

SERMON FOR THE PENTECOST 22, 2011

Reverend Errol Lloyd Narain

COMPASSION

I have tried to focus on the texts this morning but could not get away from our learning at our Wednesday evening, multiversity conversations. Much of the learning focused on compassion.

The talks by various speakers, merely 10-15 minutes long, have been fascinating perspectives and ideas worth sharing. More valuable, was the 21st Century global perspectives of the different contributors. We embraced and welcomed speakers from the Judeo-Christian tradition (David Goleman), the Muslim tradition (Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf) and from the Hindu tradition (Swami Saraswati). Each of these speakers had a unique perspective about humanity.

DAVID GOLEMAN

Amidst the distractions of urban trance, focus on the one being helped

Mr. Goleman identified a single problem concerning our response to those hurting and hoping. The problem with humans for Goleman is that we do not focus. We are too preoccupied with other things. David Goleman has coined a marvelous descriptive phrase for this preoccupation- *urban trance*.

Neuroscience has discovered that we are all wired in our brain to help, to empathize, to feel with those hurting. The reality is that we do not. Why don't we?

There are times when we do help but the motivation for this is that when we help, the focus is on self, the ego. When we help we feel good. Feeling good is narcissistic, self-serving and focuses not on the other person but the self. Those who are Machiavellian and sociopaths operate this way by default.

There are times when we are moved by empathy to help. The motivation for this is altruistic. When this happens we experience altruistic joy. The focus here in our helping is the wholly the other person. Our full attention is on the other person.

David Goleman believes that we can be compassionate when we make a paradigm shift from urban trance to focusing only on the person being helped.

IMAM FEISAL ABDUL RAUF

Lose your ego, find your compassion.

Compassion in Islam is embodied in the name for God. God is the compassionate one and the one who sends the prophet on a mission of compassion. The object of mission is the source of compassion and the doer of compassion.

Where do we go wrong and what is the source of lack of compassion in the world? In every religion there is an outer (exoteric) and inner (esoteric) path to spirituality. The mystical Sufi tradition in Islam shows that the problem is in the inner path where

there is a battle with the ego (self). In the presence of God, the Sufis teach that there is no room for two egos or two Is. In the presence of God we are the eyes, the ears, the hand, the foot and the heart of God. There is the merging of the self with the divine. The boundaries of ego dissolve and become one with the universe, other humans and the Creator. The deepest sense of love, compassion and mercy is experienced in this presence. This is the moment which is the gift of God. Everything is all God.

This experience the Koran calls the state of sleep where there are no boundaries. There are no limitations. We glorify the compassionating, the compassionate.

To be human is to embrace the attribute of compassion.

We have reached a stage in our history where we have no option but to lower our personal egos- family egos and national egos.

SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI

To discover oneness, wholeness with the universe is to discover compassion.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati unravels the parallel paths of personal development and attaining true compassion. He walks us through each step of self-realization, from helpless infancy to being the fearless warrior of compassion.

For the Swami the human child is born a consumer, and cannot be a contributor in society. It is helpless and for its survival has to be totally dependent on its support system for all its needs. It has to have absolute trust and cannot doubt.

As the child grows it learns to move away from being a consumer and learns to contribute.

To be compassionate one must discover bigness in oneself. This bigness in oneself is not power, money or status. If it is then compassion will be just a dream.

One on occasion can be compassionate when moved by empathy. No human heart is denied of compassion. We all pick up somebody else's pain one time or the other and make a difference in people's lives.

One cannot learn compassion. It is something one discovers. Compassion is not an action. One has to discover wholeness. Wholeness or oneness with the total universe is the experience common to all. The wholeness cannot be different from you. We are not limited, we are limitless. If we think we are limited then compassion becomes limited.

When we relate to the world, we relate with wholeness which is love and compassion.

To discover compassion we need to be compassionate. To learn to swim you must swim. You have to fake it to make it. Maybe by faking it you will discover that compassion is a dynamic manifestation of the reality of yourself which is oneness, wholeness, and that's what we are.

CONCLUSION

Within in our context of urban trance, may we focus, focus on our neighbor, lose our egos, and discover our compassion, our oneness and wholeness with the universe. Compassion is not a tribal dogma or doctrine. It is the cosmic God.