

Weekly Meditation January 26, 2011
By Rev. Teri Lubbers

Being Kind to Ourselves

... having struggled for a lifetime with letting the needs of others define me, I've come to understand that without the healthiest form of self-love – without honoring the essence of life that this thing called “self” carries, the way a pod carries a seed – putting another before you can result in damaging self-sacrifice and endless codependence. ...Somehow, in the course of learning to be good, we have all been asked to wrestle with a false dilemma: being kind to ourselves or being kind to others. In truth, though, being kind to ourselves is a prerequisite to being kind to others. Honoring ourselves is, in fact, the only lasting way to release a truly selfless kindness to others. ~ Mark Nepo, “The Book of Awakening”

Every living, beneficial, wholesome, spiritual truth always has the potential of devolving into a rigid, controlling, life-denying dogma.

Too often we Christians have indoctrinated followers to the need for self-denial, and held up self-sacrifice as the ultimate form of love. Like most everything of importance in life there is a paradox at work here. We are always living somewhere along an infinite continuum. At one extreme a selfish narcissism, which sees only its own face in the mirror, will separate us from one another and make connection impossible. But at the other extreme is a form of self-sacrifice that is really just a codependent way of avoiding and running away from our truest selves. We can't be whole living at either extremes.

In order to “give” myself to you, I must first have a “self” to give. When Jesus says, “Love your neighbor as yourself” there is an assumption that we love ourselves, and because we have been kind to ourselves, we will know how to be kind to others. Kindness and love that flow from this place honor life, and reflect the nature of God. But an obsessive need to do for others (which is culturally and socially encouraged and applauded!) secretly masks the desire to never face and know ourselves, and is not healthy and is not love.

If I would truly hold you in high regard, and treat you with kindness, love and respect, it will flow out of knowing myself as also worthy of kindness, love and respect. Being kind to ourselves is a prerequisite to being kind to others. If they are mutually exclusive they are not real and they are not love.

Prayer: God of All-That-Is, open my heart to the mystery of your love. Settle my uncertainties with your kindness. Help me be kind to myself so that my acts towards others will be an honest reflection of you and of your love. Amen.