

August 9, 2020  
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Title: Lovingkindness: Images of God  
Text: John14:8-10



The church talks a lot about Love. We are told to love God, to love one another and even to love ourself. We've all heard it preached, but I think what the church has often failed to do is teach us **how**. We are told **to** love, but we struggle to practice it. That's what I want us to do. That's what I want for all of us: to become practitioners of the way of Jesus, to learn how to love as he loved, to learn to live lovingkindness.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro earned rabbinic ordination in 1981, and a PH.D. in religion in 1985. Over the past forty years he has been a chaplain, a congregational rabbi, a business consultant, a university professor, and an author of three dozen books on religion and spirituality.

I met Rabbi Rami in February at a conference I attended in Florida where he was a keynote speaker. Since then, I have savored several of his books. In this sermon series I am sharing from his book, *The Sacred Art of Lovingkindness: Preparing to Practice*. In it he enumerates, thirteen attributes of lovingkindness, and he offers practices we can engage to increase our personal deeds and attitudes of lovingkindness. As we desire to grow in the likeness of Christ, taking up the practices of lovingkindness seems like a fitting path. The question that guides his book:

“Will you engage this moment, with kindness or with cruelty, with love or with fear, with generosity or scarcity, with a joyous heart or an embittered one?” One is the path to living in lovingkindness. It is a path that connects us with the kingdom of God. The realms of the kingdom of God are kindness, love, generosity and joy. These live within as Jesus said, “the kingdom of God is within you” Luke 17:20

The realm of gehenna contains: cruelty, fear, scarcity, hardened heart. Their possibility lives within us also. It is our choice in which kingdom we will reside and which we will bring forth into the world. You are born in the image of God, but living out the likeness of God is our choice. We are making that choice every moment.

When we see the Image of God in others we cannot help but live out the likeness of God in ourselves. You are made in the image of God. It is vital that you know who you are if you are to live with lovingkindness. Rabi Shaprio uses the terms spacious mind and narrow mind. “Narrow mind imagines itself as separate from the world. It is isolated, often alienated, and sees the world as a zero-sum game in which success depends on another's failure. Scarcity defines the world of the narrow mind. Fear is its primary emotion and anger is its most common expression.” Compare that to Spacious mind.

“Spacious mind sees the self as part of the Whole. Spacious mind engages life from a place of **interdependence** and compassion. As spacious mind sees it. Abundance is the hallmark of the world. Love rather than fear is its emotional foundation, and lovingkindness rather than anger is its defining characteristic.” This isn't dualistic; it isn't one verses the other. Spacious mind includes the narrow mind and expands it to a larger vision.

Hear these words from gospel of John14:8-10

Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?’

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.

Philip is looking for a God that is out there. Show us where God is, he says to Jesus. Jesus reveals God is within. God is within Jesus, within Peter, within all. God is not A being. God is BEING- all that is was and ever shall be. The ground/ center of all.

Jesus says in effect, "You want to look at something and call it God. Then look at me. I am in God and God is in me. God is all of me, though I am not all of God."

A familiar metaphor comes to us from many traditions to explain this. Just as the ocean is the wave and yet the wave is not all the ocean. I am in you and you are in me and we are all in God and God is in us. Any one of us is not all of God, but God is in us. That's a really huge, hard concept to grasp especially when we have so often been taught otherwise. I was taught that I was a wretched sinner. I was not taught every Sunday that I was a beloved child of God. I learned to hate myself because I thought I was supposed to be perfect.

The church has to do a better job of teaching sacredness of life. all life, of teaching and affirming the creation of each and every one. How different would our world be if Christianity had not lost from the beginning that all life was sacred. What if we had taught that Jews are sacred, that Muslims are sacred? Instead of launching Crusades and genocides, what if we had cherished the image of God in all?

How different our nation might be - if Christians had remembered from the beginning that all people are made in the image of God to be honored with dignity and valued as children of God instead of as possessions. How different if that truth was lived out for all people of every skin hue? How different our world will be if all our children are taught their sacred worth, and taught to recognize the sacred worth of every soul.

What a glorious, wonderful mission before us to teach all we are made in the Image of God. Without spacious mind, we are fearful, anxious, alienated and alone. That is the human condition from which we need salvation. That is the salvation Jesus points us to and teaches. Our first step towards living in lovingkindness is claim our new identity. sacred and beloved images of God. Our first step of living lovingkindness starts with our eyes. With spacious eyes we learn to see ourselves with gentle eyes to recognize the divine, the Christ, God within. Then to learn to see all others with those eyes as well.

Each one we see carries God within. God as One of Us. Our faith announces Emmanuel, God with us. Each one of us as bearing lovingkindness of God.

Our first practice of lovingkindness is Visualization of YHVH One of the most often used Hebrew names for God is four letter YHVH- Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey - Yahweh.

יהוה

When it is written vertically, it looks like this:  
which is the shape of a human form.



Here's another view to help you see.



Each one of us is the Name of God incarnate.

So, stand up if you can safely do so. IF there is another person in the room with you ,  
I want you to draw the Hebrew Name of God on each other's body. If there is not another person in the room with you, visualize someone in front of you. You have a virtual partner.

Starting on the right side of the forehead, the first letter is YOD. It looks like the number 7 .  
Your hand goes across the forehead and down the nose to the chin. Yod, the first letter of of God's Holy name.

The second letter is HEY; it is the shape of the shoulders and arms. Start with both hands on your partners sternum - physically or virtually - draw out to the shoulders , then come down both arms. (there is a little space between the shoulder and the right arm.)

The third letter is VAV- it runs down the torso- or spinal column.

The fourth letter of Gods' Name is another HEY. It is a line across the hips and down both legs to the feet.

Practice, Physically or Virtually - Visualize the Name of God on your Partner. The Name of Yaweh is the body itself. Close your eyes, see the name of God - not as paint on top of the outside not as skeleton within, see the body itself as the Name of God. Touch

your forehead, say aloud "Image of God!" Touch your partner- say aloud "Image of God!" Go to the mirror. Touch your reflection, say aloud, "Image of God!" Pick up every photograph of your loved ones or open up your picture app on your phone. Go through all of them naming each one , "Image of God!"

Visualize your body when you lie down to go to sleep tonight .when you wake up in the morning. See yourself as the Name of God. You walk through your day, to the mailbox, at the grocery aisle, "Image of God!" is incarnate in your body. We must learn to see the name YHWH in everyone we encounter, all day long.

There is a Jewish legend that says each of us has an angel who walks before us calling out, " Behold the Image and Likeness of God" Honor your angel and hear everyone else's angel. See yourself as the word of God manifest in time and space, and you will grow and awaken the spacious mind that is your holy and most true self, and you will plant seeds of lovingkindness in every step.