

# Keys to the Parables

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*“Unto you it is given to know the mystery  
Of the kingdom of God: but unto them that  
are without, all things are done in parables.”*

Jesus alone with His close disciples. (Mark 4:11, Luke 8:11)

It is hoped that this treatise you are about to read will reach those who have sufficient inner awareness and contemplative experience to recognize the inner dimension of Christ’s teachings that lies beneath the literal language of metaphor. Such individuals have “eyes to see and ears to hear.”

Furthermore, it is hoped that the reader will appreciate the implications of this discovery for the deepening of Christian religious life and for making Christianity a truly powerful force for world peace and understanding between East and West.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire the reader with the courage to share these insights with others who are receptive - putting aside all considerations for personal career advancement or ecclesiastic job security. Remember the words of Jesus: If you are ashamed of me I will be ashamed of you. (Luke 9:26, Mark 8:38).

Finally, a word of caution is advisable here. The purpose of this paper is NOT to teach meditation. For that one needs the direct, personal instruction and supervision of a competent teacher. Rather, the goal of this paper is to provide some guidelines for discerning a meditation practice that is consistent with what Jesus privately taught to His closest disciples.

The intent of a particular meditation practice is very important. Different intents can lead to different consequences. Also, one might expect that a practice that is based on the existence of a loving God will have very different consequences from one that is atheistic or agnostic regarding the existence of God. Another important consideration: is the goal of the meditation to merely escape life or to transform and divinize it?

## **Introduction - Did Jesus Teach Yogic Meditation?**

Christian theologians unanimously agree that the parables are at the heart of the authentic teachings of Jesus. Hence, the more deeply we know the parables the greater will be our understanding of Jesus and the closer we will be to “putting on the mind of Christ.”

We read that Jesus frequently spoke in parables yet very few of the general public understood their meaning (Matthew 13:34, Mark 4:34). Actually, it was only in private that Jesus revealed their meanings and then only to His close disciples (Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10). Hence, they remained a mystery to those outside the inner circle and the Bible contains very little if anything of these private explanations.

Thus, for centuries puzzled theologians have been offering a wide variety of interpretations for these sayings. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Christian churches themselves have not issued any definitive interpretations of the parables. Even the dogmatic churches have no official, parable interpretations which believers must accept. Actually, there are many parables that rarely get discussed at all in sermons or during the religious indoctrination of members. This is all very surprising given the central importance that Jesus apparently gave to the parables in His teaching ministry.

When theologians have offered parable interpretations they see these sayings as relating to either moral teachings, prophecy or church sacraments. However, these approaches are inconsistent with the secrecy in which Jesus wrapped these sayings. Jesus Himself said that regarding attempts to understand His parables by outsiders “they may look but not see, and hear but not understand” (Mark 4:11, Luke 8:11). Is Jesus referring to attempts at literal interpretation that may appear reasonable and rational but actually miss a deeper meaning? Furthermore, are these common interpretations actually hindering a deeper, mystical understanding of the parables (Luke 11:52)?

The secrecy surrounding the parables also argues against the typical theological explanations. Are not morality, prophecy and sacramental instruction suitable for the entire congregation of believers? Recognizing this incongruity and looking for something deeper, a few modern commentators interpret the parables as psychological wisdom being suitable perhaps only for the spiritually mature.

However, this paper contends that Jesus was not just a moralist, prophet, priest or psychologist. He was also a mystic – one who had direct and intimate experience of Divine Reality. Granted, the parables can be used to justify or illustrate moral, prophetic or psychological teachings in Sunday sermons but this is not what we propose Jesus used them for in His private disciple instruction.

Rather, Jesus used many of the parables as keys by which His spiritually-mature disciples could open the inner doors to direct communion with God. It is with this assumption that we approach the parables. The secrecy was and is necessary to prevent powerful meditation methods from abuse by those unworthy who would misuse the energies accessed.

Furthermore, we will use these mysterious sayings in a way similar to how we suggest Jesus may have done so Himself. Instead of verbose commentary, Jesus may have given His close disciples hints or keys which would guide them to an inner, personal realization of divine reality during silent meditation.

Thus, we find it more helpful to consider the meditation parables to be a means to direct, inner experience of the Kingdom of God rather than an attempt to describe that hidden realm with words.

A few general keys can be given now. Saint Augustine wrote: “When one encounters numbers in Scripture one would be well advised to consider a mystical interpretation.” Unfortunately, many of the commentators on the Gospels from the Oriental East failed to appreciate the significance of numbers.

Origen, the early Christian theologian, also taught that there are levels of meaning to Scripture beneath the apparent, literal interpretations.

Actually, the word parable itself means a saying or narrative that represents or runs parallel to something other than that which is apparent in a surface or literal reading.

How we approach a parable will determine its effect on us. To begin with, one has to be deeply motivated to uncover its inner meaning. A casual interest will yield only superficial results. Also, we contend that since they came from the heart of Jesus they can only be understood with the heart and not merely with the brain. Hence, the deepest intentions of the parables have eluded the theologians who don't themselves practice silent, heart-centered meditation.

Thus the Hesychasts, mystics of the Eastern Christian Church, tell us that only by stilling the mind are the deeper meanings of the Bible revealed to the seeker. Furthermore, they state that a true theologian is one who speaks from inner revelation rather than from logical, scholastic reasoning.

Finally, all old dogmatic preconceptions must, at least temporarily, be suspended if deeper insights are to be found. Otherwise, the parables will merely be mirrors that reflect our indoctrinated assumptions rather than windows through which the Kingdom of God can be perceived.

One of those assumptions concerns what Jesus meant by “the Kingdom (Reign) of God” – a phrase in many of His parables. If we assume Jesus is referring to an external, socio-political realm mirrored in the earthly Church hierarchy and fully realizable only at the “end of the world” then we will arrive at the same parable interpretations that rational, scholarly theologians have been advocating for nearly two thousand years. However, if one is open to the possibility that Jesus used the metaphoric language of parables to guide His disciples into deep, mystical here-and-now experiences of God then radically, new insights may emerge.

The parable interpretations suggested below will probably be very different from anything the reader has ever encountered or considered before. This is because underlying the following interpretive keys is the radical proposition that Jesus taught meditation.

These insights were born in this author's heart during deep-silent meditation and supported by a thirty-year comparative study of the mystical writings of a cross-section of the world's great spiritual traditions. Furthermore, this author has recently discovered that a number of the Eastern Christian mystics of the Philokalia tradition have also given an interior interpretation to some of the key metaphors of Christ's parables.

Thus, the reader who continues will be confronted with a choice: dismiss outright the interpretations offered here because they contradict well-established authoritarian dogma or listen with discernment to the still, small voice within. What will it be?

One final recommendation: Each parable may be considered to be a piece of a larger puzzle. It is only when the larger picture begins to emerge that we can clearly recognize the individual pieces. So the reader may find that a particular parable interpretation becomes more plausible as the various pieces of the parable puzzle are put together.

Finally, a word of caution is called for here. The intent of this paper is NOT to teach meditation. Such instruction should come personally and directly from a competent teacher. Rather, the goal of this paper is to provide some guidelines for discerning a meditation practice that is consistent with what Jesus privately taught to His closest disciples.

## **The Meditation Parables**

### **1 - The Five Wise and the Five Foolish Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-12)**

What is the function of a bridesmaid in relation to the bride? She is an attendant to the bride. Females are also receptive by nature.

What is the function of a physical sense in relation to the mind (soul)? Can the five senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell be considered the attendants of the soul? In physiology, the sensors are said to be receptors for the mind.

If we take this parable personally and apply it to our body and soul what might the number five represent? How many physical senses do we have?

There is a spiritually wise use of the senses which conserves life energy (prana, chi) and a spiritually foolish use of them that dissipates life energy. When the senses tempt a wise person toward dissipation she/he says no to the temptation.

There are two ways to still the senses. One way is through exhaustion and the other is through disciplined conservation.

Did you ever try to meditate when physically exhausted? Were you able to enter into the cave of the heart or were you shut out? The word meditation comes from meditari – being returned to the center.

Mystics describe the soul as feminine and when married to the Spirit it is referred to as a bride. Yogis call the withdrawal of attention from the senses into the cave of the heart as “pratyahara.” It is in the cave of the heart that they say the mystical marriage to God occurs.

Watchfulness, both outer and inner, is a key to the contemplative meditation of the Hesychasts. “Divine things are more clearly manifested to him who withdraws into the recesses of the heart...” Saint Augustine.

## **2 - Girding Your Loins, Keeping Lamps Burning (Luke 12:35-36)**

“Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning; and ye yourselves be like men who wait for their lord to return from a wedding; so that when he comes and knocks they may open for him immediately.”

To gird one’s loins literally means to pull up the lower portion of one’s robe and fasten it to the waist. This practice prevented the robe from scraping against the ground or becoming an obstacle during certain kinds of physical work or activity. More generally, it means to be ready for action.

If one looks in a dictionary one will also find that the word “loins” is used as a literary euphemism – “the area of the genitals regarded as the seat of strength and generative power.”

Meditating yogis practice raising the procreative energy up to the solar plexus and heart centers to conserve and store the precious life force “treasure”. In advanced yogis this results in the “withering of the fig tree.” (see gospel story)

Keeping the sensory “lamps” burning allows one to turn inward in contemplation through the opening of an inner door. Some yogis report that the rising of energy makes a knocking sound against the inner door to the heart. “Seek and ye shall find, knock and the door will be opened.” .....

Mystical union is often described as a marriage or wedding of the soul to God.

## **3 – The Three “Investments” (Matthew 25:14-30)**

This parable appears in Matthew’s Gospel immediately after the ten bridesmaids parable discussed above. Are they related? Could they both be concerned with life energy (prana, chi).

A spiritual master may infuse a disciple with life energy in order to facilitate spiritual unfoldment. The disciple receives the quantity of energy that she or he is capable of absorbing and using. The more energy a disciple already has the more additional energy he or she is capable of receiving and utilizing. It has to do with the developed capacity of the subtle nervous system. To he who has more shall be given, Matthew 25:29.

There are various means to impart this life energy. It can be transmitted directly. “...he breathed on them and said unto them; Receive ye the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). Also, sometimes material substances such as bread, wine, or water are used as intermediaries. The disciple can then receive the grace by ingesting or simply touching substances that have been blessed (infused) with the life energy. This is known to yogis.

This transmission of energy is sometimes done to initiate the disciple into a higher level of spiritual growth. Hence, it is called a “spiritual initiation.”

The disciple is given the energy with the expectation by the master that it will be used in meditation by the disciple to cultivate even more energy. A sufficient level of spiritual energy is necessary for

achieving spiritual breakthroughs. However, the disciple who is careless or negligent can fail to accumulate more energy and may even lose through dissipation the spiritual grace that was given. From him who has not it shall be taken away, Matthew 25:29.

A spiritual master may go away to minister to others only to return later to see what spiritual progress was made with the spiritual “investment” he made in the disciples he blessed. He may subsequently transmit even more life energy to those disciples who made good use of the first gift given. Other disciples, not so conscientious, may be reprimanded.

#### **4 - Leaven in Three Measures (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:21)**

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid (mixed) in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

Some mystics consider the Holy Spirit to be both the breath of God and the Divine Mother immanent in creation.

What might the number three represent? Yogis say that we have three bodies – physical, emotional-mental, and bliss – which surround the spiritual self. Furthermore, yoga teaches that the emotional-mental body consists of three layers – intellect, mind, and life energy (see parable 16 - Laborers in the Field). The first three chakras correspond to these bodies.

By conscious breathing, these three bodies can be infused with life energy (prana, chi). When infused, they become less dense and hence transparent to the inner radiance of the spiritual center.

These encapsulating bodies can also be made more transparent during meditation by alternating tension and relaxation at deeper and more subtle levels while consciously breathing in life energy.

This inner process is continued until the whole being manifests the radiance of spiritual light.

Note: In the kneading of dough air as well as leaven is mixed with the dough during the physical squeezing and releasing action which occurs during kneading.

#### **5 - The Unfruitful Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)**

A tree is an apt metaphor for the nervous system of the physical and subtle bodies of the soul. An unfruitful tree is one who has not achieved enlightenment before physical death. By “fertilizing” the three bodies with prana (life force, chi) in meditation one can extend ones lifespan perhaps enough to achieve enlightenment before death.

## **6 - The Candle Under a Basket (Matthew 5:14-15, Mark 4:21, Luke 11:33)**

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.”

Is the body the house of the indwelling spirit?

If concealed by the shells of the three material bodies, the inner light is hidden and the body is dark. When the spiritual light is fully revealed all seven energy centers (chakras) along the spine are enlightened and the body becomes full of light.

Saint Paul spoke of circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:29).

Does the Jewish menorah, with its seven candlesticks, symbolically represent the seven-chakra subtle-body energy system?

How does the spiritual radiance that goes forth into the world from an enlightened individual affect others?

## **7 – Sitting at the Banquet Table (Luke 14:7-12)**

The above banquet teaching is introduced in the Gospel of Luke by saying “He then told His disciples this parable: when you sit at a banquet table don’t take the highest seat..... but the lowest

Since the editor of Luke tells us it’s a parable we should not assume the obvious, literal interpretation. Luke 14:15 has one of guests saying “Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.” Eating bread in the kingdom of God is a good metaphor for meditation.

The word “table” can be a metaphor for the human body. We refer to the legs of a table and the head of a table. The seats of a table could then be a reference to the chakras of the body. Note: the third eye chakra is often referred to as the “seat of the soul.”

Hence, the advice of Jesus is to start at the lowest chakra in meditation and wait to be drawn up to a higher chakra. To start high before the lower chakras have been purified makes one vulnerable to a fall. Note: the lowest seat can also be a reference to the physical body itself.

The lowest major chakra is located at the base of the spine. However, if the entire body is considered then one should note that there is a chakra in the sole of the foot. “Unless I wash your feet you cannot receive the Holy Spirit.” .....

Jesus said He would not drink the fruit of the vine until He entered the Kingdom. Cite gospel A literalist thinks Jesus is referring to drinking an alcoholic beverage in heaven. A yogi sees the vine as a good metaphor for the nervous system of the subtle anatomy. Jesus is referring to drinking the divine nectar, amrita, which flows down into the body from the pineal gland (sixth chakra) during deep states of meditation.

## **8 – Excuses for not Meditating (Luke 14: 15-21)**

Note: The following parable follows the one above in Luke. Are they related?  
see kjv

The call to come into the banquet feast is the constant pull toward the Center of our being that we resist when we reject the attractive force of Divine Love.

“Examining the field” is what we are doing when our attention is drawn outward to the surface of life. Having “purchased the field” we are attached to it.

The desire to evaluate five oxen is the second excuse. What is the significance of the number five? We have five senses. They are like oxen which pull us in the field of life. They pull our attention outward. We have purchased them. Hence, we are attached to them. We are also constantly evaluating our sensory impressions with judgments.

The outward pull of the senses toward the surface of life results in the third excuse – human attachments.

## **9 – The Light of the Body (Luke 11:34-36, Matthew 6:22-23)**

“The light of the body is the eye, therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness.

Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.

If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.”

In Luke’s Gospel this parable follows immediately the parable above concerning light under a bushel basket. Does this suggest a relationship between the two?

Mystics of all spiritual traditions speak of focusing attention of a single, interior point during meditation.

When we perceive with the two eyes of the brain and its nervous system we experience the duality of good and evil. Is this eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil?

When we perceive with the single, interior eye of the spiritual heart we experience Divine Love, unity and non-duality. Is this eating from the tree of life?

*“the eye with which I see God is the eye with which God sees me” – Meister Eckhart describing one of his interior, meditation experiences.*

“And with the eye of my soul saw above the same eye of my soul, above my mind, the Unchangeable Light ... He who knows the truth knows that light: and he that knows it knoweth eternity.” – Saint Augustine

## **10 - The Mustard Seed ( Matthew13:3`32; Mark 4:31,32; Luke 13:18,19)**

The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

In the Chandogya Upanishad 3:14.3 a “grain of mustard” is used as a metaphor for the Atma (Divine Spirit) located in the spiritual, human heart. It is described as being simultaneously extremely small and extremely large.

In metaphysics air is the element associated with the mind. A bird is to the air as a thought is to the mind.

During meditation when attention is focused steadily on the interior, central point of the spiritual heart the Divine Spirit manifests in the treelike-subtle anatomy of the soul. Thinking is stilled and thoughts come to rest.

“God is a circle with a center everywhere and a circumference nowhere.”

“May the star of Christ rise in your heart” Peter

“I am the bright and morning star” Jesus, Revelation

“The three wise men followed the star to the place of Christ’s birth.”

## **11 - Stages of Unfoldment (Mark 4:28)**

Immediately before the mustard seed parable above, Mark’s Gospel records another parable which is certainly related. The kingdom of God is compared to a seed that grows from the ground without human knowledge of how it grows. It is mysterious.

Then Jesus describes the sequence of events: “first the stalk, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.”

If we assume that Jesus is not giving His agrarian audience a lesson in Agriculture 101 then the above description of growth could be an accurate, metaphoric depiction of how Kundalini moves upward through the spinal column, into the brain and then flowering in the crown chakra.

## **12- The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4, Matt 18:12, Thomas)**

“What man among you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it.”

“the lost sheep is the largest” Gospel of Thomas

The number 100 symbolize completeness so having 99 is being incomplete. The Upanishad states that there are 100 subtle nerves or nadis that radiate out of the subtle heart. The mystical Gospel of Thomas adds that the lost sheep was the greatest of them all. Could this greatest one be a metaphorical reference to the sushumna, the central nadi which is the greatest of them all. In meditation one leaves, withdraws one attention from all the other nadis in search of this great one – the straight and narrow way. Straight and narrow is the road and few be that find it” xxxxxxxx

### **13 - The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8)**

“What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, does she not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she finds it?”

It was a custom for a woman to wear a head band with ten pieces of silver. If she should lose one of them it was thought to bring misfortune.

The house has been used as a metaphor for the human body by Jesus in other parables. There is a saying in Eastern meditation that “breath sweeps the mind.”

Yoga teaches that there are nine “gates” in the body through which life energy can be lost: two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, the mouth, the anus and sexual organ. The tenth gate is the crown chakra which leads to liberation.

### **14 – The Hidden Treasure in a Field (Matthew 13:44)**

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hid in a field; that when a man found it, he hid for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.”

Do we know what spiritual treasure lies hidden beneath the field of our ordinary awareness?

How can one discover and retrieve the treasure hidden beneath surface awareness?

Why do those who discover the inner treasure often find it necessary to initially hide their discovery from those around them? What would happen if the discovery was prematurely shared - especially to those not ready? “Don’t cast your pearls to swine,” Jesus.

In what sense do we not own our surface awareness and the treasure that lies beneath it?

What must we get rid of to become the owner of that treasure? What does it mean to own it?

### **15 - Three Types of Ground ( Matthew 13:4-9, Mark 4:3-9, Luke 8:5-8)**

Seeds are sown in four locations: off to the side of a road, where they were eaten by birds; on hard, stony ground where they withered; on thorny ground where they choked; and on good soil where they flourished. The parable ends with the phrase “He who has ears to hear let him hear.” This indicates

that there is a hidden meaning in this parable for the spiritually mature. It might also be a reference to hearing the cosmic OM from the center point of the soul.

Living off –center, away from the straight and narrow road (the sushumna) we fail to grow from our center point. Thoughts (birds) consume our attention and vital energy.

Yoga teaches there are three states of nature called gunas. Tamas guna is hard and inert. Rajas guna is agitated and restless. Sattva guna is serene and most conducive to the growth and unfoldment of central seed-point (nada bindu) of the soul.

### **16 - Weeds Among the Wheat (Matthew 13:24)**

When a farmer who had sown seeds of wheat in his field is asleep, his enemy came and sowed weed seeds among the wheat. The servants of the farmer discovered the deed and asked the farmer if they should pull up the weeds. The farmer said “No, lest while you gather up the tares (weeds) you root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

There is a similar Buddhist parable in which creepers take the place of weeds.

Regarding meditation, one is often advised to focus on the positive to cultivate the innate divinity from the center point. Putting attention on negatives sown by the ego to try to root them out through rational means may cause one to lose contact with the Inner Light. When the inner Divine Light manifests to sufficient intensity it will automatically burn away the negatives leaving our true Divine Self to shine un-obscured.

### **17 - The Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45)**

“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who when he found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

This parable occurs in Matthew’s Gospel immediately after the Hidden Treasure parable above. Do they share any common themes?

How was the discovery of the “one pearl” made? By diving deeply to the center of the heart in meditation? “Dive deep for the pearl within.” Ammachi

Could the “one pearl of great price” and the “mustard seed” both be metaphors pointing in the same direction?

## **18 - Laborers in the Field (Matthew 20:1-16)**

Jesus begins this parable by saying that “the kingdom of heaven is like.” He then goes on to describe a landowner who hires five groups of laborers to work in his vineyard. The hiring is sequential and spaced throughout the day. The first group is hired near dawn and the fifth and last group is hired late in the day. All the groups work from the time they are hired until the end of the day. Curiously, when it is time to pay them, the groups are paid in the reverse order in which they were hired. The big surprise though is that all the groups received the same pay regardless of how long they worked.

Yoga teaches that we have not just a physical body but also other normally invisible and subtle bodies. The five bodies (sheaths, koshas) are called the Annamaya (physical), Vijnanamaya (intellect), Manomaya (mind), Pranamaya (life energy) and the Anandamaya (bliss). These five sheaths cover the hidden, radiant, true self – the Atman. “Don’t hide your light under a basket” - Jesus.

As one goes inward during meditation one engages (“hires”) the five sheaths sequentially starting with the physical (most outer) and ending with the most subtle (most inner) Anandamaya Kosha until one reaches the radiance of the inner, true self. The light from that radiant self then manifests outwardly penetrating the koshas in the reverse order that they were originally encountered during the meditative journey inward – the innermost(last “hired”) being closest to the radiant center receive the light first. However, it is the same Divine Light that is gracing each of the koshas regardless of how long they were engaged in meditation.

### **A Note to the Reader**

This is a work in progress and thus is subject to change. Your comments or questions are encouraged.

Keys to additional parables are also available free of charge.

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