

Love Yourself

So today we get to the third and final installment of our Love Trilogy, and for some of us, it is the hardest one: Love Yourself. The last two weeks we talked about loving God and loving our neighbor.

We are using the scripture found in Mark 12 as the basis for our work: *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."*

We began by trying on some different language for Loving God: we have been saying Align with the Divine. This is an internal process and not a transaction between us over here and a God out there somewhere. Unity teaches us that love is the great harmonizing energy that binds everything into Oneness. It is the nature of the One, with a big O, some call God, and it is our true nature.

We've also been talking about the messiness that Jesus introduces when he clarifies that our alignment is not just in the abstract realm of thoughts and spiritual ideals but our alignment includes those aspects of our humanity where we encounter emotions and thoughts. We are to love with our mind and soul and also our heart and strength. To align with Love in quiet contemplation is much simpler than taking that love into the streets. Which is exactly where Jesus leads us when he says we must love our neighbor. Last week we talked about all the ways we see ourselves as separate from, less than or greater than, our neighbors. We talked about leaning in to listen to the story of others, finding common ground and separating the process of connecting to the divinity in another and the process of supporting the beliefs and actions of another. We don't have to approve of the words and actions of someone to be able to see that they are a divine being in essence. We look beyond manifestation to know they and we are part of the same Oneness.

Finding ourselves in Oneness can be a happy or not so happy position. Have you noticed that we are much more comfortable in the Oneness of like-minded people? We keep returning to the labels and appearances our ego mind continues to generate in the belief that sameness is safety. I think that belief is a deep seated race consciousness idea. Generations of being judged based on differences has programmed us to have a certain fear of diversity. Loving our neighbor calls us to overcome our fear of differences and connect at that deepest level of spirit, where we are all One People.

In Jesus' time we didn't have training to become a psychologist but even in ancient times, behavior was behavior. Most of us are aware of the mental health diagnosis of narcissist. This is someone who has a lack of empathy and compassion for others, an almost obsessive need for attention and is unusually self-centered. Perhaps avoiding any confusion with that behavior motivated Jesus to pair loving yourself with loving your neighbor. He sees the two loves in tandem and linked: love your neighbor **as** yourself. Again we are square in the messy business of ***being love, aligned with love*** while embracing both our divinity and our humanity. Ironically, narcissists may not really *love* themselves-their behavior is cover for fears and a lack of self-worth.

Byron Katie is an author Unity often quotes. She says, "It is not your job to like me—it's mine!" Sometimes we get the process backwards and believe if enough other people like me, I will learn to like myself. If I could only attract a partner, a lover, to love me, I'd know I was worthy and could love myself. We limit ourselves by believing "My ____ didn't/doesn't love me so I am not worthy of love." We fill in the blank with mother, father, spouse, child, boss, teacher, students, clients and I don't have any idea who all we use. We use our perception of the love outside ourselves as the measure of love we are willing ***to give ourselves***. How crazy is that? **You** are the only one who controls the love you give yourself. The only person who has a job to love you is you.

Why don't we love ourselves? I feel there are two distinct challenges and it relates back to our duality. One challenge is the image of perfection we hold ourselves up to, only to find ourselves lacking. We judge and by judge I mean condemn, ourselves as lacking a little in some areas and lacking a lot in others. We get our image of perfection from the media, from our parents, from our peers, from our lovers, from our religion, from every place outside ourselves we look. We don't see our humanity as perfect and we expect it to be perfect. At the same time, we can't **see** our divinity and we are disconnected from the perfection we already are.

We cannot love ourselves fully because we see parts of ourselves as broken, unredeemed by the perfect love we already are. It is a conundrum—a paradox out of balance. We are fully human and we are fully divine because we are created that way—the offspring of Divine Love incarnate. Yet we focus so much on the incarnation, on the humanity and some impossible image we have created in our own mind, that we cannot apply our true nature, our Love nature to our own humanity.

I like to quote Jean Vanier. I like to say his name. It's French but he was actually born in Canada. He became a philosopher, humanitarian and theologian. The work he is most noted for, which did happen in France, outside Paris, is building community to support adults with developmental disabilities. This is one of my favorite quotes: “Every child, every person needs to know that they are a source of joy; every child, every person, needs to be celebrated. Only when all of our weaknesses are **accepted** as part of our humanity can our negative, broken self-images be transformed.” This quote is from his book, Becoming Human. If we get over-identified with our divinity, becoming human seems like a bad outcome. Yet Jesus demonstrated becoming fully human without abandoning spiritual being-ness.

I think Vanier's quote gives us some clues about how to move in the direction of loving ourselves. “When all of our weaknesses are accepted” First of all, we all have differences. It is *our perception* which of our differences are deemed strengths and which are deemed weaknesses. To some extent, our perception is driven by social norms or the opinions of others. To some extent, we criticize ourselves. We judge our differences much more harshly, perhaps, than others do. *However* we **get** to the perception of weakness, our difference is what it is. Byron Katie will also tell us that much of our suffering is from wanting something in our lives to be other than it is. So the path out of suffering is to ***make peace with what is***. Celebrating ourselves and loving ourselves is to love ourselves as we exist in our messy humanity right now.

What is it you perceive as the weaknesses in yourself that you don't love? What are the parts of yourself that you would have to cut out or change to see yourself as a whole human being—those parts of yourself that do not align with that crazy image of perfect wholeness you created. If we can begin to accept our differences as just ***what is***, we begin to see that our view of ourselves as broken is a self-image both that we created and that we can transform.

There is a tiny issue in the language of this quote that represents, to me, a huge issue in transformation. “Our negative, broken self-image” What is broken? What is it about ourselves that is negative? Not my being-ness—not my divinity. Not even my humanity. My self-image. We live in a “fix-it” society. Find the diet, the drug, the surgery, the therapy, the book that will **fix us**. What does Vanier think needs to be transformed? Our self-image. Who is in charge of your self-image? I didn’t say who do you *blame* for your self-image? We have a tendency to project outward. I am in charge of my self-image. I am responsible for accepting what is and **transforming my self-image into a positive perception of wholeness in alignment with my divinity. It is my job to love me.**

Let’s say this together so we begin to hear it resonating within ourselves.
I am in charge of my self-image.
I am responsible for accepting what is
And transforming my self-image
Into a positive perception of wholeness
In alignment with my divinity.
It is my job to love me.

The odd paradox here is that when we can accept our humanity and begin to transform our self-image in alignment with our divinity, we are guided and motivated to make the choices that change our outer manifestation. The “fixes” we sought begin to unfold as the out-working of our inner work. And maybe it doesn’t look like what we expected. Still we are at peace, knowing it is our wholeness manifesting. **We see our divinity.** That second challenge in loving ourselves.

Here is my go-to suggestion when we persistently have difficulty seeing our own divinity. Find a picture of yourself as an infant or toddler that you really like. Block out, if necessary, any part of the picture that triggers a “story” in you about challenges, problems and blame in your childhood. If you can’t find a physical picture, search your memory for a moment in time you were happy. You are a child of the Divine. Align with that innocent divinity you were long ago before all the stories and judgments began to erode your self-image.

When we stop seeing ourselves as broken and begin to love ourselves, we open up to seeing the gifts we have to share with the world.

Aligned with the Divine, I am aware of the love and gifts I bring to the world.