

**The Sacred Art of
LOVINGKINDNESS
preparing to practice
by Rabbi Rami Shapiro**

Open your heart and mind and discover—through the sacred art of lovingkindness—the image and likeness of God in yourself and others.

Rabbi Shapiro speaks of Thirteen Attributes, or aspects, of Lovingkindness. They are based on Chapter 34, verses 6-7 in the book of Exodus. God passes before Moses and calls out each aspect of goodness in turn. Rabbi Shapiro has translated these attributes into practices that allow you to actualize God's glory through personal deeds of lovingkindness. Judaism's Thirteen Attributes of Lovingkindness are a framework for cultivating a life of goodness. They are

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| 1. Realizing the divinity of self | 8. Bringing forth truth |
| 2. Realizing the divinity of other | 9. Preserving kindness |
| 3. Cultivating creativity | 10. Forgiving iniquity |
| 4. Engendering compassion | 11. Forgiving willfulness |
| 5. Finding grace | 12. Forgiving error |
| 6. Acting with equanimity | 13. Cleansing yourself of delusion |
| 7. Creating kindness | |

“Grace is a concept that originated in our Jewish roots and, for us Christians, came to its fullness in Jesus. Sometimes, we—Jews and Christians alike—forget the joyfulness of grace.” (The Rev. Rhonda Smith McIntire, 12/30/12)

Today we will focus on just one chapter or attribute of Shapiro's book:
Engaging life through grace; being present in the moment.

Webster defines grace as being freely given; the unmerited favor of love of God.

What is your definition of grace?

What does it mean to be “present in the moment?” – not wishing it were other than it is

Compassion reveals the stage on which life is to be played out; grace is the play itself.

Rabbi Shapiro posits that the master of grace is Job. **What do we know about Job?**

- An innocent man of faith
- A true believer
- God tests just how deep his faith goes

What happens to Job?

- His children die
- He loses his wealth
- His body erupts in painful, oozing sores

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And when Job's wife tells him to curse God and die, **what does Job say?**

We have no right to accept only good from God and (we) must learn to endure the horrible as well.

And when God shows up not to explain his actions, he makes it clear that all human notions about right/wrong, good/evil, justice/injustice are just that—human notions! God is beyond all that. God is what is and to expect him to comply with human theological speculation is ludicrous.

When we engage reality as it is | that is real grace!

God's grace is in spinning the drama; your grace is in learning to engage it without being blown away by it.

Grace is to life as current is to ocean
Grace is the dynamic nature of things
Without grace nothing happens,

For grace is what happens.

Hence, the prophet Isaiah taught that God's throne is founded in grace (Isaiah 16-5)

Going empty to God is the key to finding and embodying grace.

The key to grace:

- Share what you have but don't cling to what you have
- Each day God provides you with exactly what you need for that day.
- Tomorrow will take care of itself.

Let's read Matthew 6:25-34

What is God saying?

- Deal with today's troubles today
- Leave tomorrow's worry for tomorrow
- Attend to the present
- The present is all you have
- Worrying about the world to come, life after death, past or future incarnations, heaven and hell, and all other theological fantasies we invent to distract us from the present moment is of absolutely no value whatsoever.

Matthew 6:34 – Tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. Life is more than food, the body more than clothing.

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Let's look at Matthew 5:45

Shapiro interprets this verse as “Jesus says you do matter to God but no more than anyone else matters to God. And that worrying about mattering to God is simply a waste of energy and time.

So how might we go forward from here?

Perhaps you might offer the *Havdallah* Prayer for the Week

Havdallah means distinction. The *Havdallah* candle is a single, braided candle composed of several wicks. This candle reminds us not to mistake unity for uniformity and to open yourself to the complexity of the coming week without complicating it by wishing it were other than it is.

May this be a week of faith:

Faith in truth, faith in love, faith in friendship, and faith in
 You who manifests all things and their opposite.
May my labors hasten the perfection of the world, and may
 kindness awaken those deadened by despair.
May this week arrive with gentleness, good fortune, blessing,
 success, good health, prosperity, justice and peace.
May it be a week for uplifting the children and honoring
 the aged.
May this be a week of constructive purpose for me, for my
 loved ones, and for all who dwell upon this good earth.