

August 16, 2020  
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Title: Lovingkindness as Creativity, Compassion, and Grace  
Text: Gospel of Thomas 70 and Job



Jesus asked his disciples to do as he did, to follow in his way, which means to love as he loved. So regardless of any of our differences, uniqueness, or variety of opinions one thing people of faith might agree on is our intention to grow in our practice of lovingkindness.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro says the first attribute of lovingkindness is recognizing you are made in the image of God. The second attribute of lovingkindness is recognizing everyone else is also made in the image of God. All are made in the image of God. So last week, we looked at a name for God in Hebrew: YHWH. We practiced seeing our body as embodiment of God Name.

Our bodies show the name of God walking, talking, living into the world. As we practice seeing all bodies as God's name incarnate, that helps us to think and act towards all in lovingkindness.

YHWH is common name for God in Hebrew. Another name for God in our Hebrew Bible is EL which is Creating. God is creating. Creation is ongoing. We are creating; we are always in the process of being created.

Rabbi Shapiro names his third attribute of lovingkindness as cultivating creativity which is realizing that you are an ongoing creative act of God. Rabbi speaks of creativity that is needed in order to live out lovingkindness. Creativity is breaking down the old. It is breaking out of the old molds, breaking out of old ways of thinking, so that the new, unknown of us can emerge. Living lovingkindness requires our tapping into creative thinking, fresh thinking about everything.

Living lovingkindness is bringing forth you that is unique. It is freeing ourselves from all the conditioning of religion, society, culture, family that would press us into a single mold. For then we think that everyone has to be like us. We go about pressing our mold upon others in order for them to be acceptable to us. It is also us trying to press the mold of our making onto life. We try to make life conform to the paradigm we have created.

Lovingkindness is seeing our uniqueness as the image of God. It is seeing and valuing other's uniqueness as well and learning to celebrate the different expressions of God in all of us. Then, instead of judging how different we are from one another, we can behold in awe and wonder.

Rabbi Rami names the fourth attribute of lovingkindness as compassion, by this he means the capacity to be open to life as it is without trying to make it other than it is. His fifth attribute of lovingkindness is grace. Here he defines grace as the ability to engage life as it is without wishing it were other than it is. Grace is being present in the moment just as it is. All of these, creative thinking, compassion and grace shape our attitude - towards ourself, towards others, and towards all of life, and our attitude is what enables or hinders our ability to live lovingkindness.



If we remain trapped in our own feelings, our narrow mind, we will only act in ways that perpetuate those feelings, and that will keep us separate - pushing against others and pushing against life. If our hearts are closed and fearful, our dealings with the world will be false and shallow. It is a self-perpetuating circle, self-fulfilling prophesy, we find what we are looking for drama or love. When you see the world with narrow mindedness, YOU LIVE OUT A DRAMA of YOUR OWN MAKING.

In Gospel of Thomas 70 Jesus says,

If you bring forth that which is within you,  
that which is within you will save you.

If you do not bring forth that which is within you,  
that which is within you will destroy you.

Bringing forth the kingdom of God that is within is bringing forth the spacious mind is bringing forth the image of God in compassion and love, in grace and acceptance. There we find salvation and live lovingkindness into the world. How do you know if you are living in a narrow mind or a spacious mind? If you are coming from a narrow mind you will find yourself experiencing anxiety and fear. If you are coming from a spacious and creative mind, you will experience tranquility and compassion. What do you feel within? Your experience will tell you what eyes you are peering through: narrow or spacious mind eyes. It is a good way to step back- to see the larger view- to see the moment with compassion and love then live in the moment of grace. Compassion returns us to the world, in the present moment and lovingkindness allows us to engage it fully as it is.

The idea of living in the moment without wishing it were different, without wishing others were different, and thereby trying to make others into what we want them to be, and trying to make life follow the order we want it to be is a great challenge. The Story of Job from the Hebrew scriptures meets that challenge. Job is a character who is suffering greatly. In the story, he loses everything- family, home, health, reputation, his friends try to convince him that he has brought all this calamity upon himself. His friends want him to change, to repent in order to fit their notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice. Job maintains his self. He knows who he is. He is a righteous man. He doesn't know why he is suffering, but he is a step further than his friends in spacious mind. He is willing to learn something, and he demands God to show up and explain. In the end God does show up, but there is no explanation given. There is no justification for Job's suffering. Suffering is not as punishment for anything Job has done, it just is what it is. God makes it very clear that all human notions about what should happen are human notions. Human paradigms that we thrust upon the world and expect the world to live out our will hinder lovingkindness and spacious mind.

The story of Job shows that life is what it is, and God is what is. To expect God to comply with human ways is ludicrous and arrogant. The world is not ordered to make sense according to the ways we would dictate. It is not humans who created the world according to our design. In the end Job realizes the truth of this assertion, and falls silent.

Rabi Rami maintains, only when our stories fall silent, only when we stop insisting that God fit into our neat boxes of our self-serving perceptions, only when we can engage reality as it is then we know real grace. Then we can live in lovingkindness.

Our practice for today is called metta (which means lovingkindness.) First we will pray metta for ourself. Then we will pray metta for another. Then we will pray metta for all. Begin with a breath. Stretch your bodies, ground and center yourself, settle in and breathe. You are made in the image of God. Pray each line after me.

May I be at peace with what is. ...  
May my heart remain open ....  
May I be free from fear.....  
May I be healed with love .....  
May I be a source of healing and love for all beings..... breathe.

Bring a loved one to mind. See them in as much detail as possible. Imagine his/her body bearing the image of God. Pray each line for your loved one.

May you be at peace with what is. ...  
May your heart remain open ....  
May you be free from fear.....  
May you be healed with love .....  
May you be a source of healing and love for all beings..... breathe.

I offer this metta prayer to you to repeat it as many times a day as you need to hear it for yourself, for your loved ones, for those you struggle to love and finally for all the world.

Breathe. Pray each line once more for all the world.

May all be at peace  
May the hearts of all people be open to themselves and to all others  
May all be free from fear...  
May all know the healing of love ....  
May all be sources of healing and love for all that is.

May this practice lead us into Being lovingkindness today, tomorrow and all days. Amen.