

Following Your Gui-DANCE

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Guest Minister: Rev. Dr. Michele Whittington

Rev. Dr. Michele Whittington: So I want to open our time together -- this part of our time together -- with a story. Now, just a heads up: it's not a Richard Maraj story. *[Congregation laughs]* Which means there won't be a "badda-ding, badda-dune" at the end of it. Alright? You won't be groaning at the end of it! Or laughing, whichever the case may be. But it is a story, nonetheless. And it's actually a true story.

It's a story that happened -- an event, I should say -- that happened many, many, many, many years ago. But there was a man -- a tightrope walker -- who was going to walk across Niagara Falls. That couldn't be done today, but it was allowed then. And not only was he going to walk across Niagara Falls, he was going to walk with another man on his shoulders. *[Congregation murmurs]* Hmmm. Yeah; yeah! I heard that! My thoughts exactly.

So they rehearsed and they practiced -- obviously, not over Niagara Falls -- but they practiced in a safer environment. And they practiced and they practiced. And now comes the day that they are going to actually walk a tightrope across Niagara Falls.

And the tightrope walker says to his apprentice, whose going to be on his shoulders ... He says, *"I want to remind you: I've said this before to you, but I want to remind you again. We're about to risk our lives. I am to walk the wire. The entire responsibility for walking the wire is mine. You have nothing to do but match my moves. If I sway to the left, you sway to the left. If I sway to the right, you sway to the right. Under no circumstances should you try to save yourself, for there must be only one will in this adventure, and that will is mine. You must submerge yours to ensure harmony, for within this perfect unity -- without this perfect unity -- all is lost. There is only one thing for you to do, and that is to sway with me."*

So after that piece of advice, the young man climbed on the tightrope walker's shoulders, and across they went. And all was going quite well. Things were going great. But you can imagine -- you can see this in your mind's eye -- that there's a little bit of a sway in a tightrope. Right? A little bit of sway. *[Lifts her arm in front of her and moves it back and forth with a gently "sway"]* And that's a normal sway. The tightrope walker knew exactly how to handle that.

But something happened, and the vibration of the swaying cut in half. So, all of a sudden, the swaying was this: *[add slow up-and-down movement to the gentle back-and-forth sway of her arm]*. And then each half cut in half. *[Up-and-down movements of the sway become larger and faster.]* And then each half cut in half again. *[Up-and-down movements of the back-and-forth sway become extraordinarily large and fast.]*

And pretty soon, that rope was vibrating so violently that the audience -- which, of course, was huge, congregated around -- was absolutely sure that they were about to witness to a horrible tragedy. And everyone was holding their breath about whether or not these two would make it across.

The good news is: they did. They made it across successfully! It was a great triumph, and all the papers in New York and beyond had -- the next day -- had this amazing triumph. Just walking across alone would be a triumph, but then to have dealt with that happening: an amazing triumph.

The young man who sat on the tightrope walker's shoulder decided he didn't want to do that anymore. *[Rev. Dr. Whittington and congregation laugh]* Understandably so! And he went on to have his life. And he got married and had children and became very active in his spiritual community. And he often said -- and he said this to anyone who would listen -- *"I learned more religion on that wire that day than in all of my life. I learned the only safe and sound way to live is to sway with God."*

Tonight we're going to talk about "swaying" with God. What does it mean to sway with God?

Well, for me, that's all about following guidance: following Divine guidance. Learning to sway with this Infinite Intelligence that knows how to hang the planets in the sky; knows how to beat our heart; knows how to create life out of nothing. Let's sway with that! Because that probably -- that energy, that life force, that essence -- that we call God ... or whatever other term you want to use; I'm not hung up on the word on God. If you don't like it, say "Source," say "Universe," say "Charlie." I don't care! *[Congregation laughs]* Doesn't matter! God is God! To sway with that Intelligence; we're probably going to turn out pretty well if we do that.

And, yet, having said that: swaying or dancing with the Divine is not always that easy, now is it? Let me just ask you if you've ever had any of these experiences come up. So, you get some guidance, but it's asking you to go into uncharted territory. And it's causing you to stretch beyond your comfort zone. Anybody ever had that? Because this is congregant participation time. *[Congregation laughs]* We'll have more, but we're warming you up for it right now.

So sometimes our guidance may tell us to do something -- or not do something -- and we don't like that guidance. We don't want that. "Well, I want to do that." Or, "I don't want to do that." *[Stomps her foot; congregation laughs]* Anybody ever *[stomps her foot again]* stomp their foot at their guidance? Ah hmm ... thank you! Get your hands up! *[Congregation laughs]* Right? Of course!

Sometimes our guidance makes absolutely no sense to the logical, rational mind. Anybody ever had that kind of guidance? No sense whatsoever! And sometimes *[gives a sharp intake of breath]* our guidance utterly terrifies us. Anybody ever had that one? Oh, yeah. I've known that one a lot. *[Chuckles]*

But I will tell you: I believe at the core of my being that, when we get true guidance -- and we're going to talk tonight about: How do we know that it's actually guidance from the Divine? When we get that guidance, we will not be misguided. We will not be steered wrong. We will not.

And I don't believe that just because Ernest Holmes -- who is the founder of my tradition from which I come, which is Religious Science ... nor Charles Fillmore who -- with his wife, Myrtle -- founded Unity ... Not because they said it. Or not because other spiritual leaders have said it. I believe this, because I've experienced it in my own life over and over and over again.

So in a moment I'm going to share with you a simple formula, if you will: a formula for learning what true guidance is. And then learning how to hear it more often and more often and more often. True guidance vs. hmmm; what else might there be? Well, ego. *[Congregation laughs]* Oops! Fear. Anger. Wanting revenge. What else could there be? All sorts of other ... The false self. The little self that might want to do something. Is that guidance or is that not guidance? Talk about how to discern true Divine guidance.

But before we talk about my simple plan, it's really important to lay a little bit of groundwork. A little bit of groundwork so that we're on the same page, which I probably am preaching to the choir here, but I want to anchor it anyway. Just in case I'm not. And that is: I want to go back to a word -- a line -- that the tightrope walker said to his apprentice. He said, "*There must be only will in this adventure, and that will is mine.*"

Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane, "*Not my will, but Thine.*" So it begs the question: What is God's will for us? What is that? What is God's will for us?

I grew up in a very traditional household. Religion: very traditional, fundamental religion. And I learned that God's will ... Well, I learned that, when anything bad happened, that was God's will. You got sick? God's will. Somebody died? God's will. You lost your job? It was God's will. It was God's will. It was God's will those things happened. And that's how I grew up. That's what I thought! "*Well, it's God's will, so it's got to be okay.*" *[Sighs heavily]*

I'm so grateful that, in New Thought, we believe slightly -- maybe diametrically; I was going to say slightly differently, maybe diametrically -- opposed to that. And that was just an amazing "Aha!" light bulb years ago when I first stepped into New Thought and heard that for the first time. It was a -- Pow! -- mind blower for me.

So I have to quote Ernest Holmes at least once tonight because, you know, that's my tradition. I'll quote Charles, also, I promise. But here: I love this passage from the Science of Mind textbook. He wrote, *"The will of God has to be life. The will of that which is Infinite can never be finite. Everything, then, should tend to expansion and multiplication of the Divine plan. THAT is the will of God. It has to be beauty, truth and harmony, as this is the true relationship of the whole to the parts, and the parts to the whole."* That's talking about our relationship to the Divine.

"Therefore, we should interpret the will of God to be everything that expresses life without hurt. This seems to be a fair, logical, sane and intelligent way to look at it. Anything that will enable us to express greater life, greater happiness, greater power -- so long as it does not harm anyone -- must be the will of God for us."

Can I get an "Amen" on that? [Congregation says, "Amen!" and applauds] That's what we believe. That God's will for us is infinite good. So I want you to say that with me. *"God's will for me is infinite good."* Let's go! [With congregation]: *"God's will for me is infinite good."*

So we can be assured that, when we are guided by God -- when we receive Divine gui-DANCE: that dance with God -- it will be for our highest good. For expansion. For more joy. More love. More peace. More abundance.

And I love this quote from Christian Larson, who was a New Thought author many, many decades ago. He wrote a book called *Pathway of Roses*. And there is a particular phrase in this that just gives me God-bumps. He wrote: *"The Divine will works only for better things and greater things. The path of the Divine will is upward and onward forever. And Its power is employed exclusively in building"* -- here's my phrase I love -- *"more lofty mansions for the soul."* Ohhhh. Is it just me, or is that really juicy? *"Lofty mansions for the soul. Therefore, the will of God does not produce sickness, adversity or death. On the contrary, the will of God eternally produces wholeness, harmony and life."*

So, once again, we can be assured that the guidance we get from the Divine will be for our highest good.

Then that begs the question: How do I cultivate Divine guidance? How can I be sure that it is, in fact, guidance coming from the Divine vs. my ego, my anger, my resentment, my shame, my fear? Whatever it might be?

Well, Charles Fillmore had something to say about that. In *Talks of Truth*, he said, *"We must all find the Father consciously in our inner temple. We must go there day after day and ask for guidance. It is not an abstraction that dwells in a vacuum to be invoked by some magic formula, but it must be cultivated and communed with."* I love those terms: *"cultivated and communed with."*

So I'm going to propose, not a magic formula, but nonetheless an effective, three-step formula for cultivating and communing with this inner voice. And I have used this formula myself. I never talk about anything that I don't live to the best of my ability myself. Not perfect! But to the best of my ability. And so this is kind of a tried-and-true formula, if you will. Not magic! But, nonetheless, a formula for cultivating and communing with that inner voice.

So are you ready? [Clears throat] Pen and paper out? No; just kidding. [Rev. Dr. Whittington and congregation laugh] There's three steps.

Step number one is ... This is not rocket science, by the way, but it's important. **BE OPEN TO LISTENING.** Be open to listening! You've got to have your ears open, or you're not going to hear anything! And

sometimes we're on automatic pilot and we're just flying through life, and we're not paying attention to anything. So the first step is to be open.

Now, let me give you a couple of clues that, when you're listening, the Divine voice will not be about punishment, discipline or scolding. That will not be Divine guidance. It will never condemn or constrict. It will offer ideas -- if you will -- for expansion and empowerment. It will never advocate harming anything or anyone, including yourself.

So I just want to go on record here saying: That night that you get the nudge to have a box of cookies for dinner, that is not Divine guidance! *[Congregation laughs]* Just sayin'! Just sayin'; it's not.

If the idea of following this thought that you're having ... If the idea of following it brings you a level of joy and excitement and it feels freeing ... If it feels like it could bring greater peace, greater love, greater abundance, it could very well be Divine guidance. But here's the deal about it. It might not be logical. It might not be rational. And it may be terrifying.

So I'm going to give you an example, and ... So I'm just going to give a little caveat to those out in the congregation who have been at my former church. You've heard this before! So just hear it with new ears tonight, okay? *[Laughs]* Because I didn't know so many of you would be here, or I would have maybe picked a different story. *[Congregation laughs]* But you're here, and I'm happy about that! *[Laughs]* I'm thinking, "I've got a whole new audience I can tell this story to!" Dang; I don't! *[Congregation laughs]* It's all right!

It might not be rational. It might not be logical. And it might terrify you. Many, many years ago I went to *[feigns Southern accent]* Edwene Gaines. Ya'll know who Edwene Gaines is? She's a beautiful, beautiful prosperity ... I don't have a good Southern accent, but ... Beautiful prosperity teacher. And she had master prosperity training at her retreat center in Mentone, Alabama. And I went to that.

And I knew what happened on the last night of this event, and that was a fire walk. And I wanted to do a fire walk. *[Feigns cough]* Kind of wanted to do a fire walk. *[Congregation laughs]* Even thinking about it, I got shaky. I got shaky.

And contemplating it, as the night comes around and we're preparing for it, my logical brain -- and I have a pretty logical, rational brain -- my logical brain said, "Are you out of your ever-loving mind?" I may have used stronger words than that, but I shan't use them here. *[Congregation laughs]* "Um; You're going to get third-degree burns on your feet. This is not smart, Michele. This is not a smart ... I don't care what they say. This is a stupid thing to do. What are you thinking?"

This was what was going on through my mind. But my inner guidance told me I could walk and not get burned. And it told me that walking on this fire was mine to do. And even with that guidance, in our preparation in the room before we went out to this -- it felt like about 100 yards, but it probably wasn't quite that long *[laughs]* -- runway of white-hot coals ... We had built the fire two hours earlier. We built it together, and now it had burned to white-hot coals. As we're in the room preparing, I'm getting these messages. And I'm like, "Okay."

Even still, as we're walking to the runway of fire -- or of white-hot coals -- we had to walk down a little hill bare-footed. And I swear, I was shaking so hard I wasn't sure I was going to make it. My legs were shaking so hard. And I am quoting the 23rd Psalm like I've never quoted it! *[Congregation laughs]* "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want!" *[Laughs]* I said the whole thing, like, three times as I'm walking down, because I was so afraid.

That evening I was earnestly seeking guidance. I needed to know for sure that I was being guided properly to this. I think sometimes in our lives, you know, it's not a life-or-death situation if we get guidance; we're not going to get third-degree burns on our feet if we get it wrong. We maybe don't

earnestly ask, as Charles Fillmore suggested: that we must ask for this guidance, and then be open to hearing it.

So step one: open to hearing it. Open to listening. And doing some evaluation of that, based on the criteria I said before: if it is Divine guidance, it will be this way and not that way.

Step two: Oh, this is a good one. Step two is: **MAKE THE CHOICE TO FOLLOW YOUR DIVINE GUIDANCE ... OR NOT.** Didn't think I was going to say that, did you? Make a choice to follow or not. Because we always have choice! The greatest gift we were given -- besides life, itself -- is choice.

There's a woman who worked at a book store, and she loved seeing the combination of books that people would bring to buy. So one day, this woman comes up, and she has two books. One of the books was *Conversations with God*. The other book is *How to Argue and Win Every Time*. [Congregation laughs] I'll have to tell that one to Richard Maraj; he'll use that some morning, won't he? [Congregation laughs] Right?

We have a choice to follow that guidance! We can argue with it. We can choose not to follow it. So the second choice is: make the decision. Make the choice. Follow it, or don't.

So I heard the voice: "Walk!" I heard the voice: "Walk!" Even though I was terrified, I heard the voice: "Walk!" And even though I'd gotten clear guidance, once we got down to this threshold of runway of hot coals, and we're walking around the edges and we're singing and chanting some inane chant that I have no idea, because I was too terrified to remember it ... I asked again, "Can I do this and not get burned."

"Yes!"

Hmmm. Okay; well, let me ask that a different way. [Clears throat deliberately] [Congregation laughs] "Is this mine to do?"

"Yes!"

Oh, shoot. "When?"

"Now!"

"No!!!!!!" [Whines]

One woman in the group was ready to walk. She had told everyone she was going to walk. She was a minister of a New Thought church, and she had told her whole congregation: "I'm going to Edwene's; I'm gonna walk on fire." She told her son, who lived out of state, "I'm going to walk on fire." She was so excited! She was afraid at first, but she worked through her fear. She was ready to walk!

She got guidance not to walk. Not to walk.

We each have a choice. We can follow that guidance or not.

One thing Edwene said to us ... She said, "If you get guidance not to walk" -- and this actually takes us to our third point, which is **OBSERVE THE RESULTS** of following or not following. See what happens.

Edwene said to us, "If you choose to walk, and you have been given guidance not to walk, you will burn your feet. And I have no aloe vera. I have no lotion. I have no salves. And I am not taking you to the hospital. You are on your own." Yeah! And she said it just like that! She's this little spitfire of a woman, and she's got an attitude. And that was her attitude about it! If you do not listen to your guidance that said "Don't walk," and you walk, that's what's going to happen. Those are the results.

So you watch the results. What happens? When I followed it, what happened? When I didn't follow it, what happened? Pretty soon you'll learn to see. If it is Divine guidance, it did, in fact, result in greater happiness, greater life expression, greater feeling of connection, greater joy, greater abundance, greater

love. It will, in fact, have produced greater harmony and wholeness. If it wasn't your Divine guidance, it won't!

So what happened in that fire walk? Well, I walked. I chose to walk. And I am happy to say my feet are absolutely fine. And I would not be wearing shoes like this tonight if they weren't! No burning whatsoever of my feet.

I felt like -- when I got finished with that -- I wanted to do the "Rocky" thing at the Philadelphia art museum. You know, after he ran up the stairs? *[Congregation laughs]* But they told us to stay sacred, so I couldn't do it. *[Congregation laughs]* I wanted to.

My friend, whose name was Rose, chose to listen to her guidance. And she didn't walk. She was so disappointed. She was in tears. She was absolutely in tears. She was one person out of 21 people there who did not walk. Can you imagine? I mean, can you imagine? Not that we put peer pressure on her, but just the self-pressure that she would have put on herself to walk? Plus she told her community; she told her son. She was so excited!

So she went to bed that night really pretty despondent. She woke up in the middle of the night hearing some words. And she got up and wrote them down. And I asked her if she would share them with me. She gave me permission to read them, and I want to read them to you.

"Dear Rose:

I am so pleased with you. You have served me well. You have bravely faced all I have given. You have far exceeded any expectation one could have of a human being. I have given you a life of challenge, and you did not shrink once. You met each challenge with grace, dignity, intelligence and courage.

My gift to you is knowledge. You have always known what to do, and when. You have followed my guidance every step of the way and triumphed. I gave you the clear knowledge early yesterday that you could walk on fire, and fear was removed and replaced with confidence. As you walked the fire circle, all ego was pushed aside. You bravely did not do what you knew you were able to do. You listened to my guidance. I gave you, perhaps, a far greater challenge than to do what you were not afraid to do. I asked you to trust me, and you listened.

I love you; I am proud of you. Without you, I have no expression. As you trusted me and did not take it upon yourself, I know I can trust you. Yes; in the spring becomes the rose. and your every desire is granted.

Your loving Mother/Father God."

Your Divine guidance will never steer you wrong. God's will for you is only good. So if you open yourself to listen to Divine guidance: cultivate the listening. If you then consciously choose: follow it or not. And then observe what happens, you will soon very easily begin to discern that voice of Divine guidance vs. that other voice. And you won't eat a whole box of cookies for dinner, *[congregation laughs]* because you will know that is not the voice of God!

"When I looked at the word GUIDANCE, I kept seeing 'dance' at the end of the word. And I remembered reading that doing God's will is a lot like dancing. When two people try to lead, nothing feels right. The movement doesn't flow with the music, and everything is quite uncomfortable and jerky. But when one person relaxes and lets the other lead, both bodies begin to flow with the music. One gives gentle cues, perhaps with a nudge to the back or by pressing lightly in one direction or another. It's as if two bodies become one body, moving beautifully. The dance takes surrender, willingness and attentiveness from one person and gentle guidance and skill from the other.

My eyes then were drawn back to the word GUIDANCE, itself. And when I saw the 'G,' I thought of God, followed by the 'u' and 'i.' dance. God, you, and I dance."

And that, my friend, is gui-DANCE.

[Congregation applauds]

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