

## 2018 Understanding Forest Service

This summer we are exploring 12 spiritual powers or faculties as described by Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore. Since I am the one preaching, it is the also the 12 Powers through *my lens* or the way I see them. And I don't always agree with Chuck about everything. So I warn you, if you want a purer version of the Fillmore view of the 12 powers, you have to read his book. As a part of the sermon series we are also looking at ways the spiritual power manifests itself in the material world—specifically this summer manifestations we can find in American History.

If you look up understanding in the dictionary it will tell you it means “comprehension” and it gives synonyms of “mastery, grasp and absorption”. If you look up understanding in the Revealing Word, Fillmore will tell you it means “That in man which comprehends is understanding; it knows and comprehends in wisdom.” And that definition illustrates my frustration with Fillmore's back and forth with the spiritual powers of Wisdom and Understanding. So here is where I end up: Wisdom is what we know in the moment, applied to the situation. It is discerning differences and selecting one choice over another and it is the illumination or “aha” of insights of Truth. Understanding is the intuitive knowledge that we know without knowing how we know and it is what we know about *how something works*. Understanding is the practical implications and *applications over the long haul of the truth principles* revealed to us. If I know a truth principle, great. If I know how to use the principle and how it works in my life—now I'm on a roll! Chuck and I disagree on where the centers of these powers are located. For me Wisdom is in the head and Understanding is in the gut. For me, if I *know what I know*, I sense it in the center of my being—which is not the top of my head but more in my solar plexus. Mr. Fillmore has the locations switched. You can decide for yourself—which is the approach I always advocate. Think for yourself!

Fillmore and I DO agree on how the spiritual power of understanding can operate within us. In the Revealing Word he says, “There are two ways of getting understanding. One is by following the guidance of Spirit that dwells within, and the other is to go blindly ahead and learn by hard experience.” Many of us can attest to both processes and examples in our lives. How many of us who find ourselves now in Unity seats have heard a traditional theology of a punishing and threatening God and somehow **known** deep within us that was not true.

Intuitively we had an understanding of the infinite power in the Universe as loving and creative and not punishing. We **knew** that even if we could not put our finger on how we knew or when we knew or even the exact language of knowing sometimes. So sometimes we just know and then other times we enroll in the school of hard knocks.

One of my favorite lines that appears in many blues and country songs is, “If it don’t kill you, it only makes you stronger.” What don’t kill you is a source of understanding. These life lessons are part of our process to maturity. A process not everyone masters. Two specific spiritual principles seem to appear over and over as lessons we choose to gain understanding by difficult experiences.

The first principle is the idea of stewardship of our gifts. God gives us Life and a body temple and an inner guidance that will nurture and support that temple. Most of us sitting here today can say, “Yes, I understand that.” And how did we come to that understanding? By repeatedly abusing the body temple we have and being a poor steward. If God gives us a body, why should we have to overcome all these human desires and impulses to eat what does not make us feel good in the long run and drink more alcohol than serves our body. If we turn within we intuitively have a voice inside that says, “Put down the doughnut” or whispers, “I think one glass of wine is plenty”. Often we have trouble getting to the point that we surrender to the divine understanding these principles of life operate within our lives and whether we like it or not, there is a strong connection between cause and effect. The Universe continues to give us lessons on the consequences of our choices and we ignore them. Until potentially the day we stop and say, “OK! I understand. I will listen to the guidance within and I will tend to my body temple.”

Unity sometimes borrows a phrase from other traditions and says, “Fake it til you make it.” Really what we are referring to is the practice of denials and affirmations to condition our mind until the seeds of understanding take root and are strong enough to sustain our practice of principle. We deny that false ideas have power over us and we affirm the power of conditions in alignment with truth. *My desire for doughnuts is a passing thought without power to deter me from eating that which nourishes my mind and body. I am attuned to the vibration of Divine Life manifesting in me.* The conditioning of repeating denials and affirmations continues until understanding takes hold and I **know** that the vibration of Divine Life manifests in me, guiding me to nourish my mind and body and reject anything toxic to my wellbeing.

The second principle we tend to experiment with in the school of hard knocks is the law of giving and receiving. The principle tells us it is all flow. Our Daily Word quoted St. Francis, “For it is in giving that we receive.” If you want more love, give more love. If you desire to have a constant flow of something coming in, establish a constant flow of that thing going out. And how many of us clench in fear when we perceive lack. We hoard what we have. We hold onto and withhold giving money, love, time or service. Because principle operates in flow, we experience the lack we practice. We manifest the difficulty we focus on. Until grace or a moment of wisdom illuminates the Truth of Flow and joy of giving and receiving. We give. Maybe just a little. As we see the flow released we sigh in understanding. OK, I know how it works.

I understand what I need to do on a daily basis to live this principle and put it to work in my life. I no longer **need** experiences of lack to teach me this lesson. Some of us come to this understanding intuitively, maybe supported by early positive life experiences. And I suppose, some of us never get to this understanding. We simply repeat cycles of lack and plenty, always depending on the whims of the material world and repeating our own cycles of withholding and extravagance never *understanding* the principle and peace of standing in the flow.

So for me, understanding is *golden*, our color of the day, because it is the Source of the practical guidance for living the truth we know. Living our truth is essential to our Unity philosophy. It is our fifth principle. It is the advice of the gospel of James: “But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” The divine power of Understanding guides us in being productive *doers* in alignment with Spirit.

So why, Reverend Joy, did you pick the U S Forest Service as the embodiment of Understanding? Way back in 1876, Congress created the office of Special Agent in the U.S. Department of Agriculture to assess the quality and conditions of forests in the United States. In 1881 the Department expanded the office into the Division of Forestry. A decade later Congress passed the Forest Reserve Act of 1891 authorizing the President to designate public lands in the West into what were then called “forest reserves.” Responsibility for these reserves fell under the Department of the Interior until 1905 when President Theodore Roosevelt transferred their care to the Department of Agriculture’s new U.S. Forest Service. Gifford Pinchot led this new agency as its first Chief, charged with caring for the newly renamed national forests.

Gifford Pinchot served two terms as Pennsylvania's governor and came from a wealthy and philanthropic family. Grey Towers in Milford PA was their summer home and now a park at the northern end of the Delaware Watergap parkway. It was James Pinchot who initially became concerned with the effects of the logging industry, even way back in the 1800's. Gifford Pinchot was encouraged by his father to pursue forestry and Gifford summed up the mission of his new department as "to provide the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people in the long run." The mission of the department continues to maintain a commitment to the needs of future generations.

So for me, the US Forest Service embodies the spiritual power of understanding in the two ways we have described its operation. First, the department arose from an intuitive knowing of the value of the gifts of our natural environment. It is easy to look around the earth and imagine that our resources are infinite. There is a lot of forest, rainforest, prairie, ocean water, glaciers and anything you want to name in the world. California didn't become a state until 1850 so there were vast expanses of our country we knew little about when the department began. Instead of waiting until there was only wasteland, a spiritual understanding arose that said "This country's beauty in natural forests and grasslands is a precious gift to maintain."

And the second part of the spiritual power of understanding manifests as the practical application of that knowing. So it is not enough to just declare a forest a park and put up a sign. What else must we do? Two of the guiding principles of the Forest Service are: We use an ecological approach to the multiple-use management of the National Forests and Grasslands. We use the best scientific knowledge in making decisions and select the most appropriate technologies in the management of resources. Wouldn't you want a holistic approach to maintaining your body's health? Wouldn't you want the best science and the most appropriate technologies to be used to keep you healthy? Well, aren't we all ONE? So isn't the health of the forest part of the health of the ONE we are part of?

The Department has a variety of functions and services. Here are some of the topics from their website: National Forests and Grasslands, Trails, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Sustainability and Climate, Urban Forests, Fire Control, Natural Resources (which is fish, birds, wildlife and plants) and International Cooperation. To do the most good means doing more than putting up a sign that says, "National Forest". It is a dynamic dance of balance to maintain the ecosystems that sustain life on this living organism we call earth.

I found this fascinating example of an experiment in Yellowstone National Park that began in 1995 and continues to unfold today. In 1995, wolves had become extinct in the park and so 14 grey wolves were re-introduced into the park. Like a pebble thrown into a pool, that introduction rippled out in a process of re-balancing that has amazed biologists. First, the wolves were natural predators of deer and elk. These animals had over-grazed the land and eradicated areas of vegetation. The wolves reduced the deer herd and dispersed the elk. It seems with the natural predator present, they formed smaller groups and moved around more. This change in the grazing pattern allowed willows and ash trees to re-establish groves. The elk herd actually increased without vegetation damage. The new trees provided a resource for the beavers. At the outset the park was down to one lone beaver colony; the colonies currently number 9. Doing what beavers do, they dammed some of the waterways. The water changes allowed otters, muskrats and fish to flourish. The stable water sources supported more flowers and plants so there was an increase in butterflies and bees. The trees attracted an increase in the variety of birds. The wolves killed coyotes, which increased the number of mice and rabbits. With this food source available, there was an increase in foxes, badgers and hawks. Even the bald eagle population increased. The rivers are more stable and the flora and fauna continue to evolve in sustainable ways. Although at the outset there were complaints from area cattle farms that the wolves would attack the cattle, real data indicates the death rate is stable and the cattle die from other causes. What a transformation has unfolded and continues to unfold in Yellowstone Park.

Wisdom illuminates the truth idea of Divine Life, eternal and yet alive in me and in our world this very moment. Wisdom discerns between what is in alignment with spiritual life and what is the noise and chatter of the material world's ideas about life. Understanding reveals, "Yes, we can **heal** through the activity of Divine Life within!" and then, if we are patient and listen to the still small voice, Understanding will guide the steps we need to take for our healing activity to unfold. We may stumble across the affirmations we need or we may create them to condition our minds as Understanding expands in our conscious awareness. I hear the words of truth and Understanding guides my doing.

Divine Understanding expresses through me as intuitive knowing and practical applications of spiritual principle. Amen!

From Gold to Silver—next week we explore the power of Will!