

## **Love Your Neighbor As Yourself?**

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In the western Judeo-Christian teachings, there is a commandment that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. There are similar teachings in all the major world's religions and in spite of this, the world at times seems focused on individual self-love. In thoughts fueled by fears that our neighbor will take what we have struggled to acquire, many people cut others off at every possible turn. Although outwardly their behavior appears to be overwhelming self-love, in actuality these persons are often struggling with poor self-esteem. Even the individual who constantly boasts of accomplishments and superficially appears to have an overblown ego, in reality is compensating for underlying insecurity. Of course, many of these people would never admit it, even to themselves in private. However, if they really felt secure in their self worth, then there would be no need to brag. The Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu states it this way,

*"Standing tiptoe a man loses balance,  
Walking astride he has no pace,  
Kindling himself, he fails to light,  
Acquitting himself, he forfeits his hearers,  
Admiring himself, he does so alone.  
Pride has never brought a man greatness  
But, according to the way of life,  
Brings the ills that make him unfit,  
Make him unclean in the eyes of his neighbor,  
And a sane man will have none of them."*

So for all the outward appearances of many people engrossed in exercises of self-love, the selfishness is only thinly veiled insecurity and poorly devised self defense. Young babies who are frequently left to cry themselves to sleep, and whose emotional needs for nurturing are consistently unmet, do not necessarily grow up to be independent. Instead they tend to be insecure, defensive and unable to love either themselves or others, because their own early needs for love have not been met. This comes across in our parenting in many ways. Do we frequently tell our children what they are doing right; or do they only hear the negative from us, what they are doing wrong? We assume

they know what they do well, but since they are young and inexperienced, they do need to get those positive strokes too. Is the glass half empty or half full, and are your children learning to see the world through your eyes that support the half-full perspective?

Unless an individual makes a conscious effort to change (and change is always possible!), one tends to parent the same way one experienced one's parents. Even if you don't have children, this applies to you, because this is how you will relate to subordinates at work and how you may relate to your own body. Do many people think about expressing self-love towards their own bodies? Do you give yourself a break after physically pushing yourself hard to meet deadlines? Or do you get angry and cuss out some wimpy body part that caved under pressure and now is making your life miserable with pain or other untoward "symptoms?" A friend recently told me that with a recent illness she spoke lovingly to her body thanking it for doing the best it could under the pressures in her life. Then she apologized to it because she felt the need to use antibiotics to get through the illness and she knew that the antibiotics would kill the good and important bacteria along with the disease causing ones. She promised to try to be more attentive to her body's needs in the future and not allow the stress to get to this level of imbalance again. Which body do you think will heal faster, the one that perceives rejection and anger for its shortcomings, or the one that experiences love, caring and nurturing?

Which brings us back to loving your neighbor as yourself. There is a delicate balance to be achieved here. If you deny yourself and your needs in the process of loving your neighbor, you have loved your neighbor above yourself, which is equally imbalanced to selfish denial of others' needs. It is important to breathe the divine spirit into yourself to nurture and support your physical, emotional, mental, moral, and spiritual well-being. When we consciously connect with spirit in this way, we are acknowledging the light of that Universal Being that illuminates our soul as well as the soul of our neighbor. In the Hindu religion, they use the greeting, "Namaste." This is often translated along the lines of "the aspect of God that shines through my soul greets the aspect of God that shines through your soul." Since Aramaic was the common language that Jesus spoke 2000 years ago,

we can sometimes get a deeper meaning to the words of the western religions by turning to the original version. The translation by Neil Douglas-Klotz of this commandment to love reads "Draw a breath of compassion for the one mysteriously drawn to live near you: love that friend as you love the self that dwells within-the subconscious that sometimes feels separate and intruding."

At this time it is more important than ever that we become present to our breath and stop along the way in our hectic lives to connect with hearts. Once connected it will behoove us to send that compassionate spirit and love out with each breath to every cell in our body, to those we love, to those we meet and to those who happen to be our neighbors. Then, with a sigh of compassion send it out to all those known and unknown to us who struggle in these difficult times that their needs for love and connection may be filled. The spirit of love may then begin to manifest in collectively in our lives.

*"The lesson of love is first learned by human love. When a person begins by saying: 'I love God', he does not speak the truth, because man must first learn to love human beings before he can love God. One begins to love in life one's father, mother, brother, sister, beloved, husband, wife, and child; it is the first lesson, the first stage in love... The first step in love is by loving one; that is the first lesson and he, who at the beginning of life says, 'I love everyone', or 'I love many', has not yet learned his first lesson. After learning that lesson you cannot love one and hate another, you must expand your love and admiration." (Hazrat Inayat Khan, "The Supplementary Papers")*

References:

The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu, Translated by Witter Bynner  
Prayers of the Cosmos - Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus,  
Translated and with commentary by Neil Douglas-Klotz