ANNOTATIONS

LESSONS IN TRUTH (CADY)

Lesson 8

"SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING"

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QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED
for
LESSONS IN TRUTH (CADY)
Lesson 8
"SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING"

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1. What is spiritual understanding, and how is it attained? How did Peter know that Jesus was the Christ?

1. Spiritual understanding is the revelation of Truth by Spirit to man's consciousness. It comes when man turns his attention consciously to God and recognizes his oneness with Him. No matter what tasks we face, what challenges we have to meet, what decisions are to be made, each one of us may contact God through prayer. Prayer awakens our soul so that we may receive the spiritual understanding to say and do the right things. Turning to our Father-Mother God is the only way to attain true spiritual understanding.

The text for this lesson gives a number of brief definitions of spiritual understanding that we want to consider:

"Understanding is a spiritual birth, a revelation of God within the heart of man" (Para. 2, page 79). "This revelation of Truth to the consciousness of a person is spiritual understanding" (Para. 4, page 79). Spiritual understanding brings awareness of "the coming of the Comforter to . . . hearts and lives, giving them power over every form of sin, sickness, sorrow, and over even death itself" (Para. 8, page 80). It brings realization of "the ever-abiding inner presence of the Most High, God" (Para. 9, page 81), a "consciousness of the indwelling Father" (Para. 12, page 82), which is "the divine voice within . . . saying, 'Come up higher,'" (Para. 15, page 83). "Spiritual understanding is in reality a 'gift of God'" (Para. 28, page 87), which is attained in a step-by-step process of soul unfoldment as one sincerely desires and consciously feels after it.

"That they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27).

Since spiritual understanding is a "gift of God" it can neither be received from another person nor purchased; we can only attain a consciousness of it when we realize it is part of our divine birthright. We should affirm its availability, then act on the revelations it gives to us. Understanding unfolds in our soul in exact proportion to the steadfastness of our faith in God and according to our perseverance in seeking true guidance from the "still small voice" within. As we become quiet, teachable, and open our consciousness (thinking and feeling natures) to receive Truth, we begin to grow in spiritual understanding.

Discipline of our thinking and feeling through denial and
affirmation becomes a definite part of the development of spiritual understanding in our soul. As we learn to deny thoughts of limitation and then affirm that which is true of us as spiritual beings, we are able to claim the true understanding that gives us divine ideas to help us in handling every detail of life. The writer of Proverbs emphasizes the need for spiritual understanding, when he says, "Yea, with all thy getting, get understanding" (Prov. 4:7).

In the book The Revealing Word, page 202, Charles Fillmore gives two important points about spiritual understanding:

"Spiritual understanding is the quickening of the Spirit within. Spiritual understanding is the ability of the mind to apprehend and realize the laws of thought and the relation of ideas one to another."

Probably all of us have had the experience of suddenly becoming aware of new meaning to a verse of Scripture, a hymn, or a poem that we have known since childhood. We feel as though a new world has opened to us through this revelation of the Truth back of familiar words. This is spiritual understanding.

Our text on page 80 refers to the Comforter, which Jesus also called the Spirit of truth, which is the Holy Spirit:

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).

That which the Comforter reveals to each of us is the spiritual understanding needed to meet the experiences of life. When we search in all earnestness for answers, the Comforter (Holy Spirit) "shall teach . . . all things" (John 14:26). It is through spiritual understanding that we become aware of the ideas that make up our divine inheritance, such as ideas of life, love, power, faith, and so forth.

How did Peter know that Jesus was the Christ? He knew this in the same way that any of us knows that which is the Truth--through spiritual understanding. Peter had known Jesus intimately, had observed His life and His works, had heard His teaching. Intellectually Peter had undoubtedly accepted Jesus' teachings. However, when challenged by the question put to the disciples by Jesus, "But who say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:15) Peter in a flash knew the truth beyond his intellectual knowledge or reasoning. This was spiritual understanding that was revealed from the Spirit of God within his own being, so Peter could say with conviction, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus realized that at this moment Peter had touched the fount of wisdom within his own divine nature. He assured Peter that he was blessed by this understanding that had not come from "flesh and blood" (Matt. 16:17) but from the Father.

Metaphysically Peter represents faith which Lesson 6 defined as the "perceiving power of the mind." Our use of faith indicates
the direction in which we are headed. Peter, representing faith, turned Godward for the answer to Jesus' question, and faith opened his soul to direct revelation from God.

2. What is the relation between spiritual understanding and intellectual knowledge?

Intellectual knowledge, sometimes referred to as intellectual understanding, is the forerunner of spiritual understanding. Charles Fillmore says on page 155 of Keep a True Lent:

"Intellectual understanding comes first in the soul's development, then a deeper understanding of principle follows, until the whole man ripens into wisdom."

As children we were taught about God from the level of understanding of our parents, guardians, teachers, or ministers. We undoubtedly read our Bible and other books telling of God and His laws. However, spiritual understanding goes deeper than knowledge that is conveyed to us by others or by books, for it is God's revelation of Truth in us. We are not implying that facts are not valuable but they deal more with the "letter" of the law. We are seeking the "spirit" that "giveth life" which God so freely offers. When we earnestly desire to know God, not merely know about Him, desire to understand ourselves and the universe as God created it, the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit (the Teacher within) "speaks" to us as intuition and brings us the spiritual understanding we so desire.

Intellect is another name for man's thinking or reasoning faculty, the conscious phase of mind about which we learned in the third lesson. Intellectual knowledge, or intellectual understanding, is developed through use of this reasoning, thinking faculty as it gathers facts on any subject. This may be done by listening to teachers, studying books, observing phenomena along any line, and even experimenting on our own. Thus we acquire a knowledge of facts along some particular line, such as biology, geology, astronomy, physiology, religion, and the like. Many of these facts may be true but until they are revealed by spiritual understanding we do not have an inner assurance concerning them, only an intellectual acceptance.

3. Can you cure yourself or another by speaking words of Truth from the intellectual plane of consciousness? Does true healing require something beyond this?

3. We cannot cure ourselves or another by speaking words of Truth from the intellectual plane of consciousness alone, for this would be only mental suggestion and could bring only temporary relief. By this we do not imply that the intellectual plane does not have its place. It has. Its place, however, is secondary to that of the Spirit. Mental training puts the mind into the atmosphere of healing in preparation for the true healing that is spiritual.
"Thought control is imperative, and there is urgent need of teachers on both the mental and spiritual plane of consciousness if the race is to go forward in development. To this end there needs to be more co-operation between the two planes of consciousness, because they complement each other" (page 75, Keep a True Lent).

The intellectual plane of consciousness can recognize the need for healing, the need for a mental cleansing. True healing comes only through a constant conscious awareness of God as the one Presence and one Power moving as an orderly activity through man and throughout the universe.

"All healing is based on mental cleansing. When the mind is free from error thoughts, harmony in the body ensues" (page 92, The Revealing Word).

The same conditions that apply to healing of the body apply to healing of our affairs. When the intellect, or conscious phase of mind, accepts the truth of any healing, whether of mind, body, or affairs, it then begins to establish effective thought habits in the subconscious phase of mind or the feeling nature. When the conscious and subconscious phases of mind (i.e. our thinking and feeling) are in agreement, then the Truth of God has a receptive vehicle through which to work to bring about true healing. The ideas back of the words of Truth that we speak must become a living part of our feeling nature (subconscious phase of mind) thus replacing adverse concepts we may have held about a condition. We give ourselves to God in prayer in order that His Spirit may fulfill the "letter" of the words of Truth that we speak and begin the redemptive work of healing.

4. Can one person reveal God to another? Where must we all seek, and when do we become conscious of the indwelling Father?

4. One person cannot possibly reveal God to another. It is just as great an impossibility as it is for one person to eat another's food for him, to breathe air for him, or to learn his lessons for him.

The revelation of God to each of us is an intimately personal thing that can only take place within the depths of our own soul. The awakening and growth of Truth in us is an inner process and can be accomplished only by an intuitive recognition within our own consciousness. We may be stimulated by another, or by books and lectures, but the awareness of the indwelling Presence takes place only within.

"In a moment, in the turning of a thought, I am where God is" (Walter Rauschenbusch).

According to Webster's Dictionary the word revelation comes from the Latin "revelare" meaning "to unveil." It is the act of disclosing something that has hitherto been concealed. The
dictionary says also that revelation is the "act of communicating divine truth." Someone may tell us about God, just as one may describe to us the beauty of a rose or the music of a symphony. However, we do not actually know God until His Presence has been disclosed to us within our own consciousness (our thinking and feeling) any more than we are fully conscious of the beauty of the rose or the music of the symphony until we have actually seen the rose and heard the music.

Just as Peter's answer to Jesus' question came as a revelation from the Father within his own being, so our search for God must be within ourselves by thinking and feeling the ideas that make up the nature of God. "Think on these things" (Phil. 4:8) said Paul, for he knew that to dwell on the good would bring us into consciousness of the Presence of God, the source of the ideas that produce the things that are "pure . . . lovely . . . of good report."

To be conscious of something is to know it with our whole being. Therefore, it is necessary to think with the intellect, or conscious phase of mind, as well as to feel with our subconscious phase of mind, or what is sometimes referred to as the heart. The physical child learns to know his father by association. It is by direct association through prayer that we become conscious of our indwelling Father-God. Through the act of prayer we move into that deep inner silence where we listen as God "speaks" or reveals His divine ideas to us; this is spiritual understanding.

It is only through spiritual understanding that we come to know our Father as love, life, power; and no one else can do this for us. Teachers and ministers, friends and loved ones may point the way that we must go to make conscious contact with God, but only we ourselves can establish the contact within our own mind and heart. Our text (page 81) referred to spiritual understanding as the "new birth," and like physical birth it is an individual process.

5. Will beseeching bring spiritual understanding? Does spiritual understanding come to one who is seeking with selfish motives?

5. Beseeching will not bring spiritual understanding, nor will it bring the realization of God's Presence and Power within us, because spiritual understanding is an ever-expanding revelation of Truth in our own consciousness. In one sense we do not "get" spiritual understanding nor is it brought to us, but rather it is the "gift of God" that comes through growth and unfoldment.

As the word beseeching is commonly used it means to implore, to beg, but often it accompanies a feeling of fear that the request may be turned down. We can see, therefore, that beseeching could not have any part in our attainment of spiritual understanding. When we entertain feelings of fear, distrust, anxiety, or doubt we clog the channel (our own
consciousness) through which Spirit wishes to reveal Truth. When we tune into one particular channel on TV or radio station, we get only what is being broadcast from that particular station. If we do not "tune in" to God in faith we cannot expect to become aware consciously of His revelations, or spiritual understanding. We must have an abiding faith in God and a genuine desire to be guided and governed by the Christ Spirit. God completed His creation by implanting the gift of His own nature in man. We can have all of His good that we are ready to accept and express. We do not need to beg Him to give it to us. Certainly spiritual understanding is part of this good that is ours for the claiming. Probably one of the greatest lessons we have to learn is "how to take that which God freely offered" (Para. 12, page 82 of the text).

Spiritual understanding cannot come to anyone whose motives are selfish, for spiritual understanding is the power of God moving through an enlightened consciousness to bless the world as well as the individual. We cannot use God for our own selfish purposes, but rather God uses us to uplift and bless all creation as we let go of all erroneous beliefs in our consciousness and open ourselves to His direction and guidance. All of us must come to the point of desiring spiritual understanding for the good of all, knowing that what blesses one, blesses all. If we feel any sense of separation from other members of the human race, we cannot become illumined with spiritual understanding for it can only come into a consciousness free of a belief in separation from our Father-Mother God and from our fellow man.

Spiritual understanding in the form of divine ideas is accepted as a "gift of God" by our thinking and feeling only after beliefs of selfishness, fear, and distrust are erased from our mind. If we ask for this "gift of God" before we have cleansed our mind and heart to receive it, we are asking amiss. If we cannot believe that God will answer our prayer, this too can cause a mental block that prevents the acceptance of God's revelations.

If we seek the spiritual life simply to get something for ourselves alone, we are being self-centered or selfish. When Jesus was preaching at Nazareth He said, "Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself" (Luke 4:23 A.V.). We know that we must seek God and His inspiration in order to "heal" ourselves of all that is less than the God standard, but it must never be just for ourselves alone. Rather our work is to bring the kingdom of God upon the earth for all men. We cannot have the understanding we seek until our seeking is based on the highest motives.

6. When we ask for spiritual understanding and do not receive it, what is the reason?

6. Our Scripture gives us the answer very directly in these words, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss" (Jas. 4:3). We ask amiss, and receive not, when we are in
ignorance of our divine inheritance, and therefore do not know how to claim it.

When we pray and ask for spiritual understanding and it does not come, it is because we have placed the substance of our thoughts on the condition we wish to have healed instead of centering our attention on the truth that we really are spiritual beings. Everything works according to the law of mind action that "like begets like." This law is exacting and undeviating, producing results in exact accordance to the character of our thoughts. It is the "narrow gate" as our Scripture points out in Matthew 7:13, 14 "that leadeth unto life."

In order to receive the perfect answer to our prayers we must have an abiding faith that sees beyond the appearance to the perfection of God. In our mind's eye we must see ourselves as we are in Truth--whole, well, perfect, happy, joyous, prosperous--and not as we may be presently manifesting. We need to maintain an open and receptive consciousness so that God can work through us to bring forth the good we desire.

In order to receive spiritual understanding as regards anything that touches our life, our prayers must go deeper than words. It is not enough to ask God to make us healthy and then think and do things that make us sick.

"The Spirit of truth watches every detail of our life, and when we ask and by affirmation proclaim its presence, it brings new life into our body and moves us to observe hygienic and dietary laws that restore health" (page 125, Teach Us to Pray).

In every need, we must let go of all anxieties and open our mind and heart wholly to God. If we want justice in our life and affairs, we must not say and do things that cause bitterness and inharmony.

"Whatever thought you send out will come back to you. This is an unchangeable law of thought action. A man may be just in all his dealings, yet if he condemns others for their injustice, that thought action will bring him into unjust conditions; so it is not safe to judge except in the Absolute" (page 122, Christian Healing).

If we want to be forgiven for some wrong we have committed we have to have forgiveness in our own hearts:

"In spiritual understanding, the I AM of man forgives or 'gives' Truth 'for' error; the mind is set in order and the body healed. The moment man realizes this he puts himself in harmony with the Truth of Being, and the law wipes out all his transgressions" (page 60, Jesus Christ Heals).
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Regardless of what we are praying for, no matter what the situation for which we desire spiritual understanding, it is necessary for us to realize that any obstacle to the answer to our prayer is not of God but of our own making:

"All prayers are answered by the Father. Whenever a prayer remains unanswered in the manifest realm, we can be sure that somewhere there is a closed door between us and the Giver" (page 12, Effectual Prayer).

The "closed door" may be any limited belief such as ignorance, fear, anxiety, doubt, worry, and so forth. If we put emphasis on things instead of the divine realities or ideas lying back of the things, we are asking amiss and will not receive the spiritual understanding or good we are asking for. When we seek God in prayer and feel our oneness with Him, our asking will not be in vain and we will receive the answer we desire.

7. What is the first step toward attaining spiritual understanding? Name other steps.

7. The first step toward attainment of anything is to desire it. We move toward attainment of spiritual understanding by desiring it with all our being, knowing it to be a part of the heritage that God gave us at our creation.

However, desire of itself does not bring understanding. Work has to be done in the soul to prepare it to accept the gift. The text brings out the point in the quotation from Emerson on page 82 that "it comes to whosoever will put off what is foreign and proud; it comes as insight." When the desire for spiritual understanding is predominant in our consciousness, we begin to let go, through the process of denial, of all negative beliefs regarding ourselves; all thoughts of fear, envy, jealousy, anger fall away from us. We have a hunger to know more of spiritual things,

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6),

and we begin to study Truth principles by reading books, or by listening to teachers. We come to see the value of affirmations, and the importance of taking the words into meditation, so that our soul may "digest" the ideas back of them. We know we must take still another step. We must enter the silence where we listen to God as He fills the words of our meditation with life and meaning in order that we may feel the "spirit" of the words, which is spiritual understanding.

Perhaps no parable in the Bible points out more clearly the steps taken to attain spiritual understanding than does the story of the prodigal son. Until the prodigal son had the deep desire to get out of the condition in which he found himself in the "far country" he did not turn his thoughts toward his father. With this desire, however, "he came to himself" (Luke 15:17) and he
was willing to let go (deny) the arrogant willfulness that had brought him to the wasting of his substance.

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight" (Luke 15:18).

The prodigal's desire to go to his father and the denial of his error ways was followed by definite action, for we read, "And he arose, and came to his father" (Luke 15:20). As the son journeyed to the father's house, he went with a new purpose, not the selfish one he had started out with. Now he was willing to do what was right to put his life in order. After his return he heard the blessed words from his father,

"Bring forth quickly the best robe . . . and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring the fatted calf . . . for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:22, 23, 24).

When we are faithful to the steps that we must take to reach our Father's house, we too shall have the symbols of the robe, the ring, the shoes, and the fatted calf in the form of spiritual understanding to cover every phase of our existence.

8. What are some of the results experienced by us when we attain spiritual understanding?

8. The text outlines a number of results that come from the attainment of spiritual understanding, such as clearer insight, more serenity, new degrees of greatness, a changed tone that allows a person to rise above the opinions of others and dwell in the hour that now is.

The results experienced by us through spiritual understanding show forth in a completely changed approach to life. For instance, our selfish desires give way to desire for the good of all. While there is appreciation of the things in life that go to make for comfort and abundant living, of themselves they are no longer our primary desire; we see them as the results that come from spiritual understanding. They are the "all . . . things . . . added" (Matt. 6:33).

We might sum up some of the definite results that come in mind, body, and affairs, through spiritual understanding, as follows:

Mind:  In the conscious phase, or the intellect, we are more orderly in our thinking. We become more positive and wise in our deliberations; our intellect is keener, more efficient; it expresses more spiritual power and conviction.

In the subconscious phase, or the realm of feeling, we find our emotions more balanced; we are poised in the
consciousness of good; we have a feeling of peace and rest; we express more compassion, understanding, love.

Body: The body reaps the result of our thinking and feeling centered in Truth, for it begins to express more health, strength, vitality, perfection in all its functions. In other words, the body begins to manifest the wholeness and beauty that is ours by divine right.

Affairs: The results of spiritual understanding show in all our affairs. We experience more order, harmony, happiness, satisfaction in our contacts with others. More prosperity and success are manifested in our financial affairs.

Because spiritual understanding reveals the truth about us, there is no facet of our life that does not show forth good results from its attainment.

9. Can one do too much "spiritual seeking"?

9. In reality one can never do too much "spiritual seeking" or seeking for God. However, we can do too much "intellectual seeking," thinking that we are attaining spiritual understanding by rushing to classes and lectures, reading book after book, without reaching the goal of our search, namely acquaintanceship with God.

Intellectual seeking may become so all-absorbing that we fail to fully grasp and use what we have learned. It is possible to read too many books, and hear too many lectures, because our mind becomes cluttered with knowledge about God and His laws, rather than becoming more consciously aware of His presence within; we then suffer from what has been called "mental indigestion." The parable of the sower tells of some seed falling on rocky places that had "no deepness of earth . . . they had no root" (Matt. 13:5, 6). When we do only intellectual seeking for spiritual things the seeds of Truth do not get into the depths of our being, thus they put down no roots in our consciousness. We need to be rooted and grounded in Truth, not merely to have a theoretical understanding of facts, but

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love . . . know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:17, 18, 19).

Too much intellectual seeking can actually be selfishness when it is only for outer knowledge about Truth. Spiritual understanding is not something we hoard for ourselves or store up for future use. It causes us to unfold through loving service to God and man. Jesus taught, "Give, and it shall be given unto you" (Luke 6:38). Service to others, when motivated by
love and faith, is one of the steps by which we attain spiritual understanding, for we grow by sharing. Such service does not always mean doing things in the outer, for our truest service is often that which is given in prayer and in thought. For someone needing help there are times when a silent prayer of blessing can do more than any outer act or gift. When our seeking for Truth includes the sharing of faith, power, and understanding with others, we increase the expression and manifestation of these spiritual gifts in our own life.

10. What is the law of growth? Can we receive understanding of the whole Spirit of God at once?

10. The law of growth is the law of expansion; it is the law of life itself giving expression to the inherent and dynamic urge for fulfillment of the divine plan or pattern for man and all creation.

The word growth traces its meaning back to an old Scandinavian word meaning green, indicating that growth is action toward maturity. It has to do with development, increase, expansion. Growth requires the use of or exercise of certain principles necessary to bring about development. A seed may lie dormant, but once put into an environment that makes possible the exercise of the life principle within it, we find growth beginning. As the word of Truth (seed) germinates and develops within our soul, our capabilities increase, and we find our world enlarged in scope. The remark was made in Annotation 5 of Lesson 6 that "Use is the law of increase." This is confirmed on page 81 of Charles Fillmore's book, Prosperity, for we read:

"There is a universal law of increase. It is not confined to bank accounts but operates on every plane of manifestation. The conscious co-operation of man is necessary to the fullest results in the working of this law. You must use your talent, whatever it may be, in order to increase it."

Our primary objective in these lessons is to promote spiritual growth, which is the expression of the God ideas that form our spiritual heritage. Spiritual growth is the growth in our own consciousness, our thinking and feeling, into conscious unity with God through recognition of ourselves as His sons and heirs. We must increase our mental and emotional capacity in order to receive spiritual understanding.

"From center to circumference is the method of growth throughout the universe" (page 134, Atom-Smashing Power of Mind).

Because growth is a law of life, we cannot receive the understanding of the whole Spirit of God at once. Jesus was well aware that it had to be an orderly process, for He said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).
There are many good things in life that are not given to babes until they develop to a point when they are ready for them. So it is with our spiritual growth. We need to "grow up" mentally and emotionally through spiritual education before we are able to bear all that the Spirit would reveal to us. The "growing up" requires the releasing of old beliefs by denial, and the acceptance of new truths through affirmations.

As we progress in spiritual study we realize that understanding comes through a step-by-step unfoildment in the individual consciousness. We have to build the "mental equivalent" in our mind before any manifestation can come forth. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given" (Matt. 13:13). To do this, we speak words of health and vitality for our body; we speak words of love and harmony for our human relationships; we speak words of success and prosperity for our financial affairs. If to our limited stage of comprehension results seem slow in manifesting, we are able to rise above discouragement by using the spiritual understanding already revealed, for "The Lord shall give thee understanding in all things" (II Tim. 2:7). Our text points out on page 87 that,

"Spiritual understanding . . . comes to us more or less quickly in proportion as we use the light that we already have."

Again and again in our seeking consciously to know and understand God as the only presence and power, we may feel that we have reached a point when we are immersed in the whole Spirit of God. At each point of unfolding we do receive an increase in our spiritual consciousness but this increase does not include the "full baptism of the Holy Spirit!" (page 89 of the text), no matter how much we may have desired it. The search for spiritual understanding is a continual quest, and we know that as we work at building a spiritual consciousness right here and now, we are on the way to its attainment. Spiritual understanding brings with it health, strength, wisdom, and power. It invigorates and uplifts our every thought, feeling, and purpose, for it is the light of Christ living in us and sustaining us at all times.

Why must I seek forever for a sign
Instead of looking for the light within?
It is not in the skies the light will shine
But in myself God's glimmer will begin
And grow. If I would find Him let me seek
Not vainly for strange visions, but in me.
I shall not hear His voice unless I speak
Kind words; I shall not see Him till I see
Him in the small, unnoticed, everyday
Good deeds of a good life; I shall not find
My miracle in any other way
Save by the transformation of my mind.

--From the book Be! by
James Dillet Freeman.