

## Daily Meditation 1-06-25

### Further Lessons from the Universe -- Interdependence & Compassion

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we are continuing our reflections on the universe, these laws or habits that connect to our own needs, to our own behavior. And one of these, very clearly, is that of interdependence, interconnectivity, which is the entire foundation of compassion.

And I cite Thomas Merton, who in his very last talk on Karl Marx and monasticism, as it turned out, at a retreat center in Thailand, just before he died -- he died a few hours after this talk -- made this point, which I quote as a front piece in my book *A Spirituality Named Compassion*, which I first wrote in 1979. It came out in 1979. And I cite this in today's essay:

"The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another." We are all part of one another and all involved in one another, we and the other beings of the universe. That's compassion.

And as of when all the mystics have been saying this for centuries, east and west. But science is now on board. And that's huge, absolutely huge, especially at this time in history, when we honor science more than we honor religion. But we need to connect too, at the level of spirituality.

I want to tell you a little story about my book on *A Spirituality Named Compassion*, which came out in 1979. It came out when I was researching this book, several things happened to me. First is, I was in a very serious car accident in 1976. And I learned a lot about suffering. My back had me in pain 24 hours a day for two years. And I had an operation and that did not relieve the pain. And I tell that story in one of the sections of the book, the section on medicine, how neurosurgery did not solve my problem, and holistic medicine did relieve the pain for me, etc. But that pain was a real experience of the Via Negativa, and taught me a lot. And that found its way in my study of compassion.

The second dimension of the research was that I was astounded and really scandalized, when I looked at the history of Christian spirituality, and found so little on compassion. And compassion was obviously central in the teaching of Jesus. Luke 6:36, so many of his parables, the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, and so many others built around compassion. Certainly Matthew 25.

In my search to find theologians, Christian theologians writing about compassion. I found an interesting Buddhist from Japan who had turned Christian, and he brought some powerful writings about compassion. And I found many Jewish sources. Many rabbis had written profoundly about compassion.

But I still kept looking for Western writers, theologians. And that is when I found Eckhart. Meister Eckhart. He wrote an entire treatise, not just a sermon, but a treatise on Luke 6:36: "Be you compassionate, as your Creator in Heaven is compassionate." And also at that time, I underwent an operation, which I've already referred to, on my back because of my accident. And during that

operation, Meister Eckart came to me. And we walked together on the beach, silently, but on the beach. And so that was really the beginning of my cementing of my relationship with Eckhart. And of course, I dove into this marvelous exegesis of his on Luke 6:36 on being compassionate. And it's in there that he talks about compassion as justice as well.

So that was the beginning of my encountering, my very long friendship right up to today with Meister Eckhart, whom I've written three books on.

Now, in my *Passion for Creation* book, "the Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart," where I take up 37 of his sermons and offer some commentary on each, and this book came out, I believe in 1980 in its first form -- yes, 1980 -- and it was called *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation, Spirituality in Translation*, because I was the first writer to pick up on the critical translations into German that the Germans have been working on for decades, and to translate that into English with a commentary.

And it was the Four Paths that created the structure for the book. And the fourth path is called "The New Creation: Compassion and Social Justice." I just want to read to you the titles of each sermon from Eckhart. Sermon 30 was that treatise, "Be compassionate as your Creator in heaven as compassionate." So that's the first one.

Sermon. 31: "Compassion is an Ocean, the Mystical Side to Compassion." Now I created these titles, but the essence of each sermon is in the title.

Sermon 32: "Driving Merchant Mentalities from our Souls, Economics and Compassion."

Sermon 33: "Justice, the Work of Compassion."

Sermon 34: "When our Work Becomes a Spiritual Work, Working in the World." And that is his sermon on Mary and Martha, and how he flips it entirely. He says that Martha was the mature spiritual person, because she could do two things at once: work the kitchen and listen to Jesus teaching in the next room, where Mary could only sit at Jesus' feet. Couldn't do two things at once. He said, "Someday Mary will become as mature as Martha."

Sermon 35 is also a treatise. It's his commentary on the Our Father, and I call it "God has Given us For Others, on Account of Others and With Others," especially the indigent. That statement is found within his commentary on the Our Father.

And Sermon 36, again a treatise: "Everyone an Aristocrat, Everyone a Royal Person." So this takes the work of compassion and justice into society, and into politics. And I use this sermon very much in a chapter in my recent book on the Antichrist, where I point out that Jesus was precursor to democracy, because everyone is a royal person. Everyone therefore, as Eckhart says in this chapter, this treatise, everyone has rights and responsibilities.

And the final sermon of the book, 37: "Passion as Celebration, the Meaning of Torah is Compassion, when Love of God and Love of Neighbor are One." So you can see that compassion is everywhere in

Eckhart's work, and also in his mentor's work, Thomas Aquinas. So again, in my major work of translating more texts from Aquinas, more commentaries he wrote, but had never been in English before -- my book, *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation, Spirituality*. Again, its structure is the Four Paths, and the fourth path is the Via Transformativa, the path of justice and compassion. And right at the start, I quote Aquinas in his commentary on Psalm 40: "Through compassion, human beings imitate God." And in his commentary on Psalm 24: "We find these two things, compassion and justice, in all the works of God."

Well, Aquinas is the mentor to Eckhart. Eckhart stands on Aquinas's shoulders. So I found in those two writers a tremendous development of the idea of compassion. And you see at the time, as I was wrestling in the late 70s and early 80s -- although the Aquinas book came out in the year 2000 I think -- but with this issue in our language, contemplation, action, contemplation versus action, action versus contemplation, when you put them together, the word compassion puts them together. That's what I loved about discovering that word, and wrote a whole book on compassion. Compassion summarizes both action and contemplation, mysticism and prophecy, therefore, as I laid it out in the new language I was developing, it turns out, in the beginning of my theological area, my book *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear: Spirituality American Style, Mystic and the Prophet*.

And then again, in my book, *One River, Many Wells*, which is a book of deep ecumenism in bringing together all the spiritual traditions. There's a whole chapter on service and compassion, because you find this teaching of compassion in all the world religions. And it just astounds me that we have been divorced so readily from that word and that teaching about compassion, and how universal it is as a teaching. And in all the world religions, and certainly in Judaism, where compassion is the secret name for God.

So for all these reasons, I am thrilled how science has come on board with the rediscovery, not the discovery, the rediscovery of the interdependence of all beings. And now here is where spirituality and science truly meet up. And I just hope it's not too late to save the planet, and to save our species. We have to move from violence, from power-over, to power-with, passion-with, compassion. And this is what the Mystics truly assist us in doing.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.