

Daily Meditation 2-16-26

Saints Among Us -- Encouraging and Good News

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we are meditating on positive happenings. One is the local citizens of Minneapolis seem to have made a big dent and a big difference in the occupation by ICE, by all these weeks and months, resisting in a non-violent way, and regularly supporting their neighbors. And this is a great gift, a great accomplishment for the whole country to know about. So we praise them.

And secondly, we are celebrating the conclusion of the peace march by 23 Buddhist monks, marching from the Houston area to Washington, DC, and their arrival there was a very moving event. And I share in the Meditation the talk given by one of the Buddhist leaders, but also I allude to the message that the Dalai Lama sent by way of his niece, who was in fact, physically present for the occasion. And that's what the Dalai Lama wrote: He said,

Their initiative illustrates how religious practices can contribute to a practical and constructive way to social harmony and public dialogue. May their walk help sow the seeds of greater peace, understanding, and compassion in the United States and beyond. With my prayers and good wishes, The Dalai Lama.

And one of the leading monks promised that they would lead a global loving kindness meditation that evening, for several hours.

Now, when you meditate on the talk given by the Venerable Ratanaguna saying, *Today here at the Lincoln Memorial, I'd like to express my heartfelt joy, and give gratitude to be standing in this place before all of you, an exceptionally special assembly, perhaps the largest and most diverse gathering I've ever encountered in my life* -- that invocation of diversity by one of the monk leaders is, I think, very significant, because of late in our politics, there has been a war about opposing DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion). This war has been initiated, once again, by the government itself, out of the White House.

And it seems to be a trope, seems to be a project, to put down the very words, the concept and the actions are diversity, equity and inclusion, that have been of late a part of the government policy: trying to make up for centuries of genocide or racism, or Jim Crow

laws and so forth. And I, myself find it hard to see diversity or equity or inclusion as a negative force. Quite the opposite.

But there have been political campaigns to whip up this anger against diversity, against inclusion, against equity. And this is one of the fault lines between the two dominant political parties, in our day. As I point out, Peter Thiel and Elon Musk both say they don't want the word empathy in our vocabulary. Of course, they don't want the word democracy either. They're actually explicit on that, both of those very, very powerful and very, very rich members of the current administration.

Once again, the Buddhist speaker said at the Lincoln Memorial: *The heart of the democratic, multicultural nation with some of the most advanced science and technology in the world.* So he, as part of his definition of America, that it would be both democratic and multicultural. And it seems to me that that is one of our strong points.

Now, there have been studies done on this term DEI, and they found that in 2024, 78% of Democratic voters believe that without active diversity efforts, discrimination will persist in hiring, and also in promoting in the workforce. Whereas in 2024, a Fox News poll found 71% of Republican voters believe DEI programs discriminate against qualified candidates due to race and gender. The Democratic supporters again say that DEI is evidence, that if you're putting down DEI, you are continuing bias and resistance to racial progress.

One of the biggest fault lines is in terms of age, with the young people, voters under 35. There's a study done in 2023 that 67% of young Americans, that's two-thirds, support proactive efforts to increase diversity in workplaces and in schools and education, whereas only 34% of Americans over 65 want to see diversity increase. So it just can't be dismissed unilaterally and with a sweep of the hand that DEI is somehow a negative thing. But that is how the government has been acting, and rewriting laws to see that in practice.

Now, in comparison to all this, and to me, this is what this March helps bring out, is the universality of religions, of the commitment to compassion, to caring, to empathy, and to justice. So here's the Dalai Lama writing in his book "Ethics for the New Millennium:" *We can reject everything else -- religion, ideology, all received wisdom. But we cannot escape the necessity for love and compassion. This, then is my true religion, my simple faith. Our own heart, our own mind, is the temple. The doctrine is compassion.*

So I have found that, and I'm citing from my book *One River, Many Wells*, and this is the second to last chapter there, the chapter on Compassion and Service:

I find a universality among all the religions, in putting forward compassion as a necessary dimension of our deepest selves, Muhammad says, “The person does not believe, until he or she loves for her brother what she loves for herself. God will not show mercy to one who does not show mercy to others. The believer is not one who eats his fill, when his neighbor beside him is hungry. Belief is like a single person. If one’s eye is affected, all of him is affected. And if his head is affected, all of him is affected.” The Quran says: “They are righteous who believe in God, who donate goods and money for love of God to relatives and orphans, to the poor and the wayfarer, to the needy, for freeing slaves, and who are constant in prayer and give alms for welfare.” And in another place: “Benevolent toward parents and kindred, orphans, the needy, the neighbor who is a kinsman, and the neighbor who is not related to you, and your associate and the wayfarer, and those who are under your control. Surely allow us not the proud and boastful, but they conceal God who require Allah has given them of His Bounty. How should one know what the scaling of the height is? It is the freeing of a slave, or feeding on a day of scarcity, an orphan, near kin, or a poor person reduced to penury. And to be of those who believe and exhort one another to steadfastness and exhort one another to mercy.”

So this is universal teaching. Rabbi Heschel says, “Humanity is a reminder of God. As God is compassionate, let humanity be compassionate.” It seems to me that DEI in its most literal sense, is being compassionate, welcoming diversity, insisting on equity and inclusion.

Thank you. We’ll see you next week.