpose, or fulfilment anywhere — he has been given not a fish, but a serpent.

"Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" A serpent stings directly, whereas the scorpion has a sting in the tail. So if a man wants to know about his own origin or the beginnings of all life, Principle will not and cannot offer him an answer which has any sting in the tail. The only answer which Principle can and will give him is that there is no beginning, no material or mortal life, and therefore no "sting of death" in the tail. Principle will show him that he was never born and so will never die. In that way Principle enables him to ask with joy, "O death, where is thy sting?" Principle knows only this moment. "Was" and "will be" are full of sting and do not belong to Principle. "Is" and "I am" are full of the positive substance which

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has no sting. That is what Principle gives.

It is Principle which confers that “steadfast and true knowledge of pre-existence, of the nature and the inseparability of God and man” (Mis.189:8-10) which Jesus had and which made him declare, “Before Abraham was, I am.” He was not merely antedating Abraham, or he would have said, “Before Abraham was, I was.” He was affirming that which has no beginning and no end.

Mrs Eddy comments on the very first verse of Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” as follows: “The infinite has no beginning. This word *beginning* is employed to signify *the only*, — that is, the eternal verity and unity of God and man, including the universe” (S&H 502:24-27). And so Science gives to every man who asks for it a conviction of immortality which has no possible sting in its tail. There can be no sting in a line of reasoning which dispenses with any suggestion of a beginning to good or to man and is therefore completely consistent in its strong and purposeful certainty that there is no ending to good or to man. Such a line of reasoning cannot tail off into fear and doubt which could pierce our assurance.

And so these three great needs are covered by Jesus — first, the need for the immediate application of the bread of Truth to the problem at hand, without any evasion; second, the need for a daily and continual flow of inspiration, which can be attained only through reasoning which flows exclusively from Spirit’s onliness, with no other limiting argument permitted to exercise its poison; and, thirdly, the need to know constantly what Jesus taught — that we never began and will never end. “To begin rightly is to end rightly” (S&H 262:28), and to end rightly means to see that we never do end because we never began.

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” Jesus is saying that we have to admit that we with our limited understanding do our best to bring all our thoughts and actions into line with Principle and its requirements in order to meet the needs presented to us (needs symbolized by the requests for bread, a fish, and an egg); how much more, then, should

we admit that the Principle which gave us these inclinations will fulfil its purpose in rewards of spiritual understanding and realization beyond the reach of any normal human effort, "above all that we ask or think." When we bring thought into accord with Principle to the best of our understanding, our human efforts break through the veil which endeavours to separate us from the realization of Principle's presence and all its endowments on our behalf. These are the wonderful moments of breakthrough when we *know* that we are in the presence of Principle and are in very truth the sons of this heavenly Father. Every sincere worker experiences these moments through his honest importunities. He finds what was always there and was always him, but to him it feels as if Principle is giving him what is termed here "the Holy Spirit."

So we see in this parable that if we are importunate in our call upon ourselves to respond to the requirements of Principle, we not only have rewards at the human level but, more than this, Principle gives us those higher understandings and realizations covered by the phrase "Holy Spirit" — and in the final analysis this is what we all really want.