

Linda Simmons  
Sermon  
Nov. 17, 2013

## The Gift of Belonging

There is a story told in Hinduism about Lord Krishna when he was just a young child. Before I tell it to you, let me first tell you something of my understanding of Hinduism which comes to me from a year of living in India when I was 21, some moons ago and from my studies since that time. Some say that Hinduism is a polytheist religion, meaning a religion that has many gods, but this is not my understanding. Hinduism believes in only one ultimate mystery named God. But there is also an recognition that human beings are too limited to understand much about God, that we can really only relate to all of life in terms of ourselves, so this one divine mystery appears in many manifestations of itself in ways that we might understand: as the trickster, the fertile, the good, the evil, the bringer of love, the bringer of pain, etc.

All of these gods point to the one God. In this way, Hinduism is said to be panentheistic which means that the divine interpenetrates every part of nature and timelessly extends beyond it. Others that we know in our tradition who are panentheistic are the transcendentalists. In fact, Henry David Thoreau took a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, one of the most important of the Hindu holy books, with him to Walden and was influenced in many ways by it. But that's another story.

So back to Krishna. Krishna is a central figure of Hinduism and is traditionally attributed the authorship of the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna is known to be a historical figure who lived around 3,000 BCE. He is much revered in Hinduism. So, one day when Krishna was just a young boy, he and his mother Yasoda were walking in a field and Krishna bent and put what his mom thought was a chunk of dirt into his mouth. Of course, mom said, "Krishna, open your mouth and let me see what you have in there." He pursed his lips and shook his head, uh uh. And he giggled.

I know we can all remember a time when we did that or when our children or nieces or nephews or other young friends did this. In fact, many of us still do this in one way or another when asked to talk about what we are feeling....we purse our lips and shake our heads...uh, uh. So Krishna took off running through the high grasses, in his little chubby boy roly polly way, long hair flying in the wind with his mother in tow, he giggling and she laughing but still really wanting to get that dirt out of her son's mouth. Finally, she caught Krishna and lifted him up into air, the blue sky and sun shining behind his dark flowing hair and she said, "Now Krishna, open your mouth and show me what you have in there."

And as the myth has it, and I say myth here with the utmost respect, referring to myth as the meanings we put together to make sense of the world around us, not as something untrue, just as something that reflects a piece of the truth--and as the myth has it, Krishna opens his mouth and his mother looks in and she sees the whole world, not just this world, but all worlds. She sees the divine. She is stunned. Krishna knows that no human can contain such a witnessing, so he erases her memory soon after she sees this, and they continue their game until he at last spits out a piece of dirt and surely gets the--you know dirt is bad for you, lecture.

This myth got me to thinking that when we risk showing each other ourselves, when we risk offering what another is asking, when we risk opening our mouths and speaking of our hearts, we become one with all that is.

I have been thinking a lot about giving and belonging these days and about what it means to live on an island. Someone told me the other day that the words to the song, We are a gentle, angry people should have another verse for the island, We are a gentle, private people! I have been learning about what this means a day at a time as I negotiate life here on this island and then it dawned on me, and I learned this most profoundly from Sissy and Brian, that privacy does not mean isolation, privacy does not mean a lack of authenticity, privacy does not mean not giving of oneself fully.

It does mean that when we open ourselves to one another and the holy, which for me means that which is unutterably beautiful, spills from us and we do not need anything in return. As Krishna erased his mother's memory so that she could go on being his mother, being human, privacy on this island means that we give all that we have to give, that we risk belonging in a way that others may not understand, and that we know we are whole enough, good enough, full enough to go on, that we know that giving what is ours to give connects us to each other, fulfills a longing to belong, and that belonging is the gift.

We have so many here in this community who give like this. I see you everyday: tending the garden, washing the dishes, greeting the people, cleaning, calling on those in need, reaching out, serving, welcoming the stranger. I see you every day. You are all my heroes. You are all my Krishna. In you the whole world is visible.

Amen.