

## Daily Meditation 05-06-24

### Compassion, Eckhart, and Humanity's Future

Good morning.

In today's meditation, I'm talking about "Compassion, Meister Eckhart, and Humanity's Future," which is a course I will be teaching, beginning tomorrow, Tuesday, with The Shift Network.

And I'm really excited about it, because I think compassion summarizes so much of the real meaning of spirituality. In fact, that's why the book I wrote about it, a number of years ago, was called *A Spirituality Named Compassion*. I think that we need that kind of spirituality today: something that will ground us in our best efforts, at putting our best selves into the world. And building up the courage and the strength and the imagination and creativity — and the willingness to let go — so that all that can happen.

And I do think that Meister Eckhart is a real genius in his spirituality, and especially really culminates in this whole theme of compassion and service, relieving one another's pain and suffering, but also celebrating together. As Eckhart says, "what happens to another brother, be it a joy or a sorrow, happens to me."

Compassion is that togetherness, that occurs both in celebrating, in joy, and in relieving one another's others pain and working for justice, therefore. Because so much of injustice is the cause of pain and suffering.

Now, Rabbi Heschel — a tremendous figure in 20th century religion and theology and activism — wrote a very iconic volume on *The Prophets*, and himself absorbed the ways of a prophet. He talks, among other things, about the "dark night of the soul" of our time, what he calls a "dark night of society." He says,

*This is an Age of Spiritual Blackout, a blackout of God. We have entered not only the dark night of the soul, but also the dark night of society. We must seek out ways of preserving the strong and deep truth of the Living God theology in the midst of the blackout. For the darkness is neither final nor complete.*

And I think talking about this blackout and the dark night of society, which he did decades ago, is very appropriate for our times now. There is a lot of despair, a lot of people dropping out, a lot of people going kind of crazy with conspiracies, and the rest. And so this term "the blackout," the parallel to the dark night of society, is I think, extremely useful in our day. He says,

*The darkness is neither final nor complete. Our power is first and waiting for the end of darkness for the defeat of evil. And our power is also incoming on single sparks and occasional raids, upon moments full of God's grace and radiance.*

So he's talking about bringing the Via Positiva alive with radiance and the sparks of God's grace, even if they're occasional, but also about standing up to evil.

*We are called to bring together the sparks to preserve single moments of radiance, keep them alive in our lives, to defy absurdity and despair, and to wait for God to say again, Let There Be Light. And there will be Light, he says.*

And this light is Mitzvah, it is what he calls the way of God. So actions of compassion, he says, “these are ways where the self-evidence of the holy is disclosed.” It is unveiled, it comes out, when we participate in works, and attitudes of compassion about caring for others.

He actually makes a very big distinction between the Greek idea of the “Unmoved Mover,” that God is an Unmoved Mover, and the Jewish idea of God suffering, that God suffers and undergoes the pain and suffering of other beings, all other beings. So this is a God of Pathos, he says, the vulnerable divinity. And he thinks you don't find this in the Greek philosophy, but you certainly find it in the Jewish way of looking at the world, and looking at the divine.

Now, in my book on *Compassion*, I take up many elements and dimensions to it. For example, the need to separate it from sentimentalizing, and mere feeling and mere pity. Webster's Dictionary actually says that the idea that compassion is about a relationship between equals, is obsolete. So our very language has failed us, when comes to the word compassion. The English language has banished the idea that compassion is about equality, and justice. But that's at the very heart of the Jewish teaching.

And Meister Eckhart picks up on that when he says “compassion means justice.” That compassion is not just about feelings, it's about structures. It's about being critical of our political structures, academic and educational structures, and all the economic structures, that themselves that may be raining down injustice and suffering on people.

And so we have to get smarter, and apply our intellects and create the balance. We all know that one of the symbols of justice, Lady Justice, is the scales. Scales are about balance, aren't they? and fairness. And this is integral to creating structures where kindness can happen, where kindness can flow, and compassion can flow, where forgiveness can flow.

And I talk about circles, versus climbing ladders: that in a circle, people see one another's eyes, you can see one another's joy, and one another's pain and tears. And it is what I call “Dancing

Sarah's Circle” that is a path forward, different from “Climbing Jacob's Ladder.” Only a few people can survive on a ladder, especially near the top. And everyone else gets just left behind. A lot of competition, when it comes to a ladder consciousness.

And so to be taking up this topic anew, at this time in history, where the planet is suffering so much, we've got wars raging again, and so much competition around war, where the reptilian brain is again asserting itself -- I think more than ever, it's important to bring this energy, this grace, this possibility of compassion forward. And Meister Eckhart has done a rich, rich job of bringing forward the biblical traditions of compassion, and the philosophical traditions. But above all, the practice of the spirituality of compassion. So I'm really looking forward to exploring this with others today, in light of today's context.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.