

Daily Meditation 09/24/2021

Tara and Kuan Yin and Compassion

Good morning.

Continuing our meditations on the divine feminine, we come to the theme of compassion and the archetype of compassion as expressed in the East through Tara.

And as I point out, the Tibetan name can mean both "star" and "tear." I think that's a wonderful combination. A star is a very vast item in the universe, and our sun after all can hold a million earths...one million earths can fit into the sun.

And yet Tara also means "tear," and of course the tear is something very intimate, very small really, but it's packed with a big message: tears of sorrow and grief, but also tears of joy.

In any case it's naming the depth experience that we undergo as human beings: the via positiva -- the tears of joy and the moistness thereby -- and the tears of grief and suffering -- the via negativa.

So Tara then represents the Buddhist understanding of compassion. and I share in my essay a beautiful little poem to Tara, the mother of great compassion:

"A thousand hands, a thousand eyes, cooling like water, ripening like fire, spreading like the wind, pervading like the space" -- again conjuring up the sense of cosmos and the whole that the divine feminine stands for. And again in the West we have the teachings of wisdom and nature.

Then Kuan Yin, who's represented by the statue over my right shoulder -- she is a bodhisattva of compassion. She listens to the cries of all beings, and she's omnipresent in the lands of the universe, and she pours spiritual rain like nectar everywhere, quenching the flames of distress...quenching the flames of distress.

So both of these images speak for compassion. Now, a number of years ago, I wrote my major work on compassion, called *The Spirituality Named Compassion*. And one thing I learned in writing that book is that compassion is at the heart of the teaching of Jesus (Luke 6), when he says, "Be you compassionate as the Creator in heaven is compassionate." So he's bringing forward the Jewish teaching that compassion is the secret name for God, that God and compassion go together, compassion is a name for divinity. That's the Jewish tradition. And Jesus was explicit about it. In fact he let the secret out of the bag, you might say, no longer a secret.

But what I found was, looking at the history of Christian spiritual theology, in the West especially, that the word "contemplation" is far, far, far more utilized than the word "compassion." It's kind of strange, because there isn't a Hebrew word for contemplation as such; "εὐσπλαχνία" is the Greek word for contemplation.

And so, in a way, you don't see the word contemplation as such in the scriptures. You see the words "solitude" and "stillness" -- Jesus had to go out in the desert often, in the wilderness, get away from people and hassle and all that. He wanted solitude. And we read in the psalm, "Be still and know that I am God." So there's plenty of references to stillness.

But my point is that there's even more references to compassion... but compassion I found years ago in our Western tradition has been very, very undervalued and underwritten about, even though it's primal in the Jewish tradition, and as I say, as another name for divinity.

And I suspect the reason that compassion has been kind of sidelined as a spiritual category in favor of contemplation is that there's something feminine about compassion. The word, of course, and its root meaning in Hebrew and Arabic becomes the word for "womb" -- so compassion comes with mammals, and with women, and with mothers.

And I suspect that a lot of patriarchal theologians were not at home with the word compassion. And they preferred contemplation, which they usually define as climbing Jacob's ladder, climbing up away from Mother, the Earth, matter, away from mater. "Mater" means "mother," and is almost identical to the word "materia" -- matter.

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So the idea was you have to escape matter to experience the divine -- that's not Jesus' perspective at all. It's not a Jewish perspective. And in that tradition, which is the biblical tradition, you wrestle with divinity, and you wrestle with justice and injustice, and all that is part of the work of compassion.

So the return of the divine feminine, which the East speaks about explicitly, and the West has plenty of wisdom around, but we've not been promoting it as much as we should in Western spirituality. This is a time for compassion to return. And that's part of finding a balance between compassion and contemplation, and compassion as action, compassion as bringing forth justice, bringing forth healing, and bringing forth the the struggle for balance and fairness.

Both feminine energies and masculine energies come together in compassion, so the Psalmist says "Compassion is where peace and justice kiss."

Thank you; we'll see you tomorrow.