

Sermon: Bliks in Karma's Kitchen 4 6 2014

In an odd but tender moment from a recent novel a woman quizzes her husband while he sleeps. He isn't a guy to talk about his feelings so she justifies these journeys into his psyche as a necessary "state of the union" check on how he is doing.

"Are you lovable?" she asks. His slumbering face mashes up doubtfully. His insecurity is no shock, but it is heartbreaking. "Are you helpful?" she asks. This one should be a no-brainer, her husband is a social worker with at-risk teens, his success rate is unprecedented, his life is dedicated to service. But again his face scrunches up- no, no I'm not helpful. Finally she asks "Does your wife love you?" A smile breaks out across his face- he is so pleased- yes, he knows she loves him. Yes. Now she drifts off to sleep, wondering how she can change his first two answers to also be yes.

Where does this belief come from- that we are unlovable, that we are not good enough? I'm not going to ask this out loud, don't worry, but I bet if I asked those people who feel "not good enough" to raise their hands, around us we would see people of kindness, of service, of accomplishment, hands raised. People we cherish who don't believe they are cherish-able. Why?

A few weeks ago an enthusiastic group of folks from this congregation traveled with me to District Assembly in Spokane. Unitarian Universalist gathered from all over our four-state region of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska to learn from Unitarian Universalist professor and philosopher Thandeka about bliks. A blik is foundational belief, a belief that you can't prove right or wrong but that defines how you move through our world. We all have a sizable pile of Bliks coloring our view.

Imagine you are building a log cabin from trees freshly chopped down. Around you are piles of fragrant wood, wanting to be set into place. If this log cabin is your life, the logs are your bliks. They are integral to who you are, your life is built upon them. Bliks are huge part of religious life, since God, faith, and the afterlife are concepts that we have strong emotional ties to but can't prove in any scientific way.

I love jokes, and my favorite kind is certainly religious. Let's set the scene: Pope Ratzinger is in his office at the Vatican, returning some e-mails, when he gets a phone call from God. God says, hey buddy, how's it going? What is the weather like down in Vatican City today? Good, just fine, the pope says.

God continues: I have made a big decision. I am taking your advice and establishing one true religion on earth- no more bickering, no more holy wars. I'm going to come down there and make an announcement later today.

The pope is thrilled! Wonderful, wonderful! I can't wait, God. I will prepare the biggest stage and best sound system Italy has ever seen! I'll gather the Cardinals, the sisters, everyone- we are going to party tonight!

Well, God says, hedging- about that...I won't be coming to Italy.

What?? Why not? Just then the pope glances down at his phone and to his horror- God is calling from Salt Lake City.

So this is the Pope's blik- he believes there is the one true faith, the faith God would choose, the faith that is better than all the others. There is no way to prove that he is right or wrong- the criteria for one true religion is different for every person. Still, lack of evidence isn't stopping him. His belief in Catholicism as the one true faith is foundational to who he is. Just like a person who is sure there is no God has an atheist blik, or a Buddhist has a Buddhist blik- bliks are important enough to us to cause strong reactions when threatened. Think of holy wars, of religiously segregated neighborhoods. Bliks are serious business.

Bliks color how we look at everything in our world. Some bliks are appearance based- maybe from the stereotypes on television you have gathered that women with glasses are smart, that young men in baggy pants are dangerous, that single parents have less coddled children. Are these bliks factually true?

Or course not. How could you measure how much coddled is too coddled for a child? That is an opinion. What does it mean to be dangerous? Young men in baggy pants certainly aren't dangerous to fabric manufactures, all those extra yards of cloth. And for these women in glasses- what does it mean to be smart? Emotionally intelligent? Book smart? Good at fixing cars?

Recently a big blik went bust in Berkeley, California. There a few friends decided to open a café that would serve a delicious, Indian-inspired Sunday brunch, a multi-course meal after which your check reads...\$0. A note reads: "In the spirit of generosity, someone who came before you made a gift of this meal. We hope you will continue the circle of giving in your own way."

PLAY VIDEO: <http://www.karmakitchen.org/>

Karma Kitchen moves me because it relies on people being kind to each other, and it actually works. Sunday after Sunday people gather, eat a tasty, free meal, and then decide to pay for a total stranger's food, a person they are unlikely to ever meet. Because Karma Kitchen presents a choice- you can fill your belly and give to keep the café running, or you can just leave. It is an anonymous, no-peer-pressure decision. Some people leave \$10, some \$100, some volunteer to wash dishes. Some share generously outside of the café. But everyone seems moved by the experience: people frequently cry, hug strangers, or laugh at the sheer, unexpected joy of having the chance to be generous to people they don't know. This is the unforeseen joy of finding a place that runs on human kindness- and after seven years there is still enough kindness to keep running.

So what does this have to do with bliks? Well, I believe most of us want to have faith in the goodness of our fellow humans. We want to believe that people are generous, empathetic, compassionate. But all too often that faith is difficult to have. People let us down, strangers and friends. We humans can be a selfish lot: we commit genocide, we pollute our neighbor's water supply, we refuse to change lanes so people can merge on I-5.-----

If your heart is heavy with the blik that your fellow earthlings are selfish beasts, a meal at Karma Kitchen will relieve that strain, as well as filling your belly with a spicy curry. As soon as you sit at a table a volunteer begins to serve you, then food funded by a previous diner, a stranger, is gifted to you. And after this stirring experience you are invited to continue the cycle, you are given a chance to be generous, empathetic, and compassionate. Karma Kitchen's gift economy is catching fire across the globe, with similar establishments opening in Denver, Salt Lake City, and Berlin. In India, New Zealand, and especially Indonesia food trucks, medical clinics, and even a cab driver have adopted the Karma Kitchen model. Across many languages, in many cultures the concept of generosity is translated into hot food, gentle care, and new faith in humanity. And a heavy blik is destroyed.

I bet you can guess what I am going to say now- what are your bliks? You believe that you are lovable? Helpful? Generous? Do you believe Catholic's have the one true faith, or do you think all believers are crazy? Do young men in baggy pants scare you? What logs make up your house?

Bliks come to us in two ways: they are taught or caught. The taught blik is easy to understand: if your parents told you women who wear glasses are smart, for a time at least you would believe that was correct. Perhaps for years you would live your life without questioning this blik, subconsciously choosing an accountant with glasses over one with contact lenses. Caught bliks happen more subtly: if you are walking downtown and see white women clutching their purses more tightly when a man of color walks by, you may catch the blik that men of color are purse-snatchers. You are being taught a blik in an inadvertent way. Maybe you don't consciously realize- hey, I am getting the impression that white women are afraid of black men- but still the impression has let itself be made.

The problem is that our bliks keep us from living in tune with our Unitarian Universalist values. Our first UU principle is that every person has inherent worth and dignity- but living in a way that honors this principle is impossible when we are afraid of young men of color, or can't honor our own worth because

we were taught that we aren't worthy. How can we ditch our blik so we can honor our fellow beings with the respect our principles counsel?

Ah, another UU principle can come to our rescue. Our fourth principle encourages us to affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We Unitarian Universalists are emboldened to not only spend our lives seeking truth, but helping others to do the same. And our blik need only to be sought and discovered to be dismantled.

The key is mindfulness. Have you ever tried to just observe your thought? Watch them rise like the smoke from a camp fire, spinning up into the sky before dissipating. I find it a crazy-making but profoundly important practice. When I am mindful of my thoughts I hear the inner voice that says "I can't believe you are trying to be mindful again. You are terrible at this- give it up." I hear the inner voice that says "that religious belief doesn't fit in with my worldview, I am ignoring it."

You don't have to sit in full lotus pose under the Bodhi tree, just pause and notice your reaction to a new idea that knocks out of focus your standard thought on politics, on faith, on yourself. Make a mental mark- huh, I am not very nice to myself. Huh, I get really nervous when I hear about truly compassionate conservatives. Huh, I am uncomfortable and I am not sure why. I need to think on why I am feeling that way.

Unexamined blik aren't healthy for us or for our vision of a more just world. They lead to prejudiced behavior, they shut down new ideas that may change our worldview for the better. The sooner we examine our blik the sooner we will be free of the unhealthy lenses that influence how we move through this world.

When you feel angry, defensive, or nervous but you aren't sure why- pause. Consider the thoughts rising like wood smoke. Is something happening that unsettles a long-hidden blik? This month, as we consider

the theme of Revelation, let mindfulness lead you to a personal revelation: you don't have to trust everything you think. Pause. Consider. And tear down that blik.