Dear CMind Friends,

Sawubona! We see you!

First, please allow me to wish you a very Happy New Year. The new year brings with it a certain feeling of hope, of transformation, and imaginative anticipation. Moments ripe for reflection and introspection dwell deeply beside an enduring spirit of possibility even in the midst of an ongoing global pandemic.

There were moments within these first 12 days of the year that I experienced the joy brought on at the sound of a child’s laughter and others in which I was driven to an unknown depth of despair from missing those who are no longer with us in body, but very present in spirit. I am grateful I have felt it all without the need to attach too readily to any of those feelings; I know how fleeting feelings can be. Love is bedrock. It is a deep love that precipitates longing for those absent; that challenges us to challenge ourselves to do-be better; and that calls us from the unknown depths into the light of hope and collective action.

Love, as our new ancestor bell hooks reminded us, is a choice and an
Even more, love is an ethic; it is an ethical, social, political, cultural responsibility and commitment to truth, to overcoming domination, oppression, and subordination. Love is, perhaps, the most powerful force in the Universe. A force, writes Brian Massumi, “is not to be confused with power. Force arrives from outside to break constraints and open new vistas. Power builds walls” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xiii). Love is an all-encompassing force and the insistent call of the Universe, which compels us toward radical hope and opens the possibility of an ethical, more humane absent-present future free of the violence of domination. Love (or the lack thereof) is the politics, which precedes and shapes our very being in the world.

Love is risk. It is through risk—expectant hope, courageous action, “weakness and vulnerability that most of us learn empathy and compassion and discover the soul,” wrote our newly initiated ancestor Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

This week, our friend and CMind Board Member Vaishali Mamgain, writes to us about her love of CMind, calls us in love to collective action, and foregrounds for us the ethic of risk. That is to say, she illuminates love as an ethic of hopeful vulnerability, which requires a keen sense of responsibility, decisive action, and the spiritual fortitude to sit with and in uncertainty while releasing the need for reciprocity or desired outcome.

Vaishali invites us into the matrix or what I, along with Deleuze and Spinoza, call the plane of immanence. The plane of immanence, conjoint contemplation and action, invites us to implant ourselves in the ether of love, and invites us to understand that victory and defeat are both becomings at different speeds or haecceities within a milieu of pure possibility. Our matrix—our plane where being collides with thinking to catalyze new contemplative becomings, assemblages, and multiplicities—she reminds us, is CMind—both the spirit of the intention of our organization set at its founding, our necessary evolution to meet today’s challenges, and our need to anticipate the challenges to come. Vaishali invites us to enter into this organization’s radical becoming—together.

For the past two months, in the vein of critical examination, I have
contemplated a series of questions in stillness as it relates to CMind, my role, and how we might meet just one of the needs of a world bound together by suffering. In the spirit of collective reflexivity, I share them, and I ask you to hold them with me:

- What does it mean to be contemplative and do contemplatively?
- What does it mean to recognize our shared humanity and practice justice?
- How might we engender a genuine curiosity in our institutions of higher education, among our colleagues, and in our students about the generative complexity of contemplative practice?
- What is the role of grace—this great mystery that meets us right where we stand, but does not leave us where it finds us—in our organizational work?
- How might we, personally and organizationally, protect ourselves from being reasonable human beings—that is, how might we privilege the need to not adjust to environments, but force the environment to rise to and push the limits of our collective imaginations?
- How might we begin to practice living, being, and doing in radical amazement?

Thank you in advance for sitting with me, for holding intention with me, and for our generative work in the year ahead in service to collectively reimagining CMind.

To close on a joyful note, since November 2021 we have raised over $21,000 from members, friends, and board members of CMind. A hearty thank you to each of you for your generosity! In this issue, you will see that we are beginning to engage in our annual ACMHE membership drive. I encourage you to become a member and/or renew your membership to ACMHE. We have great events planned for the year ahead and you won’t want to miss them.

Gratitude in advance.

May your year be a practice in love and, in the words of my teacher St. Ignatius of Loyola, may that love “manifest itself in deeds rather than in words.”

bell hooks and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, may their memory and their wisdom be a blessing.
Risk, Resistance, and Regeneration

Dr. Vaishali Mamgain

It is my great pleasure to greet you in 2022. May this year bring us all, everywhere, joy and ease.

I want to begin by welcoming our new Executive Director – Dr. David Robinson-Morris. Do you remember what it felt like when as a child you found a new friend? Someone who enlivened you by showing you all their favorite places, with whom you shared stories and toys. David’s presence and leadership at CMind has felt like that. We have fun, a sense of purpose, and direct, meaningful conversations.

In one such exchange we brainstormed how to make CMind financially sustainable. Our previous funding model relied heavily on the benevolence of the philanthropic community through big grants, which allowed CMind to offer a variety of programming. Nationally, those grants are diminishing. CMind has to figure out a way ahead – who we are, what we do, and how we do it. It’s an important, sobering conversation but it doesn’t have to be dreaded. Instead, it can be clarifying, even invigorating.
Who are we? We are many things - kin to some folx, friends to others, skippers of stones, lovers of art, music, dance. Connected through CMind, we are contemplatives, students, scholars, teachers and many of us now name the work we do: we are anti-oppression activists! At CMind, together, we are learning, teaching, inventing on the fly, how to redefine academic and other spaces to enact compassion and justice. We are able to do it because we feel held in care, recognized, and supported. How do we do it? Through contemplation and action. Our contemplative practice lets us touch vastness, a wellspring of knowing and love that allows us to hold the seeming impossibility of addressing the world’s crises; and then there is action – the outer activity! This is the part that I’d like to expand upon.

CMind needs a firm financial base to survive. We are exploring various options – pursuing grants, offering different courses and training, and changing our fee structure. We need your help. At CMind we have been in the vanguard of the movement to undo oppression, particularly in academic spaces. Can you offer resources personally? Might your institution benefit from a CMind social justice training? Do you know potential donors? Importantly, can you form coalitions within your organization to further your request, to strengthen the ask?

Interrogating Power, Locating Our Edge
I facilitate anti-oppression work in various settings. When asked to situate themselves vis-a-vis a wheel of power I invariably get pushback: most people feel they have little or no power. I assure them - this is by design; the system wants us to think we are powerless - too powerless to form coalitions, to revolt against the inequitable system we are a part of. Many of us have much more power than we think we do. But we haven’t really interrogated this. What is our edge? In an accompanying practice I invite you to do that. First, we find our power, then we exercise it, we take a bit of risk. I say this with the caveat that for some of us, our entire lives have been an exercise in risk taking, in wresting power where none would have been given. You know who you are and I bow down to your courage.

The Ethic of Risk
I’m situating this message in the context of being part of a social justice movement, guided by Sharon Welch, who in her book Toward a Feminist Ethic of Risk asks, “How does a movement persist in the face of partial victories and continued defeats? ...The ethic of risk is characterized by three
elements: a redefinition of responsible action, grounding in community, and strategic risk-taking. Responsible action does not mean the certain achievement of desired ends but the creation of a matrix in which further actions are possible.” CMind is such a matrix.

When we were interviewing David for the ED position, someone asked what he would do to get CMind on a sound financial footing. He said, and I quote loosely, “The Board and CMind members have to ask themselves that question too. David Robinson-Morris alone cannot be the Great Black Savior of CMind.” I gasped, I felt called out, I felt called in, I felt relieved, I laughed. It was real! This is what I’m asking of you. Come on board with us. Contribute what you can personally, ask your institution to support you, form coalitions in your organization, partner with CMind. Interrogate what your edge is. We need to own our power if we are to persist in our movement to make the world more loving and just. Let’s take a risk together.

And now, because it always feels good to laugh, here’s a routine by Flip Wilson on the perils of passing around the collection plate.

In solidarity, and with laughter and gratitude,

Vaishali

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Vaishali Mamgain, PhD., is an Associate Professor of Economics and the Director of the Bertha Crosley Ball Center for Compassion at the University of Southern Maine. A leader in the field of contemplative education, she facilitates anti-oppression workshops in the US and abroad, specializing in somatic and immersive nature training to undo (internalized) oppression. In 2017, she completed a three year meditation retreat at Samten Ling Retreat Center in Crestone, Colorado, and now lives in beautiful, coastal Maine where she enjoys swimming in the sea, admiring seaweed, running, hiking, singing, and cooking.
Asking:
Risk, Resistance, and Regeneration Practice
By Dr. Vaishali Mamgain
The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE) is a professional academic association for all who bring contemplative practices and perspectives into their work in higher education. Member benefits include fee discounts for ACMHE and CMind events, access to the Journal of Contemplative Inquiry, a member directory, forum, webinar archive, and more.

Join over 800 members worldwide who are creating integrative, inclusive, and transformative education.

Join ACMHE Today
What does it mean to be a contemplative practitioner attentive to issues of power, racism, and marginalization in higher education today? How has your contemplative practice impacted your work as a teacher, scholar, leader, community activist? How does your practice sustain you? How do you navigate non life-affirming structures and harmful environments while seeking to transform them?

Proposals are requested for personal narratives + practice-descriptions that arise from the experiences of people from all identity categories for consideration to be included in the upcoming book Contemplative Practitioners in Higher Education: Showing Up in our Fullness.

Learn more here.

In 2021, CMind:

• Hosted over 1700 people at 36 online events, including retreats, work shops, and webinars on education, healing, and social justice.

• Deepened our commitment to social justice and anti-racist pedagogy through the lens of contemplative justice through a deep evaluation and transformation of CMind policy, program subject matter, and a host of diverse presenters.

• Continued the ACMHE Contemplative Education webinar series for a 13th year, with 405 participants over 8 webinars.
• Convened the 12th ACMHE Conference, Resourcing, Reconnection, and Reemergence: Centering Contemplative Practices in our Work and in our Healing.

• Welcomed a new executive director, Dr. David Robinson-Morris.

Are you a new reader? Welcome!

The Reservoir is a newsletter from CMind, The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. We intend this newsletter as a moment of respite in your busy day.

Click Here to Subscribe to The Reservoir
The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind) is a global community of contemplative practitioners whose goal is the ongoing development of racial, social, economic, and environmental justice and the advancement of human flourishing. CMind's mission is to positively and progressively transform society through diverse contemplative practices.

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