

# ***The Way of the Master***

## ***God's Method of Teaching***

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As all things temporal are a reflection of all things spiritual, we bring with us into mortality that which was present with us in immortality. And so it is that the war over AGENCY, which was fought before we came into this estate, rages on here and now with the same basic forces at play. On one side, there are those who prefer to be told what to do and elect for someone to assume responsibility, authority and leadership over them in exchange for the promise of safety and security. On the other side, there are those who realize the importance of autonomy and having to choose for themselves without any guarantee of success. They understand that the opportunity to learn to walk by faith without any guaranteed outcome is worth the sacrifice and risk involved so that they may advance in knowledge, break free of ignorance and thus ascend through the heavens. This is known as the plan of salvation and it's the story of the ages which replays itself creation after creation. We currently find ourselves in just one cycle of one eternal round where the drama plays out in front of us daily and the characters are easily identified.

### **DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO**

By finding ourselves here in this creation, it's safe to assume that at some level we don't want to be told what to do or who to follow and elected to embrace the freedom to choose for ourselves. It is natural to have these feelings because we are in reality the offspring of God and They are autonomous beings of light who prize agency above all things under heaven and earth. For most people, there is something so inherently repulsive to their souls about being governed, ruled, controlled, manipulated or coerced by fiat (mandated) leadership of any kind that they are willing to risk their lives and abandon everyone and everything they hold dear just to escape it. This is particularly true of leadership/government which is malevolent because nobody wants to endure abuse forever. History is replete with examples of this phenomenon and it's the underlying basis behind every major war and exodus of peoples throughout the known world. In biological terms, this seemingly involuntary impulse is called *Fight or Flight*.

But it is also in our nature to repel or distrust de facto leadership even when those who lay claim to the right to lead are well-meaning, up-standing citizens of our communities who simply decide one day that they will start giving the orders. Maybe it's because they lack the skills or credentials to assume control of the group. After all, who would respect a speeding ticket issued by their next door neighbor or be willing to allow the local farmer to begin handling their finances and processing their tax returns? Maybe it's because the would-be leader is a relatively unknown character who hasn't written or spoken much in the public forum so we have no idea if the person can accurately represent our thoughts and feelings individually and as a people. Whatever the case may be, when the person stands up and demands our allegiance, we are naturally repulsed by it because we did not choose the governance or the governor.

## SHORT-CIRCUITING THE HARD WIRE

While we all seem to be hard-wired with the same general loathing for individuals or institutions that assume control over us without our consent, it is often the case that we exercise our agency in giving it away to them. There are many reasons for this behavior which include, but are not limited to, false traditions (i.e. *"it's always been this way so why would I question the system"*), fear of retribution, loss of social standing, misplaced trust, hoard mentality, or even just a desire to please those in higher positions of authority in order to climb the leadership ladder. But perhaps the most pernicious reason of all we are willing to put our faith and trust in our leaders is for the assurance of assumed safety and security.

A contemporary author, Daniel Kahneman's, wrote about this behavior in his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*. He discusses a psychological phenomenon we all experience described as "cognitive ease" and "cognitive strain." In short, people make judgments based on impressions of cognitive ease or strain. Ease/easy is a sign things are going well – there are no threats, no major news, no need to redirect attention or mobilize effort (in more familiar terms...*"all is well in Zion"*). Messages bearing good news therefore make us feel good and perpetuate cognitive ease. Over time, this can lead to a "mere exposure effect" as repeated exposure of a stimulus is followed by nothing bad. Such a stimulus will eventually become a sign or signal of safety, and safety is good.

Conversely, if anything comes our way that causes mental strain, effort or questioning, it disturbs the psyche and indicates that a problem exists which requires thinking and analysis. We encounter this whenever we are faced with the challenge of learning something entirely new or changing our previously held views based on a newly acquired paradigm. In the religious environment, we are taught that this disturbance/bad feeling is a signal from God (Holy Ghost) warning us against what we may be encountering for the first time which challenges our previous understanding. One other point Kahneman makes is that the less people know, the easier it is for them to fit everything into a coherent pattern. Therefore, a tyrannical ruler can find an easy payoff from an ignorant people (i.e. Kim Jung Un of North Korea).

This insight into human behavior helps us to better appreciate many of the scriptural stories we read about prophets being sent from God among a people to declare truth. The messages they bear is difficult for people to hear not because it is wrong, but because it requires them to think, analyze and reconsider their position which is often a very difficult thing to do. Especially when their leaders have conditioned them not to question what they have been taught to believe.

Getting back to assurances/assumptions of safety and security from leadership, we can find examples of this in virtually every corner of the business and political world, but it's probably no more apparent than within the established hierarchies of global religions in which divinely approved successive leadership is neither questioned or challenged but rather has become a matter of process. And within the religion arena itself, there are two very similar and notable examples of presumptuous safe and secure leadership that stand out. In both Catholicism and Mormonism, after the death of the Pope or Prophet, there is a short period of mourning for the fallen leader while those in authority just under him follow through with an established process for installing the next leader from among themselves. Acceptance of the new de facto leaders "called of God" is not only expected of the lay membership but rather

enshrined as a quintessential tenet of belief. For example, since the 1950's, within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the often quoted phrase "*Follow the prophet and he can never lead you astray*" seems to have forged itself solidly into the role of the trump card used as the final play in any challenge to official policies or procedures that may arise with the challenger being labeled an apostate worthy of excommunication should they persist in questioning their local and general authorities.

## **LEADERS: WHO WE CHOOSE AND WHY WE CHOOSE THEM**

Every four years in our country, the populous has the opportunity to exercise their constitutional right to vote for their choice of the highest leadership position in the land. Like it or not, in 2016 Donald Trump was elected the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States primarily based upon his record as a shrewd financier during a time in our country when concerns over domestic stability were paramount. It certainly wasn't because of his high moral standing or oratory prowess. The majority of voters saw in him a person with the necessary business and finance skillset to reign in the US financial crisis and were willing to overlook some rather obvious character deficiencies. Only time will tell if that little wager will pan out. Regardless, this scenario demonstrates very clearly what is most important to people when they are allowed to choose their leaders as opposed to having their leaders imposed upon them. In short, we want our leadership to have enough experience, knowledge and expertise in the challenges we face that we are willing to exchange our trust for assurances of safety and security. And to some extent, this is as it should be. No leader should assume they have the right to lead without first having the qualifications to do so. That should go without saying although history has seen a great many presidents, kings and rulers assume control who were completely unqualified and the consequences upon humanity were disastrous.

But what about that second part regarding a person making use of their agency like currency with which to purchase safety and protection? Is that a good way to choose who we should and should not accept as our teachers and leaders? Maybe there is a better way to decide who is best suited for the job. Suppose we could retain our agency throughout the selection process while only giving our time and attention to those who offer nothing in exchange for our consideration of the message they bear. Better yet, suppose the appearance of the would-be teacher or leader was somewhat obscured from us as the audience or the message was confined to anonymous writing. We would then be left to decide for ourselves whether or not there was enough light and truth contained in the words to earn our heed and diligence. In such a scenario, there would be no guarantees, no promises and no assurances that the teacher is right or wrong. It would be left completely up to us to discern the matter for ourselves with all the consequences of that choice being laid at our own feet. One has to wonder how careful we would all be with our decisions then and who would emerge as society's greatest teachers and leaders?

## **THE WAY OF THE MASTER**

Regardless of which religion or ideology a person subscribes to, the words of Jesus Christ which have been preserved in scripture provide a perfect example of this exact style of teaching. In essence, the teaching comes by way of invitation only and imposes no compulsion or coercion upon the pupil. It make no demands nor insists that allegiance to a person or institution is required to be considered

faithfully walking the right path. The only safety and security that can be found in examining His words comes from within via peace of mind and heart. The Savior accomplishes this primarily with the use of imagery through his telling of stories or parables which allow Him to embed multiple layers of meaning and reveal important hidden truths to those who are prepared to receive them yet hide those truths from those who are unprepared, unwilling or hard-hearted. The Way of the Master is to present the truth in plainness and then leave it to the student to determine whether or not any action should be taken in congruence with the light and truth communicated to the mind. It's an invitation only.

There is a purpose for this rather indirect approach of transmitting knowledge from heaven. It is because God knows that light and truth only stick when it is found out voluntarily by the recipient and can never be forcibly installed upon the mind of the listener. Of course it's always possible to parrot information that is received from one person to another, but the deepest meaning of the most important matters will never be understood without taking the time to investigate them for ourselves and coming to the truth through agency and autonomy. This may seem like a very inefficient way to reveal truth to mankind, but it ensures that only the most diligent seekers of truth will ever be the guardians of the mysteries of heaven. And we as mortals can use this to our advantage. Once we know the way in which God communicates to mankind, we can look for this pattern in the messages of those who claim to speak on His behalf and use it as a test to find out who are His authorized messengers and who are just pretenders because the real thing cannot be faked. So this leaves us with a very simple list of attributes we should expect to find in any true messenger, teacher or leader whom we ought to pay close attention to. They will:

1. Have the necessary qualifications, knowledge and expertise on the issues they address by virtue of the personal record they can clearly articulate and/or demonstrate.
2. Be able to enlighten the minds of their listeners based solely upon the content of their message without any appeal to authority.
3. Leave their listeners with their agency intact and unmolested to reason the matter out for themselves.
4. Make invitations only with no promises of safety and security if the listener follows them or their directions.
5. Not forcibly impose knowledge upon the minds of unprepared listeners.

## **CONCEDING DAMNATION**

With this in mind, there appears to be a direct correlation between the amount of light and truth we are able to wrestle from God and our willingness to accept assurances of safety and security from men/women on earth (i.e. "the arm of flesh"). We foolishly assume that they have already done the heavy lifting to figure out the right answers and so we need not question them. Admittedly, it's much easier to place the burden on the back of someone else rather than take the responsibility upon ourselves. But it cannot and will not produce either knowledge itself or the increase of faith that is obtained through the process of individual discovery. Thus, it follows that people whose understanding of the things of God is derived from what they have been told by others, including parents, siblings, trusted scholars and especially their religious leaders, are in fact damned. They cannot progress and are unable to lay hold upon the kind of redemptive faith required for ascension in the afterlife. This situation is particularly precarious in the case of our religious leaders because we are conditioned to

trust them implicitly to define doctrine and interpret scripture yet they often bear none of the hallmarks of an authorized messenger. Instead, they are just as lost and fallen and without redemption as anyone else and may even be in greater peril due to a greater depth of accepted safety and security they may feel having been “called and chosen” to lead others.

## **CONCLUSION**

People often speak ill of those whose nature it is to question their authorities as if it were a character flaw in need of eradication. But if we are all ignorant by nature and the ONLY real authority is God, and They are gravely offended when we pay homage to one another through endless forms of idolatry, then the only real danger in critically analyzing and challenging what our teachers and leaders have given us to swallow and digest is not doing it enough. Especially when it comes to matters of the utmost importance such as our eternal souls. We cannot afford to trifle with one another or ourselves.

To the extent that you need to be taught by anyone other than God, you need to be VERY careful and skeptical with whom you place your trust. Don't be afraid to ask direct and probing questions of those who claim to be in possession of some kind of leadership key and expect them to explain to you what those keys are. They ought to be able to clearly demonstrate them to you by virtue of what they can expound upon rather than simply reciting what title they hold. Then take that information to the scriptures yourself and see what patterns may emerge. Before discarding a new explanation of something, reason it all out in your mind and argue the case for and against it and don't be afraid to abandon an old view and embrace something new. If your desires are to find God and you take that desire to the scriptures and to your knees, They will course correct you as needed until you are eventually led to the end of your faith and arrive at knowledge. The process is necessarily humbling and involves a great deal of honesty with regards to what you know and don't know for certain. In almost every case, the safest approach is to adopt the mindset of a child and assume you know very little about anything and be willing to be taught at times from the most unlikely and unrecognizable sources.

If we want to avoid being deceived, we need to discipline our minds to ignore appearances and perceptions and focus entirely on the subject matter being addressed as we choose who we listen to. Even with all the mixed messages we receive in mortality, some careful thought and analysis will serve us well as we distinguish between who is a true messenger bearing a true message on the one hand and everything else on the other. Just as things were before, so too are they now because there really are only two teams and two churches. One is the church of the Lamb of God and the other is the church of the devil.