

## Daily Meditation 05-13-24

### Wisdom and the Youth vs. Adulthood, continued

Good morning.

Today in our essay, we're meditating on wisdom and youth, versus adulthood. And it gives some examples of adults behaving badly, such as the obvious headlines about the war in Gaza, and the news about a presidential candidate meeting with fossil fuel CEOs and promising to do away with environmental regulations if they would just give him \$1 billion dollars.

And there's plenty of other examples, of course, in our news these days, of adults behaving badly — and therefore, the need of young people to protest, which they are doing. In many instances now, adults continue to behave badly and spread rumors that these people are anti-semitic, the college students are. There may be a few who are. But overall, that's not the case. In fact, there are stories of college students who are Muslim, and Palestinian, sitting down to celebrate Shabbat with Jewish students who, like them, are protesting the war in Gaza.

It's interesting that Rabbi Heschel has a lot to say about education and its importance, and its dimension of spirituality and holiness. But after talking a lot about education and how we should educate the soul, and not just the mind as he puts it, he also says this: “The first possibility for education is good parenting, the training, the example, the teaching that goes on at home.”

So I was thinking, today actually, because today is Mothers' Day as I record this, of my home and my parents, and my mother. And I think one of the most wonderful teachings that I received from my parents, was that when I was a teenager, and my older brothers went off to college, there was an empty room when they left. And my parents had this idea, which I think was the greatest teaching they left me, to rent out the empty space, the empty room up where I lived on the third floor, to a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, because I grew up in Madison, the capital of Wisconsin, where the university is located.

So during my years of high school, I shared my space upstairs, with a singh from India. He used to cook wheat germ at two in the morning, up in his room (it didn't smell real good!) -- and with an atheist from Yugoslavia. He was also a communist. And a failed bullfighter from Venezuela. Used to pull up a shirt to show us where the bull gorged him, and more.

And what I want to emphasize is that I learned as a teenager, not because my parents talked about it, but because I was put in a living situation with other human beings, that the whole world was not Catholic, the whole world is not Christian, the whole world is not believing the way I believe. But we find common ground together, we share stories together. The same fellow

had a marvelous turban that he wore every day. And he taught me how to how to put it together each morning, as he did each morning. And so I gave a talk on it in my speech class in high school. We had a class to talk about how to make something. So I had a popular fellow in class, sat him down on a chair, and I put this turban on him, talking all the while about the meaning behind it. I got an A-Plus for that speech.

But again, I am just underscoring that when it comes to Mothers' Day, we can thank our parents for many things, including their instructions in life.

Now, this week, I'm teaching my second class on Meister Eckhart and Compassion, through the Shift Network. And I'm very excited about this class because I think compassion has been thoroughly undervalued and distorted in the West for centuries, where we've reduced it to something like pity or sentimentalism. And it's none of those things. It's at the core, the absolute core of Judaism. Therefore, a biblical value system. And Meister Eckhart has written extensively and profoundly on compassion.

And I just want to share with you this one passage, that is very, very meaningful to me, in light especially of the fact that today is Mothers' Day. Yesterday, we could say, was Mothers' Day when you get this on Monday. He says, in Sermon 31, in the book that I created where I put together 37 of his sermons with commentary after each, and this is based on a critical edition of the German. He says,

*A master says the highest work that God has ever worked in all creatures, is compassion. Whatever God does, the first outburst is always compassion. And I don't mean that he forgives a person his sins, or that a person takes compassion on another. The master meant much more than that. He means it's the highest work that God works is compassion. He says, the work of compassion so close to God, that although truth and riches and goodness name God, one of them names him better than the other: and that is compassion The highest work of God is compassion. And this means that God sets the soul in the highest and purest place which it can occupy: Space. In the sea. In the fathomless ocean, there God works compassion. That is why the Prophet says, Lord, have compassion on the people who are in you. What people are in God? St. John says, God is love. And whoever remains in love remains in God, and God in him.*

Now, what I want to stress is that Eckhart is going through a process that poets and others go through. He's saying, How shall I say this? How should I picture this? That compassion means that God sets the soul in the highest and truest place it can occupy: In space? No: in a sea. No: in a fathomless ocean.

But notice those images: the cosmic, compassion is cosmic. It's got an energy of interdependence in the whole universe. But it's also these images are fetal. They are fetal, they

are like the fetus in the womb. The sea. The bottomless ocean. This interdependence between mother and child. And for a Mothers' Day meditation, I think it's especially important, that the word for compassion in Hebrew and Arabic, comes from the word for womb. So there is built into compassion a maternal dimension, a motherly dimension, as Julian of Norwich talks about, that compassion is the work of the mother in a special way. It's a motherly vocation.

And today, we need that: to displace patriarchy and its omnipresence in our lives, with something healthier. And that men can and have to find the Divine Mother in themselves, and our powers of compassion, and interdependence, as distinct from the reptilian brain of conquering and being number one.

Thank you, see you next week. Happy day after Mothers' Day