

Have you ever been so excited about something you wanted to learn all you could about it? I'm that way. Three years ago, I read everything I could about pocketknives. This past year, I took an interest in shoes and how they're made. The best shoes are made in England. I don't have any English shoes, but as soon as we get our boys through college, I'm going to buy a pair. This past week was my birthday and Joan gave me a hurricane lamp made in Germany, so now I'm fascinated with oil lamps.

When I was 19, I became curious about God. This has been, besides Joan, my one enduring interest. I would visit the Bible bookstore in Plainfield and read books about God. I couldn't afford to buy them, so just snuck in and hid from the owner, Bill Strafford, and read the books without buying them. One day, while perusing the sale shelf, I came across a book called *God's Answer for Everything* for the bargain price of \$1.99. It was a surprisingly thin volume for a book purporting to be the repository of divine wisdom, though it seemed promising at the time. The one-word topics were arranged alphabetically with a corresponding Scriptural citation. I had been thinking of going to college to study theology, but decided to buy the book instead and save myself money, time, and trouble.

Alas, the book was not nearly as comprehensive as the title promised and within a week I realized I'd been snookered. There is no one book that contains everything we need to know. Some books are more helpful than others, but no one book contains all the wisdom we need to negotiate life. Not even the Bible, which, though it speaks about many important matters and is profoundly helpful, leaves many important subjects unmentioned.

The one thing most of the world's religions have in common is that they each claim their book or prophet or founder has a special knowledge others don't. Christians believe the Bible is superior to the Koran, Muslims believe the Koran is better than the Torah. We Quakers prefer our *Faith and Practice* over Joseph Smith's *Book of Mormon*. This is a big problem with religion, it too readily dismisses the wisdom and value of other religions, traditions, and philosophies.

It isn't a new problem, humans have always held these kind of biases. In the Gospel of John, when Philip met Jesus, Philip was so impressed he went to Nathaniel and began telling him about Jesus.

Nathaniel asked, "Where is this man from?"

Philip said "Nazareth."

Nathaniel asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

I imagine there were a lot of people who were dismissive of Jesus because of where he was from, just as people today can be dismissive of insights and teachings that don't come from their own tradition.

I had a transcendent moment this week at Rotary. I joined Rotary several months ago because I was impressed by their polio eradication and clean water programs and wanted to be a part of them. So every Thursday I go up to the Mayberry Café in Danville and eat lunch with the Rotarians and listen to an interesting speaker and try to do my part to help others. There are millions of Rotarians around the world and each week when we meet we repeat what is called the Four Way Test—four questions to help gauge whether what we're about to do is the right thing to do. Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

When I joined Rotary, I just liked that they helped provide clean water and kept kids from getting polio, then I stumbled upon this wise method of moral conduct that I never dreamed I'd find in the Mayberry Café in Danville. I mean, the Mayberry Café isn't exactly a Socratic portico in ancient Greece. For crying out loud, they serve a Goober chicken sandwich. But there it was, the Four Way Test, this wonderful bit of wisdom recited and practiced the world over. And this past week, it struck me what a marvelous source of wisdom the Four Way Test is.

Also this week, I heard about a book called *The Four Agreements*, written by a man named Don Miguel Ruiz. I had noticed an excerpt from *The Four Agreements* posted on our meeting's website, but I wasn't familiar with that book, and was talking with someone about it and they said, "Oh, you don't want to read that book." (Whenever someone tells me not to read a book, I immediately want to read it.) They said, "You don't want to read that. The author believes some really odd things. He believes the pyramids in Mexico have spiritual power. Isn't that weird?"

"No weirder than believing Moses turned the Nile River into blood and caused the sky to rain frogs," I said.

Now, I'm not sure about the pyramid power thing, but the four agreements for personal fulfillment and happiness, summarized by Don Miguel Ruiz are pretty good.

- 1.) Be impeccable with your word.
- 2.) Don't take anything personally.
- 3.) Don't make assumptions.
- 4.) Always do your best.

That's pretty good stuff.

Just because something comes to us from a Nazareth kind-of-place-or-person, doesn't mean we should discount it.

I was so excited this past Friday when the snow began falling. I bought a snow blower several years ago and I love using it. I clear our driveway, then clear our neighbor's driveway. That's always fun. Our neighbors don't like us, and when I clean their driveway it freaks them out. Then I go dig out my mother and father and their neighbor, then my brother Doug's driveway, then my sister's house.

I'd just finished cleaning all those driveways yesterday and Herb Denny called me and said, "Hey, let's take our snow blowers down to the meetinghouse and clean the walks." Herb likes his snow blower, too. So we drove down here to clean the walks, but someone had beat us to it. And I was really glad, because I was pretty tired by then.

Here's my point. Wisdom is like help. When you really need help, you don't always care where it comes from, you're just glad to get it. Wisdom is like that. We should care less about where it comes from, and just be grateful for it. So over the next eight weeks, I want us to be thinking about the wisdom we've gotten from unexpected sources.

Nathaniel asked Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" The answer is, "Yes, indeed, and from all corners of the world and all traditions."