

“Namaste”
Matthew 10:40-42; Mark 9:38-41; Luke 6:32
(The Holy is Recognized.)

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[Take a tripod telescope, set it up near the window, look through it...then comment to all] “I’m looking for the Divine. When we speak of God, many think of God ‘at a distance,’ ‘up there,’ or ‘out there.’ Do you think I’ll find God if I keep looking up?”

[Pick up a magnifying glass and start looking at things up close. Look at the communion elements.] “We talk of God being ‘in’ things. Inside? Where? Will I see the Holy? Will I recognize it?”

Today we celebrate “Epiphany,” the day we think of the Magi, the Wise Ones who *did* find the Holy. We think of them as seeing the Holy in the baby Jesus. They saw that Jesus would be the Christ, the long-awaited one *who would help humanity to see God*.

The word “Epiphany” means the “sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something.” For example, if we are struggling to understand something, and finally have an “Aha Moment,” we’ve had an “epiphany.” “Epiphany” also means “the manifestation of a divine being.”

[Walk to altar.] The Magi—without a telescope or magnifying glass—found the Holy. Look at these Magi on our altar; they are depicted as **bowing** before Jesus.

That gives me an idea. [Look eye-to-eye with several people and greet them with “**Namaste.**”] Aha! I found the Holy! In you, and you, and you.

In the U.S. we hear it in yoga classes, yet it is a common greeting in the East—greeting another with a respectful bow and the phrase, “**Namaste.**” This originally Hindu greeting has a variety of interpretations, but in general means, “That which is of God in me greets that which is of God in you.”

I am fascinated by this gesture. I think that the spirituality and the humility behind this greeting is precisely what Jesus lived and taught. I have no idea what Jesus’ physical stance was, when he greeted others, but he behaved—to so many whom he met—with an attitude that is symbolized by this gesture.

As we seek to grow spiritually, one of our life *tasks* is to *see* the Holy, especially in surprising places. In a sense, our task is similar to that of the Magi—to find the Holy.

Some psychologists propose that if we *feel* positive, then our *behaviors* will follow. Other psychologists encourage us to *behave* positively, for they point out that if we *behave* positively, our good *feelings* will follow.

It is similar with epiphanies. If we get into the habit of anticipating the Holy, we tend to find It.

Our experience can flow either way: If we sense a person to be quite sacred, we might bow. However, if we bow first, upon meeting the person, we might be inclined to recognize their sacredness.

I have probably given money only to 1 out of 10 beggars on the street—people on the sidewalk with a cup. I usually give a dollar or two. Once, at Union Station in Los Angeles not long after we moved back to California, for some reason I did something strange. I put a \$10 bill into the cup of a man who was begging. Strangely, after *behaving*

in that way, a bit more generous than usual, I had a strange sensation. I *felt* him to be sacred. Our eyes didn't even meet, but I felt a connection.

I want to share a couple of other encounters people have reported having with another person, encounters in which epiphanies happened that reveal the mood and attitude of Namaste: "That which is holy in me greets the sacred in you."

The U. S. Senator from Hawaii, Senator Inouye,¹ when he was young was placed in our own country's internment camp for Japanese Americans early in World War II. At one point in that war, Japanese Americans were offered "freedom" from the concentration camp if they would join the U.S. military.

Senator Inouye signed up and found himself fighting with American forces in Italy just after the American forces had driven back the Germans. Inouye went into a small house, looking for any remaining Germans, and found a wounded German soldier lying on the floor. Inouye stood there, cautious. The German reached into his pocket. Thinking he was reaching for a weapon, Inouye hit the man with the butt of his rifle. Then, he reached into the German's pocket to pull out what was there. *It was a photograph of the man's child.* The man had been trying to show Inouye the photograph. The Senator recalled thinking to himself at the time, "This is war." "This is war." Inouye handed the photo back and *experienced an epiphany, a truth about the nature of things. He experienced the German soldier as of sacred worth. He connected as human to human.*

Another example: For almost three decades,² beginning when Iraq was at war with Iran, volunteers have driven busloads of wooden caskets with unclaimed victims from Baghdad through dangerous areas to a cemetery that is four hours from the city. These men belong to a burial society that got its start because, they explained, Iraq is a country both *of deep piety and terrible brutality.* There were many unclaimed dead, yet there was also the strong belief that these dead should be treated properly.

This burial society of volunteers does not adhere to any religious sect; it does not even have a name. Yet thirty to sixty men make a trip, twice a week. They do not accept any money—they only "want the blessing of God."

When the men arrive at the cemetery, they say their midday prayers, then unload the bodies, wrap them with white cloth and lower them into double graves marked "Unclaimed." One man explained to the journalist: "When I look at any one of these victims I feel that he is my brother or father. We cry as if they are our relatives. . . We bury the Sunni or Shiite, Christian or Muslim, Iraqi or non-Iraqi. . . We deal with the human being as a human being."

These volunteers sleep on mattresses spread across the floor, or outside on the porch for fresh air, then drive back to Baghdad the next day.

Namaste is a gesture and attitude of reverence, given upon greeting another, or taking leave. These volunteers do not say "Namaste" or gesture in this way. However, they revere the bodies of those whom they recognize to be children of God—no matter their religion. These contemporary volunteers follow in the footsteps of the Magi—who were open to epiphanies, finding the Holy in others.

Matthew records Jesus as saying, when his disciples were perplexed, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." Matthew also conveys Jesus' teaching, "Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I

mean this.” Luke reported that Jesus taught, “If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that.” (That is *The Message* translation.)³

Jesus taught throughout his whole ministry that all human beings are Holy and that *revering any human being is revering him, Jesus, and also revering the God who is revealed through Jesus.*

Teachers sometimes see the Holy in their students. Parents sense Holiness in their children and grandchildren. Perhaps it goes the other way around, too.

I have one more epiphany story. This one came from a “field trip” John and I took to downtown L.A.!

We decided to be “tourists” to downtown and visited the Disney Concert Hall, Olvera Street, and also the contemporary Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. Inside that Roman Catholic Cathedral, I was enthralled with 136 larger-than-life sized images of Saints that were put onto long tapestries, by the artist John Nava. These are impressive artistically—beautiful. However, the religious *epiphany* that the artist conveys is equally remarkable. Along with saints of different nationalities, ages, occupations and vocations, saints whose names you and I would recognize, he includes twelve unidentified figures, a few of whom are children. When I saw these unrecognizable people among the images of the saints, I thought, “Who are these?” They represent, we discovered as we read the tourist pamphlet, in the artist’s own words, “anonymous and future saints.” “Anonymous and future saints.”

When one looks at the tapestries up close, one notices that they are “mottled,” “like saints,” says the artist. The artist explains: “Mottled humans mingled together. That’s what Los Angeles is. That’s what we all are.”

Jesus ushered in a faith that believes in the Communion of Saints, that *all* are saints. If all are saints, we are called to have an attitude of Namaste to all. Just think—anyone may be an “anonymous or future saint”!

[Pick up mirror.] We who follow in the footsteps of Christ should, even when we look in the mirror, say “Namaste.”

Maybe finding the Holy is like a game of Hide and Seek. The Holy is hidden; we must seek it to find it.

No—that’s not true. Jesus was not “hidden” when the Magi found him; he was just in a place people did not typically look. Beggars with cups at Union Station, wounded Germans reaching into their pockets to share a photo, Iraqi volunteers burying unclaimed bodies, and “anonymous and future” saints drawn for Cathedral walls, are not “hidden”; they are simply people in places where we do not typically look for the Holy. That is why it is an *epiphany* when we are struck by their sacredness!

You know what? Finding the Holy is much more like the game of Marco Polo. No one hides; we just have our eyes closed. When we say, “Marco,” [close eyes] we hear in this direction and that all sorts of voices, saying: “Polo.” When *we open our eyes*, we have an epiphany—we find someone worthy of reverence in every direction we look—so we are often inclined to bow!

¹ Inouye will become the longest- serving U.S. Senator in history, if he serves until mid-year, 2014.

² “The selfless and the dead,” by Raheem Salman and Doug Smith, Times Staff Writers, *LA Times*, October 22, 2006, p. A1, A12

³ He also tells of Jesus explaining to his confused disciples, “Anyone by just giving you a cup of water in my name is on our side.”