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Flexibility by the numbers

By Elise L. Moore

I was struggling with a required calculus course in college. I would pay attention in class, do the homework, study long hours — and then do miserably on the tests.

Was there something about me that made it so I just couldn't do it? Had God given me only limited intelligence, or ability only in certain subjects? Was I restricted to only one way of thinking? I believe that God gives His children intelligence, but also persistence, perseverance, determination. I realized I couldn't give up. I needed the God-like qualities of diligence and patience along with the determination to think in new and fresh ways. I wanted more than just the ability to correctly calculate. I wanted to *understand*.

I connected with a guy who already understood calculus. I told him I wanted to learn to think like he did. He agreed to help me, and I soon found out what my problem was. When he would explain a concept to me, I could actually feel the rigidity of my thinking. I couldn't relate the rules of calculus to what I saw in the world around me.

So he would explain again, and again, and again. I worked hard at being more flexible with how I was conceptualizing. When the first breakthrough came, I was amazed. I had opened my reasoning just a little bit, let go of preconceived images of how things were supposed to be, and bingo! I understood the concept he was explaining. It was more than just being able to do the problems. I grasped the idea behind it.

He helped me through the entire semester that way. Gradually my thinking process became a little less rigid and more willing to accept new perspectives. I began understanding the concepts the second time he explained them instead of the fourth or fifth. I got an "A" in the course. But more importantly, I learned to think in fresh, less rigid ways.

The ability to think this way has helped in solving problems spiritually as well. Instead of resisting a spiritual concept that doesn't fit my preconceived notion of how things should be, I try to be willing to listen for God's explanation. Even if spiritual ideas are not tangible, even if spiritual concepts seem difficult to accept, I've found that if I'm flexible, I'll understand.