

the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Spring 2007 e-Newsletter - Social Justice Edition



Kindness is a gentle form of love. When kind to others, we demonstrate the very best of what it means to be human. It takes practice, persistence, patience, and wisdom, and seldom comes without a price. But it has a big payoff. It is truly a full life that kind and caring people live. Kindness nourishes the mind, the body, and the spirit of both the giver and the receiver. It is an opportunity to act in a way that is essentially and ultimately Divine.—Harold G. Koenig

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Storytelling as a reflective practice

Storytelling is a very powerful cultural tool to teach people about a variety of ethical and moral values. The stories that follow teach us about kindness.

[*Buddha of Infinite Light: The Teachings of Shin Buddhism, the Japanese Way of Wisdom and Compassion*](#) by D. T. Suzuki gives us a story about kindness. It is a tale about a man's surprising kindness to a group of boys stealing fruit from his trees.

"When a man heard noise coming from his yard, he looked out and saw neighborhood boys climbing up one of the fruit trees in the yard, trying to steal some fruits. So he went out into the yard and placed a ladder underneath the boys in the tree. He then quietly returned to his house. Is this not a stupid thing to do? The boys are stealing his fruits, but the owner does not stop them from committing an unlawful act. This man feared that when the children try to come down the tree, nervous about being caught, they might slip and fall, and hurt themselves. His impulse was to prevent them from being injured, not to save his property from thieves."

Here's another from the Sufi tradition which demonstrates the power of being kind without expecting anything in return.

Once upon a time, says the Sufi master, the waters of the rivers swelled and ran over the riverbank, reaching the level of trees. At the most frail end of the lowest branch, a scorpion clung quivering to the one leaf above the water. The Sufi knelt down in the dust, stretched himself out on a slender branch and extended his hand to the scorpion as a bridge. Each time he reached for the leaf, however, the scorpion bristled and sprang to sting. "Are you crazy?" shouted a passerby. "Don't you know every time you touch that scorpion, you will be stung?" And the Sufi shouted back, "perhaps, dear friend, but just because it is the scorpion's nature to sting, should I forfeit my nature to save?"

Michael Garret's [*Walking on the Wind: Cherokee Teachings for Harmony and Balance*](#) offers us this gem. To "walk the path of good medicine" is to be in harmony with the universe and its sacred rhythms." He uses stories like the following to elaborate.

"I remember once listening to a Mayan elder talk about one day when he was walking in the forest with a young boy who had cut off one of the branches of a small tree. The boy was proud of his new walking stick and displayed it for the elder to see. The elder questioned whether the boy had gone about it in a proper way: asking permission, taking only what he needed, and giving thanks to the tree spirit by making some offering. The boy replied that he had just cut it off because he needed a good walking stick and the branch was a good one for that. The elder asked the boy to go back to the tree and put his hand on the spot where he had cut off the branch.

'What did you feel?' he asked the boy.

'It was wet,' said the boy.

'That is because the tree was crying,' the elder replied."

Small Gestures of Kindness

Here are 10 small, but practical gestures to kick start your kindness practice.

1. Offer someone a helping hand if you see them struggling with bags of groceries.
 2. Make eye contact with someone today, smile and greet them when entering a room or building.
 3. Pick a day when you set a firm intention to look outside yourself to see when someone needs help.
 4. Open the door for an elder or someone holding a baby or thank someone who holds the door for you.
 5. Apologize if you bump into someone.
 6. If you pass a homeless person on the street and you don't have any "spare change," immediately send them a blessing of abundance.
 7. Offer a hearty "good morning" and "good night" to neighbors and co-workers.
 8. Send a kind word to a friend you haven't seen or spoken to recently.
 9. Offer to run an errand for an elder in your neighborhood or apartment building.
 10. Prepare a special meal for someone who you care about and who may be facing a difficult life challenge.
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Upcoming Workshops, Trainings and Retreats

CMind events:

Sitting in the Fire with Integrity

Saturday, April 21, 2007:

10:00 am – 4:00pm

\$15 - \$40 sliding scale admission

Brotherhood/Sistersol

512 West 143rd Street

New York, NY

For more information, contact sophia@contemplativemind.org

Awake to this Moment: A Zen Meditation Retreat for Activists and Organizers

Led by Rev. Ryūmon Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín

2 Day retreat: July 28th, 2007, 10am-7pm and July 29th, 2007, 8am-1pm

Smith College, Northampton, MA

Limited Spaces, for more information contact sophia@contemplativemind.org

A Gathering of Activists/Organizers of Color

October 9-12, 2007

Trinity Conference Center, West Cornwall, CT

This is an intergenerational gathering of northeast activists and organizers exploring the integration between spiritual practice and social action.

Please email Sophia Rice at sophia@contemplativemind.org for further information.

Non Cmind related events:

Nonviolent Communication

led by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D.

May 4-6, 2007

Omega Institute

Rhinebeck Campus: Rhinebeck, NY (US)

Tuition: \$295 (does not include accommodations or commuter fee)

For more information visit www.tinyurl.com/2z6k82

Vision and Values Workshops

May 7-9, 2007

Doyle Conservation Center

Leominster, Massachusetts

Through these workshops, we help organizations and coalitions re-align their practices with their vision and values, expanding the scope and effectiveness of their work. For more information visit www.wholecommunities.org/vision_values/

Spirit in Action Leadership Program

May 9-13, 2007

Tierra Learning Center

Washington

For more information visit www.spiritinaction.net

Introduction to Spiritual Activism: Cultivating Joy While Changing The World

Led by Carla Goldstein, J.D. and Bonnie Singman, B.A.

June 29, 2007 - July 1, 2007

Rhinebeck Campus: Rhinebeck, NY (US)

Tuition: \$255 (does not include accommodations or commuter fee)

For more information visit www.tinyurl.com/2768cl

Being Change: The Way of the Activist

Retreats for Activists

August 5 - 10, 2007

Vallecitos Mountain Refuge

Taos, New Mexico

For more information visit www.stonecircles.org/work/events.html#being

Values in Action: A Mindfulness-based Leadership Training for Change Makers

Trainers TBA

Vallecitos Mountain Refuge, Taos, NM

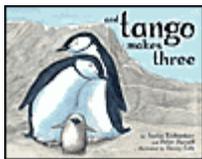
October 11-14, 2007

At Vallecitos, we meet in a new way. We convene deep in the deep woods and mountain wilderness, with no computers or cell phones, and we turn inward. We use a set of time tested awareness and contemplative practices drawn from the great wisdom traditions that are simple, direct and undogmatic. We spend time in the woods, hiking in the majestic old growth forest of the magical and legendary La Manga wilderness that borders the ranch.

The format cultivates creative dialogue, critical thinking and strategic problem solving. We explore important issues from different points of view, discover insights and formulate creative actions to systemic problems.

Visit www.vallecitos.org for more information and to register.

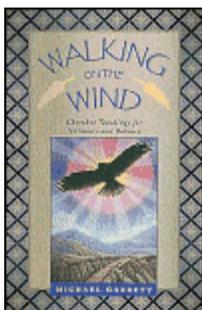
Recommended Reading



And Tango Makes Three

Richardson, Justin, Peter Parnell and Henry Cole
Simon and Schuster, 2005

This is an illustrated children's book which fictionalizes a true family story from NYC's Central Park Zoo.



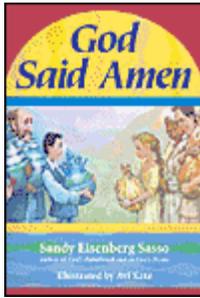
Walking on the Wind: Cherokee Teachings for Harmony and Balance

Garrett, Michael, Walking on the Wind
Bear & Company, 1998

Teaching stories about spiritual manners toward Mother Nature.

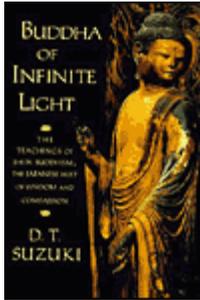
God Said Amen

Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg



Jewish Lights, 2000

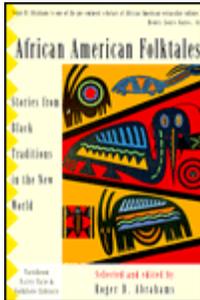
God Said Amen salutes the generous heart and the wonders it engenders.



Buddha of Infinite Light: The Teachings of Shin Buddhism, the Japanese Way of Wisdom and Compassion

Suzuki, D.T.

Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002



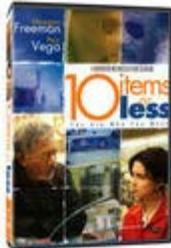
African-American Folktales: Stories from Black Traditions in the New World

Abrahams, Roger

New York: Pantheon Books, 1999

"The Trouble with Helping Out" (pp. 173-74.) is an Anansi story which asks us to consider what kind of expectations we have when we offer assistance or kindness to another.

Recommended Viewing



10 Items or Less

THINKFilm

Directed by Brad Silberling, February 2006

This is a delightful flick about 2 characters engaging in a day-long life-enriching adventure.

Recommended Listening

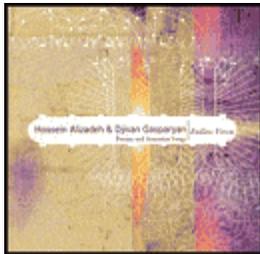
Rise

Anoushka Shankar

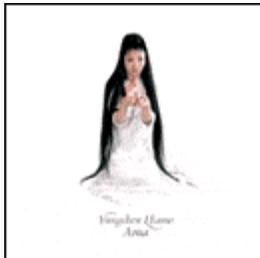
Angel Records, 2005



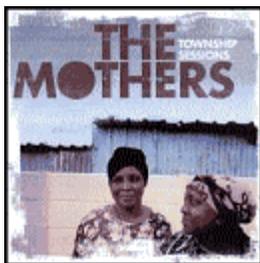
Not Too Late
Norah Jones
Blue Note, 2007



Endless Vision, Live
Hossein Alizadeh and Djivan Gasparyan
World Village, 2006



Ama
Yungchen Lhamo
Real World, 2006



The Mothers
Township Sessions
Mr. Bongo, 2005

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top image by Lisa Berry