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## Heart-Hearing

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## Heart - Hearing

When we listen, not necessarily with great effort, but with firm determination to perceive and to receive whatever is presented to us, we satisfy our hearts more than our minds. Many of us know well what it is like to listen and not to hear, while we mentally occupy ourselves with formulating a response or by engaging in some inner critique of another's words. The choice to listen with care, not only to the literal meaning of the words, but with a desire to understand all that is being communicated, is a gift to the one speaking, and also a deed for one's own benefit.

Listening is more than hearing sounds, especially when we consider the internal options we have. We sometimes use "hearing" to describe the meaning that we take as our own and that we might use as a basis for action. "I hear you" can mean that we judge a speaker's volume level to be adequate, but more often, we use the expression to signify that we take seriously what is spoken. We hear with our ears, but we also hear with our minds and our hearts.

When we listen with our hearts to another person, we do not cease to use our minds, but we direct our mental faculties to help us detect meanings that are helpful, even if what we hear, challenges us. The purpose we have of learning or gaining something of value for ourselves and others, governs the way we listen. We also want those who listen to us to do so with openness to our intentions rather than to seek flaws in our reasoning or in our use of words.

God listens to us with great-heartedness and at the same time with complete understanding, knowing us better than we know ourselves. If, for example, one of us says that we need a new car to make us happy, God hears not just the words we use but also our true requirements. When our words do not yet match well with our desires, God often responds by giving us indications, sometimes gentle, at other times direct, that we have not listened carefully enough to our own hearts, and so we are not ready to receive an answer that will content us. Some reflection will help us to make a more honest and realistic connection between our thoughts and our desires, enabling us to say the truth that God hears.

Reading and hearing are linked realities. We do not "hear" with our eyes, but when we read with an open heart seeking to engage both the literal meaning and also, and more importantly, unique experiences of guidance, encouragement, and inspiration, we are satisfied with the results. Whether the text contains them or not, and whether others hear what we hear or not, when we read with the intention of gaining something positive for ourselves,

our hearts hear what we really need. God listens to us throughout our reading, and responds even to desires that we have not articulated for ourselves. Many of us have learned that we gain more from our reading, no matter what the subject might be, if we begin with a prayerful intention of hearing with our heart.

Would we take it as a compliment if someone considered us a person who hears with our heart?