

Daily Meditation 08-13-22

God as Nothingness

Good morning.

Today we're talking about the theme of God as nothing...God as nothingness. And again, this is part of the apophatic understanding or talking about divinity. The cataphatic talks about God as light and God as creation and present in creation.

But the apophatic language talks about God as nonbeing, or as Eckhart says,

"God is not because God is lacking in being, but because God is beyond all beings."

...beyond all beings, which means we can't imagine what divinity is, because divinity is not the same thing as all the beings we encounter in the world. Not forgetting, of course, that as Eckhart says, "Every being is a book about God." There's revelation of the divine in every being, including all of us.

But that's the *via positiva*; the *negativa* is that everything falls short of naming what divinity is. That's why Eckhart can say

God is a being beyond being and a nothingness beyond being, who consists of a changeless existence and a nameless nothingness.

Or as he says:

To say God is nothing is not to say divinity doesn't have being. It means God is not this thing or that thing: beyond all beings, beingless being, nothingness therefore. And yet God is something.

All this is paradoxical language, and mystics always talk paradoxically -- authentic mystics -- because we are dealing with mystery, and with humor at the same time, and mystical language challenges us to think not in literal fashion, but in these playful, both/and exciting fashions: God is nothingness, yet God is something; God is the being of all beings, and God is beyond all beings, and so forth.

And as Father Bede Griffiths points out, the Hindu wisdom is very, very parallel. So we're talking about something ecumenical, talking about divinity as apophatic or nonbeing, nothingness.

So, in the Hindu tradition, Brahman is "not this and not that," whatever word we use, whatever image, whatever concept, we always have to go beyond, says Father Bede, who studied Hinduism deeply, living as he did in India for over 50 years. But we cannot stop at any name of God. That's the Hindu tradition.

And the Buddhist concept too, of emptiness reminds us, *shunyata*, of how God is beyond a self.

And in the Jewish tradition, in the Kabbalah, God is called *Ayin*, nothingness, as what existed before all the beings in the world, says Daniel Matt, a scholar of the Kabbalah. And the Jewish name for God, *Ein Sof*, means "that which thought cannot comprehend."

Our limited mind cannot grasp or fashion this, it joins infinity. You might even say, with the Jewish mystical understanding, God is the annihilation of all thoughts, uncontainable by any concept. no one can contain God at all. Therefore, it is called nothingness: *Ayin*.

So there's deep understanding here, and certainly deep ecumenism, with the Jewish tradition, the Buddhist tradition, the Hindu tradition and the Christian tradition: a consensus that divinity is beyond all words and all names.

And yet isn't it a pity that in the name very often of our version of divinity or God, we have fought each other and tried to eradicate one another's Gods over the centuries.

Hopefully, in this new age, the age of Aquarius, in the age when we're facing our common extinction as a species, we can leap forward beyond this kind of ignorant understanding of God and gods, to a fuller incorporation of the divinity of the *via positiva*, God as light and as creative beings, and the apophatic divinity of darkness and nothingness.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.