

The Present Teacher

by Pacho Lane

Pacho Lane is a maker of documentary films and a member of Rochester (NY) Monthly Meeting.

Many Friends believe that "Jesus continues to teach his followers himself." What does this actually mean, experimentally (as George Fox would say)? That is, what *actually happens* when Jesus teaches you?

Here is my own attempt at an answer:

I get "leadings." What I mean by this is a sense—not specific words, but a sort of push or pressure that gradually becomes an articulate thought. Sometimes this may be in response to a question I ask (i.e., a "prayer"). More frequently it is because I am faced with a specific situation and must choose how to act in the moment. I then "turn inward" for a moment and look for guidance. I guess you could say I am still asking a question—"what do I do now?"—though I don't formulate it as such. The proper response to the situation then sort of shows up in my mind.

But leadings can also come without my asking for them. In this case, it is a kind of growing sense that I need to do something. I may not recognize this for a few days, but it keeps on pushing at me, until I become conscious that I am being directed. Then I think about what the message is, sometimes for several days, and eventually I am clear about what I am being led to do. Then I do it.

There are also "openings"—flashes of revelation, where I suddenly "see" something whole—a whole new concept or idea or way of looking at things or a situation. Again, I see these openings as being given to me to say or do, not as coming from myself.

The best and deepest openings usually come in natural environments, when I am by myself, in the woods or on a mountain, for example. Sometimes on my mountaintop I feel a presence and a sense of power (not mine, but around me) that is overwhelming, and I just sink into "meditation." Frequently, some new insight or revelation may come out of this sense of presence, but whether it does or not, I eventually return to my normal life filled, refreshed, and inspired.

The way the revelations work out the best, however, is in my filmmaking. I feel a strong pressure to make a particular film—or even more vaguely to go somewhere and make a film without knowing what the film will be about. I do so, constantly seeking guidance—i.e., looking in each situation for inspiration as I do in Meeting. I shoot the whole film this way, seeking direct inspiration for every shot. There comes a moment at which I "know" that I have shot everything I need for the film, and I stop.

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Then I edit, also of course seeking inspiration for the editing. As I edit, I recognize what the film is about. That is, while I know what I shot, I don't know what it means or how it fits together until I edit. There usually comes a blinding moment in which I see, for the first time, the message and the power of the film, and recognize that that was what I had been called to do at the beginning, even though I did not know it until that moment months later in the editing room.

Most of my films are done this way. If you check the films listed on my web site, all the Mexican films were done that way, as was *The Black Tulip*. *Inside Afghanistan* and the American films were less directly inspired. They were done jointly with others, so I did not have as complete control. But I used the same method as much as I could, particularly in *Stoney Knows How*.

There is no question in my mind that I am being led by Something outside myself. I see the results not only in my films but (more importantly) in my life. A lot of times, just as in Meeting, I feel so much pressure that I almost have no choice—I have to obey what I am being given to do. In Meeting, this is when I speak.

I see silent Meeting for Worship therefore as THE Quaker Discipline. The form of Meeting is "direct pointing"—i.e., it gives a structure in which to experience the Light—and that is the purpose of Meeting. There is a logic to it that teaches me how to focus, listen, hear, and obey the Light. This is the practice of what I am to do in my life. Meeting is the place I learn how to be open to, listen to, and let the Light work through me. It is where I learn how to live the rest of the hours of the week, as if I were in Meeting.

When I am perfectly in tune with the Light, or the Spirit, or the Spirit of Christ, or G-d, or "the gods of Mexico"—all of which are my names for the experience I feel—I know just where to walk, and I don't make any missteps. I can feel the Light working in and through me, and it appears that others can feel it in me, because they respond to it.

I have not yet learned to live entirely in the Light, every minute of the day, though I'm growing more and more that way every day. I don't know whether I'll make it before I die, but I hope so.

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