

## The Iridescent Glow of Soul

Rob Gieselmann, Pent. 25C, October 26, 2014

A story is told among Jewish mystics, about a man who renounces his Jewish heritage, as both arcane and irrelevant. The man has a dream, and in his dream, he watches a group of ancient sages around a table. There is a human soul on the table – shriveled and starving, awaiting its judgment. The sages agree that the soul is worthless, that nothing good is left to it, and it should be damned. But the *tzaddik*, a righteous one, who is sitting at the table with them, disagrees. *Every soul*, he says, *is pure; every soul has merit.*

The *tzaddik* then reaches out his finger and touches the withered soul – An iridescent spot appears at the site of the touch, glowing, as if that is the part of the soul that has worth – The man wakes up and realizes of-course the dream is about him.

The *Kabbalah* – ancient Jewish wisdom – *claims* there are five levels of being – including the obvious: the physical and emotional – But also higher levels, two of which are incorruptible, the place where the dark deeds of life cannot reach. That iridescent location of the withered soul is located there, at the incorruptible levels. And it is there you find the nexus between this world and the next, this temporal world, and God's eternal world. They say.

\*Among the Law of Moses, there are 613 commandments; 248 are positive, corresponding to the number of body parts; 365 are negative, corresponding to the days of a year.

*Which of the 613*, the lawyer asked Jesus, *is the most important?* Even in Jesus' day, lawyers parsed rules.

Q: What do you call 25 lawyers buried up to their necks in cement?

A: Not enough cement.

This lawyers' probing question was just as annoying to Jesus as cross examination is today. Which commandment indeed? But, you see, there is this little iridescent place in the soul that houses the divine – *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.*

These dual commandments contain it all, and then some – Love inflates all 613 commandments, like oxygen inflates collapsed lungs, they expand with meaning. Before they were, as Scripture says, dead letters; but with love, they come alive. Love - not just those who love you, but *especially* those who do not.

Love your enemies, do good to those who would hurt you. Moses loved both God and the people. And when a dispute arose among them – between God and the people – Moses defended each to the other... Stood in the middle. You remember – the people thought God had abandoned them – *I'm sure you've never felt that way, have you?* So they turned their attention away, to a golden calf.

God would have judged them just like the sages judged the withered soul – But Moses stood between them, and said, *No!* ...Because he *loved* both. And what good is love anyway, if you aren't willing to risk it? If you remain blinded to the iridescent glow emanating from the soul next to you?

They say that Moses did *not* die of old age, or disease or infirmity – but that he died – “at the mouth of the Lord,” ... That God kissed Moses, tenderly on the mouth, withdrawing his soul. \*What is love, anyway?

Mark Twain wrote, *[A human being is] the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself, [but] cuts his [neighbor's] throat if his theology isn't straight.*

But the *Kaballah* treats God as a verb, not as a noun, and Christian Scripture agrees – for God *is* love – John writes.

Love is action, and not mere feeling. The love you feel compares poorly to the actions you take, the life you lead. Love your neighbor, and what Jesus means is: you must *choose* to love. You choose to see find that iridescent glow deep in the withered soul next to you.

\* I was dismayed, this past week, to hear a national nursing association complain that nurses were being neglected – This came about because two Dallas nurses contracted Ebola when caring for Thomas Eric Duncan. The nurses weren't given proper gear, they complained. Nurses *should* have proper gear, but our knowledge of Ebola and proper gear is evolving. And the implication – which I heard behind the association's complaint – was that nurses should not care for Ebola patients without absolute assurance of safety – seems absurd.

As one compelled by Jesus to love others, what would you do if you were the only person available to help an Ebola victim? ...Perhaps hypothetical in our western world, but not everywhere.

In one episode of The West Wing, my favorite television show, President Bartlett has to convince an obstinate doctor to operate on the dying son of a hostile Arab leader – The doctor is Jewish, and he is the only one who can perform the operation. President Bartlett turns to Abby, his wife – she is a licensed physician – And she says plainly, the doctor has no choice. *He has to save the boy.* That is what doctors do, that is who they are. That is what nurses do, that is who they are. That is what Christians do, that is who we are. You don't love because you feel like it – You love because you are Christian, it is who you are. You love those who spurn or hate you, those who would do you harm. You throw out careless words, like, *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* That is what Christians do, it is who we are.

Nobody said it would be easy being a Christian – but I can tell you from personal experience –it sure helps if you locate in your neighbor the iridescent light of God.

Catholic social activist, Dorothy Day, once said, *I really only love God as much as [I love] the person I love the least.*

Nobody said keeping the entire bank of 613 commandments would be easy – And Jesus just made it much harder: love. But it is *the* imperative.

*Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your soul, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

In-deed.