

Aligned with the Divine

This Sunday and for the next two Sundays we are going to explore a passage from the Gospel of Mark. Most of the same language appears in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Since Bible scholars acknowledge that Mark was written first and is the source material for much of Matthew and Luke, we'll look to Mark's language. This passage contains the entire essence of Jesus' message, in my opinion, and if we could just focus our attention on understanding how to live this message, we might be a bit happier. I also want to explore the passage in the context of today's world. How can we view events in the material world and what are we called to be today?

Here is the passage from the 12th chapter of Mark: *One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

I think we are familiar with the idea, Love God, so I want to explore some subtleties in this. On its face, Love God, as a commandment feels like a subject/object interaction. God, over there, is an object to be loved by me, over here. Yet we know that Jesus also repeatedly referred to a "kingdom within". Paul refers to "Christ in you". So are there any clues in this Mark passage that offer us guidance on getting God from "out there" to "in here"?

I noticed that the first reference is to "our God" and then to "your God". God is both a shared experience and a personal experience. God is available to everyone everywhere and is available for an intimate, personal relationship according to our own understanding. The two references are tied together with "the Lord is one".

Of course, Judaism was unique as a monotheistic faith at the time of Jesus. Greeks and Romans, Celts, all had multiple gods.

We usually read “one God” language as a literal number, to distinguish this concept of the divine from those with multiple aspects and embodiments of the divine. Sometimes, knowing the alterations that can happen as language is translated and passed down, I imagine what a line might mean with one or two extra words inserted. Words that could possibly be in the intention of the passage that got edited or skipped in translations. So what if it said, “the Lord our God, the Lord is one **with us**”. God is **one in us**. This would certainly be consistent with later references Jesus makes to the intimate relationship of a divine within. It would bring this divine we are to love into the very essence of who we are. God is not “out there” but is available in the midst of who each of us is and in the midst of **us**--who we are **being** as a collective humanity. One reason I chose Mark as our core text is because the reference to “the Lord is one” is missing in Matthew and Luke.

Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore actually says in the Revealing Word that the metaphysical meaning of “the Lord is one” is “Oneness of thought and purpose in the individual, as well as the one Presence and one Power--the omnipotent good, which one must know and consider in one’s contact with the world without. The principle of oneness controls life.” I already knew that!

The references in Matthew and Luke also skip a reference to the community “our God”. I feel that the shared experience is relevant not only to my experience but also to how this plays out in the world. My spiritual journey is my own and my understanding of the divine is my perspective and yet my “is-ness” is part of the great “is-ness” of what is manifesting in the world right now. Trash is washing up on the shores of remote and un-inhabited islands. No one is an island has never been more apparent. I am compelled to see my relationship to the divine in the context of how the world is embodying the divine. I may not always like what I see.

So what does it mean to “love God” or to “love the Divine” or to “love Creator” or whatever language you have for your One. Back in the Revealing Word Fillmore says, “[Love is] the pure essence of Being that binds together the whole human family. In Divine Mind, love is the power that joins and binds in divine harmony the universe and everything in it.” To love, then, would be to unify in consciousness with Divine Mind. Although love is our true nature and oneness is our spiritual reality, our consciousness produces illusions of separation we overcome by consciously focusing on love and oneness. I have been struggling that “loving God” still sort of feels like a subject/object transaction. **How** do I love what is within?

So new language came into my awareness. Align with the Divine. Two metaphors for aligning came to me. The first is the old combination locks we had on lockers. You turned the dial until you stopped just on the right number and there was an audible and palpable **click**. You could *hear* and *feel* that the mechanism was aligned and the lock released. The second metaphor was a stopcock. This is a feature in release systems I encountered in the science lab. A round fitting blocked the neck between a reservoir of liquid and an outlet. In the middle of the fittings was an open circle. As you turned a handle, the opening rotated into the channel of the neck. First there is just a trickle getting through. When the open circle is totally aligned with the channel, there is a free flow from the reservoir out-another release.

When we are aligned with the divine, we feel the click; we experience the flow. We don't just align in our mind, we feel it in our body, we experience the ease in relationships, we have a sense of our access to the radical wholeness beyond our intellect and we release all the divine power from within us. Alignment produces peace even in the midst of chaos and conflict. This is aligning with "all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." And what about strength?

I understand spiritual flow to be a continuous exchange. In the stopcock, the flow is directed by gravity until the reservoir is empty. In spirit, once we open fully to the flow, we are in a circle of giving all and receiving all. There is no end, until we move out of alignment with the flow. As we bring a focus to alignment strengthened into laser like precision, we are strengthened. As our minds are open, we express love and new ideas pour in. As our hearts are opened, we express love and we know love.

So why would we ever move out of alignment? It does not seem to be in our best interest? I think we move out of oneness and out of the unifying energy of love because it just seems too difficult to live that way. The world is a land of duality and maintaining an attitude of oneness requires a fair amount of effort. Take a breath and tell me—is it easier to think of things as black and white, good and bad where you can separate yourself onto one side or the other or is it easier to contemplate that the environment, these people on television and on Facebook, the sharks and meth gators in Florida, they just are and they are a part of you. I know which one feels easier to me. Alignment seems simple and yet inclusive oneness gets messy. If I only had to align with the absolute spiritual, I might have a chance.

I'm aligning love with love, peace with peace. Done! Then Jesus has to go and embody the oneness of humanity and divinity. Jesus has to drag our humanity into the oneness commandment—with all our heart and mind and strength. It is unifying the part we judge and long to cut off from our oneness that makes it messy and challenging **and** *for our greatest good*. It is the inclusive oneness that sees the results of humanity out of alignment and recognizes it as a part of ourselves that should motivate us towards fuller alignment. Being out of alignment with our divinity and living from ego and sense consciousness produces greed and hatred and violence. We point to it in the world as if we are separate from it. We narrow the demonstrations of greed and hatred and violence so that we exclude ourselves from those acts. Are we without greed or hatred or violence? I know I am clearly still a work in progress.

How can we love a God that allows human sex trafficking; that allows individuals to order the separation of children from parents and then pen everyone in conditions we abhor for animals; that allows greed to drive us to pollute the air and water and land until it hardly seems we have reverence for any life? To ask this question means we are trying to conveniently put God back out *there* where we can project responsibility for humanity's actions. Perhaps we need to ask, how can **I** become so fully aligned with Divinity that I discern a way to live and words to speak that brings others into alignment with their own divinity? When did our sense of separation become so great that we allowed ourselves to act in ways unlike the truth of our being? When did we allow ego's fear to rule our collective consciousness?

The weather reports have been filled with warnings that heat is the greatest killer. Does this mean the sun has turned vengeful? That was the pagan belief. They would offer burnt offerings to the sun god to coax him back at winter solstice when they believed they were being abandoned. Now we understand it is simply the order of rotations that produce seasons. It is the science of carbon gases that amplifies the sun's energy and produces climate change and **we** are the primary cause of the change.

The end of the passage admonishes that living in this love energy "is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." I suspect that we consider ourselves *above* burnt offerings and sacrifices. No alters in churches for sacrifices of grain or fowl or lambs. Yet metaphysically, are these ritual offerings simply outer things we do in substitute for the real work of living the love we are meant to be?

And might there **be** some of those outer things we do around? Jesus repeatedly challenged rituals which he felt no longer were spiritually engaging but were actions taken *in lieu* of spiritual engagement. Going to church on Sunday. This can be engaging in the work of exploring how I show up in spiritual community and being a presence of spirit OR a trip to a building once a week where I get points that allow me to feel better about lapses in behavior and mindfulness the rest of the week. I know which side of the equation everyone *here* wants to be on and truthfully, we might be a little on both sides.

Here is a favorite Unity activity: reading a new spiritual book. We clearly have the intention of gaining new skills and spiritual growth. However, without any further books we can continue the work of uncovering the ways I am out of alignment with divinity and committing to daily assessments of living in love as I currently understand it—trusting the Universe to reveal new lessons as I am ready. I think we can do both and I think sometimes we turn to reading a new book as a distraction from doing the hard work we already know how to do.

Turning away from distractions, engaging the inclusive, spiritual work of loving God, here is this week's affirmation: **Aligned with the Divine I am strengthened in body, mind and spirit.**

Aligned with the Divine is our language for loving God and placing ourselves in the infinite flow of Oneness. Surrendering the limits and judgments of our humanity, we give our all and receive all.

Next week we will explore loving our neighbors. Once again encountering the question Jesus posed, "Who is your neighbor?"