

Love, compassion and power

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Spirit of Life



The Rev. Dr. Kharma R. Amos

This is a time of year when our thoughts might naturally turn to the topic of love. Marketers capitalizing on Valentine's Day have been trying to convince us for months that we have "obligations" to those we love. Reports indicate that the national average price of a dozen roses is now over \$80, and many a well-intentioned lover will have spent significantly more than that this week to demonstrate their love.

While I find the capitalism of the whole affair off-putting, is there ever a bad time for us to turn our focus to love? When we are reminded, by calendar or consciousness, to pay attention to our loving relationships and spend time intentionally nurturing them, we should heed the advice and be grateful. However, we also need to move beyond the Hallmarky, rom-com kind of love that tends to let us off the hook too easily as soon as life gets difficult. Because, let's face it, life is difficult right now, both globally and (for too many) individually.

As I write this, the numbers of confirmed dead in Turkey and Syria following last week's devastating earthquake have surpassed 38,000, more than 500,000 people became homeless in what seems an instant, and this is being lamented as the worst natural disaster for that region in more than a century. It is the one year anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and there is currently no end to the war in sight; over 18,000 civilian casualties have been confirmed and millions of people have had to flee their country for safety or are internally displaced. The epidemic of gun violence in the United States claims victims daily, and this week, yet another college campus experienced the specific kind of terror that active shooters incite. The list of potential examples

of human suffering is, sadly, too large to even scratch the surface.

Given all of this, one particular form of love that we desperately need right now is compassion. Religious scholar Karen Armstrong argues, "All faiths insist that compassion is the true test of spirituality," because without compassion, the rest is meaningless. Armstrong explores the common thread of the "Golden Rule" woven throughout all the great religious traditions. Compassion takes us outside of ourselves (and our self-centered egos) and connects us with others. It puts their suffering so front and center in our minds that we cannot turn our attention away; it moves our hearts and, hopefully, inspires our actions. Compassion highlights our responsibility for one another as interconnected beings who share the same planet and our "responsibility" (i.e. ability to respond) as a powerful resource for collaboratively discovering solutions to our common problems.

If you are finding yourself moved by the plight of those who are suffering, the compassion you are feeling is a powerful form of love. Do not dismiss it; in fact, notice it, give thanks for it and lean into it. This compassion, which moves us toward one another and all we hold sacred, may be the only thing that can save us.

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