

God-Beside-Us: the practice of relationship
Meditation/Message Rev Brigid Beckman 9-22-24

Loving Kindness Meditation (adapted from a version by Diane Berke)

*Let your breath carry you gently within, eyes closed or gazing softly in front of you. As you relax into the even rhythm of your breath, let a willingness to be healed gather in your heart. Extend wishes of loving kindness and wellbeing **to yourself**, letting your breath and the phrases bring you into peaceful patience with to yourself, just as you are:*

May my heart be open and filled with loving kindness.

May I be set free from all suffering, all illusion, all fear.

May I accept myself and others completely.

May I be happy and at peace.

*Offering loving kindness to yourself, let that mercy and compassion deepen, and expanding your awareness bring to mind **those you love**, connecting to them, sending your them your love, your compassion, your care:*

May you be filled with loving kindness.

May you be free from suffering, all illusion and all fear.

May you accept yourself and others completely..

May you be happy and at peace.

*As you hold these loved ones in your heart, begin to sense this whole world that so deeply yearns to be healed, to know its true nature, to be at peace. Let your loving-kindness reach out to all beings in need of healing, especially **those who most need it in this moment**:*

May the hearts of all beings be open and spacious.

May all beings be healed of their suffering, set free from their fear.

May all relate to each other with kindness and love.

May all beings live in harmony and peace.

May all beings be filled with loving kindness.

May all beings be free of suffering and fear.

May all know the deep joy of acceptance.

May all beings dwell in happiness and peace. May all beings be joyful.

And so it is. Amen.

Message:

Welcome to the next installment of my “conversation” with *The Many Faces of Prayer* by Thomas Shepherd, and *The Three Faces of God* as described by Paul R. Smith in [The Integral Christian Network](#) and the books *Integral Christianity: The Spirit’s Call to Evolve* and *Is Your God Big Enough? Close Enough? You Enough?*

Here’s a brief look back at the threads of this ongoing conversation that will bring us into today’s exploration of God-Beside-Us:

- The question from Tom Shepherd in *Many Faces of Prayer* that started me down this line of thought:

“Am I *communicating* with a Presence and Power beyond myself– engaging in an *I-Thou* relationship with my Higher Power– or *reflecting* upon something deep in my consciousness? Can prayer be both, or neither?...”

- From *99 Names of God*, by David Steindl-Rast:

“The word **God** ...is a prehistoric artifact ... The insight that enlightened our ancient, only just human ancestors was that we stand in a personal relationship with the unfathomable mystery of life...And that we may call to that mystery because it calls to us. This word “call to” with its meaning of invocation, marks the etymological root of the word “God.” It is not a name, but rather a reference to our relationship to the nameless...It is a word with the momentous task of pointing to the mystery.”

- Barry Taylor, the road manager for AC/DC “*God is the name of the blanket we put over the mystery to give it a shape.*”
- ***Infinite Face of God-Beyond-Us~A God Big Enough for Our Mind***
Behind the God that Jesus talked *about* was always the awesome Creator of heaven and earth. Moses was told this face of God-Beyond-Us is the I AM of Infinite Being. Paul taught the Infinite Face of God is “one in whom we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Smith writes in *Integral Christianity* that “Buckminster Fuller (and thanks Dave Ferril!) was the first person [he] heard say that God was a verb rather than a noun...a beautiful expression of the Infinite Face of God.”

- Which led me to ***This Here Flesh***, by Cole Arthur Riley, who describes awe as a spiritual practice: “an exercise, both a doing and a being...a spiritual muscle of our humanity...not a lens through which to see the world but our sole path to seeing...[it] is...*having the presence to pay attention to the commonplace.* ... To encounter the holy in the ordinary is to find God in the liminal—in spaces where we might subconsciously exclude it...

Holy WOW. As I mentioned last week, “this tiny, three letter word **GOD** that carries the weight of cultural assumptions, embedded theology, wonder, doubt, confusion, joy, awe” has been my rich source of contemplation and practice!

So here, finally, we come to this week’s exploration of the face of “**God-Beside-Us**: the practice of *relationship*.”

From Paul R. Smith: [Integral Christian Network](#)

Intimate Face of God-Beside-Us ~ A God Close Enough for Our Heart

“Jesus magnificently modeled what the Intimate Face of God looks and feels like. This divine personal presence is pure love. However, not just love in the abstract, but love in the most intimate, dynamic way we first experience it — (ideally) from a loving mother and father.

Incredibly, he talked to God, calling this personal divine presence by the same name he called his father, Abba...God is beside us as a loving father and mother.

Theologically, God-Beside-Us is the intersubjective, personal, and theistic face of God that comes in many forms (God, Jesus, the saints, nature, a friend, etc.) that we may talk to. This is the Immanent Presence of God...” (from website)

From Smith’s book, ***Is Your God Big Enough? Close Enough? You Enough?:***

Closeness to God is about bringing the reality of God’s presence into our reality....You know your God is close enough if you can fall in love with the Intimate Face of God beside you... Jesus said the one thing God most desires is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all strength and with all your mind,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

From Smith's book *Integral Christianity*:

The Intimate Face of God is the Presence of God close to us.

- Ultimate Reality that stands before us while we lovingly look into one another's eyes.
- Evolutionary Impulse that sits across the table...with us
- Divine Intelligence that appears on the sofa next to us and starts a conversation
- Sacred Love that puts its hand on our shoulder and reassures us in the middle of the darkest night

“Look at whoever or whatever most reveals God to you as the Great Other.” If *The Intimate Face of God-Beside-Us* is accessed in the spiritual knowing of the heart space” how does YOUR heart encounter the divine? Who in your life has helped reveal LOVE as a verb? Jesus taught, “Love God with your whole heart, strength and mind, and Love your neighbor as yourself”... how has that charge called to you? Been a challenge? When have you felt your own egoic will surrender to the will of God?

Does it feel uncomfortable to think of God as “other,” as Father or Mother, or Beloved? Or does that bring comfort? How might contemplating the Divine Other lead us to reflect on our relationships in general? In our families, in our community, in our civic life at this moment?

Will you join me this week in a practice of noticing *relationship*? Notice what happens when you practice paying attention to your interactions with people, even with the more-than-human world. Notice moments where the mundane interactions might be transformed into the sacred by mindful awareness of the Presence of the Divine Other, God-Beside-Us.

Here is the version of *A Sufi Body Prayer* that saw me through a dark night of the soul (more than one, actually!) and the poem/prayer I wrote based on that, inspired during a day of silence on retreat with my classmates at One Spirit.

A Sufi Body Prayer

(From "Spiritual Practices" by Rev Diane Berke, One Spirit Interfaith Seminary)

"I step into the embrace of the Beloved..."

Take one step forward with the right foot, then bring the left to meet it.

"...to receive and to give..."

Cup hands in front of heart, then extend forward as in a gesture of giving

I put behind me all worldly concerns and egoistic thoughts..."

Bring hands back, palms facing forward, at shoulder level, elbows bent

"...I open my heart..."

Place hands over heart center

"...and offer thanksgiving and praise..."

Lift hands and arms upwards, while also looking up

"...I surrender to You..."

Bow at the waist, sliding hands down the thighs to knees

"...that I may do Your will..."

Drop to knees and touch forehead to the ground

"...now and always..."

Sit up and back on heels, hands resting on thighs

"...at one with You.

Touch forehead to ground again

Stand and take one step back to original starting place

Repeat the entire cycle three times

My Beloved (inspired from the Sufi Body prayer)

I step into the embrace of my beloved
And here in this moment is all I need
Receive, receive first, receive
Love, grace and again, Love
Love to give back now to my Beloved
Love enough to release my fear and worry
and smallness
Love enough to open my heart
Where can I run from your Love?
My lips my eyes my limbs my joyful
Dancing feet carry me to yes and yes
Yes says my heart, yes, and I reach in
Pluck out the final shard of glass
Offer it
To my Beloved and surrender
To the light, radiant light
That spills out of this tender fissure
In my heart
Pulls me invites me loves me
Into Surrender
My will becomes Thy will
Yes and Yes and Love
Always

~ Brigid Beckman