

Winter Feast for the Soul 2020 - Welcome Letter

Dear Meditator,

Welcome to Winter Feast for the Soul 2020, By engaging in this event, you become part of a global community whose intention is to bring more peace into our individual lives and into our world. Thousands of people all over the world participate in the Winter Feast each year. Through the realm of meditation, no bars, no walls, no razor wire, can keep our spirits from connecting with other spirits. As you go through this year's Feast, I invite you to notice ways in which you experience more connection with the whole.

For those who are new to the Winter Feast, let us take a few moments to tell you about its history. The first Winter Feast for the Soul began in a small community in Idaho in January 2008. The previous summer, a woman name Valerie Skonie read a poem by the 13th century Sufi mystic and teacher, Jelaluddin Rumi:

“What nine months does for the embryo, forty early mornings will do for your growing awareness”

The poem started a series of questions: What if this was true? What if forty early mornings could change our awareness? Valerie already had a daily spiritual practice of meditation and she knew how it had changed her life once she was faithful to it. How could she bring this to her local community? How could she inspire them to try it on their own?

In January 2008 about 150 people gathered daily in small groups, or alone in their homes, to share the practice of meditation. The secret was that they made a commitment to themselves and to one another that they would be faithful to their practice for forty days. Word spread rapidly and people around the country, and the world, wrote and asked if they could join the Idaho group.

In 2009, nearly 10,000 people in 29 different countries joined the Winter Feast, including 10 men housed in an incarceration center in Boise, Idaho. Of these ten men, one wrote regularly and submitted drawings of saints that came through his practice. “We are doing sacred work,” he wrote. “What we are doing will change the world. Thank you for letting me be part of this. It is changing my life.”

Pope John the 23rd wrote a letter to the world in 1963 on the topic of Peace on Earth. He said, “We will not have peace on our planet until there is peace in the heart of every person.” By finding our own personal inner place of peace, we make a huge contribution to the world and to the peace that it so badly needs. What you do makes a difference.

Each year, on January 14, an opening ceremony is held. Enclosed with this letter is an opening ceremony that is structured specifically for our program. When you participate in this ceremony, you create a container in which your next 40 days of practice can be held. This is an important part of the program, and we highly encourage you to take the time to do it.

With Metta,

Eastern Religions Chaplaincy Volunteers

Structure of Program

The materials for the printed version of the Winter Feast were originally developed by a team of Winter Feast volunteers led by a woman named Maya. The materials provided for this year's feast are drawn from materials Maya developed. If you are repeating the feast you may recognize some of them. Volunteers for the Crain Unit Eastern Religions service also contributed materials to incorporate into the Feast.

How to Participate in the Winter Feast for the Soul

The focus of the Winter Feast is on your meditation practice. If you keep your commitment to daily meditation throughout the forty days without reading a thing in this packet, that is wonderful. If you read everything in this packet but don't meditate, then that is what you needed to get out of the Winter Feast.

There are articles in this packet that will guide you in the practice of meditation. You can follow any or all of these meditations throughout the forty days or you can use any other meditation technique that you want.

If you'd like, we invite you to join the worldwide community in an **Opening Ceremony** for the Winter Feast on January 14.

Some of you will find journaling to be helpful. Journal pages have been included so that you may write as much or as little as you like. As soon as you complete your meditation time, take a few minutes to reflect on your experience and make journal entries. These pages are your private journal to keep. They are yours; no one else will read them.

Contemplations

Each day, read the quote for that day and spend some time contemplating what it means to you. Is there anything in that quote that can help you find more freedom or feel more gratitude?

Lastly, a note about keeping your commitment to yourself: The real commitment is to yourself. It is so important to remember that. When we keep our commitments to ourselves, we begin to feel better about ourselves, knowing we can count on ourselves to do something we said we would do.

- Striving to keep commitments is itself a spiritual practice. Most people do not live up to their commitments all of the time. Exploring how easy or hard it is to keep our commitments, we come to know ourselves better and experience what it means to be human. When it is easy, what supports you to keep the commitment? (i.e., doing it at the same time each day, or first thing in the morning)? When it is hard, what is the nature of the resistance? (i.e., thoughts of "I'm a failure," or "This isn't working the way I thought it would.") Just notice what comes up. Notice also what drives you to commit to a specific level. For example, are you choosing a level that feels realistic? Do you want to push outside of your comfort zone? Do you feel competitive with other participants?
- If you do not keep your commitment, no need to beat yourself up. Just take a breath, acknowledge that you did not keep your agreement, and resume the practice. Building new habits is not easy – it is important to be gentle with ourselves when we falter. You can even journal about your inability to meditate that day if you like.

Winter Feast for the Soul 2020 Opening Ceremony

This simple interfaith ceremony was first used in France in the early 20th Century. Humanity's search for Truth is found in many spiritual traditions that extend throughout recorded history. In this Candle Light Opening ceremony we honor the unity of these traditions as a way of bringing people together under the umbrella of our 40-day period of commitment to spiritual practice. We are all one in our search for peace.

- 1. Start with a few moments of noticing your breath. This can be anywhere from 1 to 15 minutes.**
- 2. Visualize an altar with candles on it. Imagine a large Candle of Truth being lit, while you say these words:**

I open this ceremony with the lighting of the candle of Truth.

- 3. Then imagine a candle being lit for each of the following traditions while you read the prayers. Take a few moments to contemplate each prayer. What does it mean to you? How does it apply to your life?**

a. Native American

There is a river flowing now very fast.

It is so great and so swift that there are those who will be afraid.

They will try to hold on to the shore.

They will feel they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly.

Know that the river has its destination.

The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open and our heads above the water.

And I say, see who is there with you and celebrate.

At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves.

For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt.

The time of the lone wolf is over.

Gather yourselves.

Banish the word struggle from your attitude and vocabulary.

All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

We are the ones we have been waiting for.

~ Message from the Hopi Elders

b. Buddhist

May all living beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.

May we all be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

May we always rejoice in the happiness of others.

May we abide in equanimity, free from attachment and aversion.

~ The Four Immeasurables

c. Judaism

Let the rain come and wash away the ancient grudges, the bitter hatreds held and nurtured over generations. Let the rain wash away the memory of the hurt, the neglect.

Then let the sun come out and fill the sky with rainbows.

Let the warmth of the sun heal us wherever we are broken.

Let it burn away the fog so that we can see each other clearly.

So we can see beyond labels, beyond accents, gender or skin color.

Let the warmth and brightness of the sun melt our selfishness.

So we can share the joys and feel the sorrows of our neighbors.

And let the light of the sun be so strong that we will see all people as our neighbors.

Let the earth, nourished by rain, bring forth flowers to surround us with beauty.

And let the mountains teach our hearts to reach upward to heaven.

~ A Prayer for the World by Rabbi Harold Kushner, 2003

d. Christian

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; Where there is sadness, joy.

O, divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,

To be understood as to understand,

To be loved as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

~ Saint Francis of Assisi

e. Islam

Move beyond any attachment to names.

Every war and every conflict between human beings has happened because of some disagreement about names.

It's such an unnecessary foolishness, because just beyond the arguing there's a long table of companionship, set and waiting for us to sit down.

What is praised is one, so the praise is one too, many jugs being poured into a huge basin.

All religions, all this singing, one song.

The differences are just illusion and vanity.

Sunlight looks slightly different on this wall than it does on that wall and a lot different on this other one, but it is still one light.

We have borrowed these clothes, these time-and-space personalities, from a light, and when we praise, we pour them back in.

~ Jelaluddin Rumi - 13th century (Translation by Coleman Barks)

f. Yoga / Hindu

Still your mind in me, still yourself in me,
And without doubt you shall be united with me, Lord of Love, dwelling in your heart.
But if you cannot still your mind in me,
Learn to do so through the practice of meditation.
If you lack the will for such self-discipline,
Engage yourself in selfless service of all around you,
For selfless service can lead you at last to me.
If you are unable to do even this,
Surrender yourself to me in love,
Receiving success and failure with equal calmness as granted by me.
Better indeed is knowledge than mechanical practice.
Better than knowledge is meditation.
But better still is surrender in love,
Because there follows immediate peace.

~ Krishna to Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita

g. Pagan

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the infinite peace to you.

~ Adapted from ancient Gaelic runes

- 4. Then imagine that the final candle to be lit honors “all those, known and unknown, who have held aloft the Lamp of Truth.”**
- 5. End the ceremony with being aware of your breath – from 1-30 minutes.**



Mediation 1: Gratitude

Note: Begin by reading the whole piece so you get a sense of how this will go. Then proceed section by section. You will use the same breath awareness throughout the entire meditation:

Close your eyes gently and start with a few gentle breaths in and out. **(Pause)** Take a long slow deep breath in through your nose and witness it move into your body, into your belly. Feel your belly fill. Now slowly release it. Feel it and observe it as it flows back out of your nostrils. Just breathe and witness here for a few moments.

The first section focuses on gratitude:

Gratitude for each breath, each word, each thought, each relationship, the connection we have with our body and mind; the connection we have with our sweet mother earth, this connection to each other on this planet and the ability each of us has to transform our world by transforming ourselves.

Gratitude for the Winter Feast for the Soul as a powerful tool to connect us more deeply at the level of spirit, at the level of soul, at the most personal and the most universal levels.

Gratitude to yourself for showing up, for caring about your personal development, for opening your heart, for trusting in your very core, for trusting in the divine flow of the universe, in God, in this yoga, this union, this oneness. Gratitude, Deep gratitude.

Gratitude for the journey into the depths of your soul, into the furthest reaches of your existence. As the Sufi poet, Rumi, says:

*A new moon teaches gradualness and deliberation
And how one gives birth to oneself slowly.
Patience with small details makes perfect a large work like the universe.
What 9 months of attention does for an embryo
40 early mornings alone will do for your gradually growing wholeness.*

This has never been more true for us than in this moment because we have shown up here in the sacred womb of the Winter Feast to birth ourselves into the vast, abundant infinity of a new year.

Let's begin with gratitude. Sweet unconditional gratitude to help us open our hearts, our minds, our souls to the magnificence that allows us to spend our time in meditation. rather than fighting for food, struggling for warmth or scurrying for safety.

Now begins the meditation:

Get comfortable; relax. There are no rules here. Whatever position you want to sit in, lay in, or recline in, settle into it. The only requirement is that you show up. Tap into *metta*, unconditional loving kindness, and awaken the flow of love within.

Close your eyes and start with a few gentle breaths in and out. **(Pause)** Take a long deep breath in through your nose and witness it move into your body, into your belly. Feel your belly fill. Now slowly release it. Feel and observe it as it flows back out of your nostrils. Just breathe and witness here for a few moments. **(Long pause, 7 breaths)**

For the rest of this meditation, on each exhale you will be filling your heart with metta, sweet unconditional loving kindness bathing every cell in your body.

On each exhale, let that *metta* flow back into the world. Embody your breath. Don't direct it; just release it. Feel it fill you with each breath. Feel it empty from you as you exhale.

Stop here and practice flowing metta for at least 7 breaths. If you wish, you can stop here and just use the rest of the meditation time you have set aside to breathe in this manner. If you wish to take this a little deeper, you may continue.

Place your hand on your heart and feel your heart reach up into your palm as you inhale. Now feel the *metta* flow within you and without you. **Do this for at least 7 breaths.**

For the next part, you will do the same breathing, with a different focus each time. I suggest focusing on forgiveness for 7 breaths. Then stop, read the section on compassion, and do that for 7 breaths. Then on to acceptance, patience, and love.

1. **Forgiveness, self-forgiveness.** Give yourself permission, in this moment, to let your regrets slip away. Your choices you view as mistakes, bathe them right now with sweet *metta*. And let this love be a salve for your sweet tender heart. Forgiveness. Breathe it in. Let it flow back out into the world. **(Long pause, 7 breaths)**

2. **Compassion, self-compassion.** Empathy for yourself, and for your own suffering to end. Allowing yourself to be human and deserving of compassion. Allow compassion to fill every word, every thought, every deed. Compassion. Now breathe it in and let it flow back out into the world. **(Long pause, 7 breaths)**

3. **Acceptance, self-acceptance.** Allow yourself to just be. Accepting decisions you wish you hadn't made, accepting every choice you have made. Accepting that this moment is perfect, every moment, no matter how you have judged it, from the moment you came out of the womb, has led you to this moment. Acceptance. Breathe it in and let it flow back out into the world. **(Long pause, 7 breaths)**

4. **Patience.** Patience for what you receive and what you expect to receive. Patience for the next moment. Patience to let others finish their words before you interrupt. Patience for the miracles in your life to unfold at God's pace rather than your own. Patience. Breathe it in, and let it flow back out into the world. **(Long pause, 7 breaths)**

5. **Love, self-love.** Breathe in and feel *metta* flow into your heart. Feel it fill, washing you with love for your body, love for your emotions, love for your feelings, love for your life, love for the way you flow through the world, love for your self. You are so deserving of love, so entitled to receive love. So worthy of love.

As the Sufi poet Hafiz wrote,

*When all of your desires are distilled, You will have but 2 choices:
to love more and to be happy.*

So breathe that love in and let it flow back out into the world. **(Long pause, 7 breaths)**

And now let's meditate in silence. At the end of the time you have set aside for meditation, read the *metta* moment and use it to take your practice into your life.

Metta Moment. And now, flow *metta* out into the world. Today. Just start today. Go a little easy on yourself. Be a little forgiving to yourself. Today. Just today. Have a little more self-compassion. Just today. Have a little more self-acceptance. When you find yourself having a pity party, feeling less than, beating yourself up, scolding yourself, or judging, regretting, just give yourself a hug, look in a mirror (if you can) and say *Namaste, I honor the light in you that's also in me.* And when you are in that divine space, and I'm in that divine space, we are one. Like exercise, any amount of meditation can bring unforeseen results. Expect the unexpected.

**A River Far Away and Long Ago
by Mary Oliver**

The river of my childhood,
that tumbled down a passage of rocks

and cutwork ferns came here and there
to the swirl and slowdown

of a pool and I saw myself -
oh clearly - as I knelt at one -

then I saw myself as if carried away,
as the river moved on. Where have I gone?

Since then, I have looked and looked
for myself, not sure

who I am, or where, or more importantly, why.
It's OK - I have had a wonderful life.

Still, I ponder where that other is -
where I landed, what I thought, what I did,

what small or even maybe meaningful deeds
I might have accomplished somewhere among strangers,

coming to them as only a river can -
touching every life it meets - that endlessly kind, that enduring.

MORE MEDITATION TECHNIQUES

Maybe your mind is filled with questions. Maybe painful thoughts have visited you or experiences of ecstasy. You might have noticed changes in your behavior, or in how others perceive your actions. Don't get attached to results. All the possible experiences that may come from your practice are your teachers, and everything that you need resides within you.

There is an old Tibetan saying "you cannot get butter by squeezing sand, no matter how long you try." A person could keep squeezing sand for a thousand years. When you ask him "what are you doing?" the answer is "trying to get butter." We all know that he will never get butter, because sand is devoid of butter.

Our rational mind tries to understand ultimate truth, but it never can, because it is the wrong tool. Our mind is always trying to figure out things that are beyond it. How do we realize that which is beyond our ordinary mind? We go inside ourselves and realize what is keeping us from opening our heart - doubt, resistance, guilt, fear, and shame. We shine the light of awareness on those feelings and thoughts and they usually dissolve. Love, courage, trust, and bliss are available to us when we lose our defensiveness.

Meditation is the primary tool for providing us this opening. How do we take meditation into our daily lives when we get up from our sitting meditation? Here are some useful methods.

SETTING AN INTENTION: As you get up in the morning, maybe even before you get out of bed, set your intention for your day. You might intend to observe your daily meditation, feel gratitude, keep your temper, or notice the beauty around you. You might intend to develop clarity and insight, love and compassion for your self and others. Whatever it is, define it to yourself, and visualize how you might use this intention as you go through your day. Repeat it in your mind until you remember what it is, and remind yourself of it as you go through the day.

PAUSE #1: This is a mini meditation that I find most useful. It came about when my teacher Anam Thubten suggested that we pause and meditate every 2 hours during the day for a short period of time, just a pause, really. I don't time these meditations or do them on a schedule. I keep a little chime and whenever I pass it, I ring it and pause as long as it takes for the sound vibrations to fade away completely. When I am away from the chime, I often just play that vibration in my mind and stop whatever I am doing a moment. This has been a great thing for me; it puts a little distance from whatever stress I might experience, giving me a different perspective immediately.

PAUSE #2: Something or someone bugging you? Wanna say or do something mean or unwise? Pause for a breath or two or three. Look at the emotions and thoughts you are having. Let go of them. Look at the actions that you might take, and their consequences. Is there really a need for you to follow your emotions, or are they leading you into trouble? You can make a choice here, just from putting a pause between yourself and your actions.

JUST BREATHE: Relax. Breathe deeply for several breaths, then normally. Feel your breath coming in through your nostrils and traveling down the body, filling the stomach. Feel the air returning up the body and leaving the nostrils. Feel the vitality that your breath brings to your body, and feel gratitude for your body and your breath. You can stay with the breath and gratitude for as long as you would like.

GRATITUDE: Reflect on all that you have to be grateful for. Notice the person who does you a kindness, the people that love you for who you are, people who are difficult for you (they are your teachers), the beauty of the earth's sights and sounds in nature, the blessing of a whole body, sufficient food, and shelter, all the blessings of this precious human existence.

WALKING MEDITATION: Start with an erect and easy posture, hands folded in front of you, clasped behind your back, or hanging loosely at your sides. Take a slow step forward, paying attention to the set of your heel and toe, the movement of each of your muscles, and your breath. Breathe naturally. Put your foot down slowly, gently but firmly, and take another step, and another, each step slow and reverent, mindful of the whole incredible workings of your body that make walking possible. You may do this inside or outside.

Buddha covered hundreds of miles alone or with his followers doing walking meditation. You may want to imagine you are walking with him, or some other teacher who has guided you.

BLUE SKY MEDITATION: Who knew that our childhood play activity of watching clouds was a meditation? You can meditate on the blue sky and the clouds. Sit or lie down in meditation and look up. Let your gaze fall softly on the sky. Watch the clouds as they appear and disappear. Let your thoughts and feelings arise and dissipate naturally.

The heart of meditation is awareness that is like the vast sky. All arising thoughts and feelings are like clouds which arise and vanish into it. The sky does not reject or claim them. When you abide in sky like awareness, love, wisdom, and compassion shine forth from within like the sun, the moon, and the stars.

SINGLE POINT MEDITATION: Focus on an object of beauty, a flower, a candle flame, an autumn leaf, and just experience it as it is. This kind of meditation will still your mind and bring you into the present.

CHANTING: Chanting a mantra, or beloved verse, or song can place you in the present, as well as lift your spirits.

SMILE: Many spiritual teachings advise placing a gentle smile on your lips. It cheers you up as well as lifting the spirits of the person on the receiving end.

Buddha said "Don't go back over what has passed, nor yearn for what is yet to be. What has passed has been abandoned, and the future is not yet here. The state arising here and now - See it with insight as it is."

I CAN'T MEDITATE

Here are three things you need to know that will change the way you meditate

- 1) **MEDITATION ISN'T ABOUT QUIETING THE MIND.** Remove the idea that meditation is about sitting there quietly and thinking no thoughts. With practice, this may be the outcome - but it isn't the goal. A common mistake is to give up after a few minutes when your mind inevitably starts to wander. In fact, your mind wandering is a GOOD thing. It allows you to practice observing. The true purpose of meditation isn't just the moments your mind is silent. It is also the moments when you're able to recognize your mind wandering and bring your attention back to your breath. When you are distracted or overwhelmed, start by taking a deep breath. **DURING YOUR DAY -** Observe what you're thinking, acknowledge it, and calmly bring your attention back to whatever you should be doing in that moment.
- 2) **MEDITATION IS ABOUT SEPARATING YOURSELF FROM YOUR THOUGHTS.** If it isn't about quieting the mind, what is it for? Meditation helps you separate yourself from your thoughts and emotions instead of being controlled by them. At the core of meditation is strengthening your ability to observe yourself, to separate yourself from what you think and feel. The key is to realize that you are not the voice inside your head. Over time, you'll begin to notice that you are no longer driven by your thoughts and emotions. You will be able to recognize them as they arise, and choose to allow them to pass or act on them. **DURING YOUR DAY....**Take a step back and observe how you're feeling without judgement. You don't need to make them go away; just remember that you are NOT your emotions.
- 3) **MEDITATION IS ABOUT REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF HOW YOU CAN OPERATE.** At the beginning, the few minutes of meditation may be the only moments of calm and clarity in your day. That's OK. Over time, you will start to notice a general sense of mindfulness that you carry with you through the day. You begin to observe your thoughts and emotions and feel a deeper sense of control. Even if you start with just 2 minutes a day, meditation allows you to practice how to observe without judging, to forgive yourself and others, and to separate yourself from your ideas. **DURING YOUR DAY -** take a few moments to step back from getting caught up in whatever you are doing to focus on the present moment. Remember how you felt during meditation, and bring yourself back to that feeling.

Daily Contemplations

- 1) As you dissolve into love, your ego fades. You're not thinking about loving, you're just being love, radiating like the sun. ~ Ram Dass
- 2) The key to being mindful is remaining aware of experiences as they arise without getting lost in the story or the thoughts connected with any of them. ~ "Awakening Joy" by James Baraz
- 3) Wisdom tells me I am nothing; Love tells me I am everything. Between the two, my life flows. ~ Nisagaddtla Maharaj
- 4) Each thought, each action, in the sunlight of awareness, becomes sacred. In this light, no boundary exists between the sacred and the profane. ~ Thich Nhat Hanh
- 5) Meditation is the discovery that the point of life is always arrived at in the immediate moment. ~ Alan Watts
- 6) To see, we must forget the name of the thing that we are looking at. ~ Claude Monet
- 7) Revelations can be ambiguous. Disturbing figures may carry the truest message. ~ "Before Us Like a Land of Dreams" by Karen Anderson
- 8) It is true, we can seldom help those closest to us. Either we don't know what to give, or the part we have to give is not wanted. And so it is that those we live with and should know, elude us. But we can still love them. We can love completely, without complete understanding. ~ "A River Runs Through It" by Norman McClean
- 9) For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes. ~ Dag Hammarskjold
- 10) Do not feel lonely, for the entire universe is within you. ~ Rumi
- 11) If you assume there is no hope, you guarantee that there is no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, then there is a possibility that you can contribute to making a better world. ~ Noam Chomsky
- 12) If you are going to be able to look back on something and laugh at it, you might as well laugh about it now. ~ Marie Osmond
- 13) There are no traffic jams along the extra mile. ~ Roger Staubach
- 14) Earth is forgiveness school. ~ Anne LaMott
- 15) Always remember that you are unique - just like every body else.
- 16) There is an extremely powerful force that so far science has not found an explanation for. It is a force that includes and governs all others. This universal force is LOVE. If we want our species to survive, love is the answer. Each individual carries within them a small but powerful generator of love, whose energy is waiting to be released, able to transcend anything and everything. LOVE is the quintessence of life. ~ Albert Einstein in a letter to his daughter

- 17) May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in the world, so that you and do what others claim cannot be done, so that you can bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor. ~ From a Franciscan Benediction
- 18) Change is not a four letter word, but often our reaction to it is. ~ Jeffrey Gilmore
- 19) It takes courage to grow up and turn out to be who you really are. ~ e e cummings
- 20) When we try separate anything out by itself, we find it hitched to every thing else in the universe. ~ Orson Scott
- 21) We must cherish and honor the word "free" or it will cease to apply to us. ~ Eleanor Roosevelt
- 22) This New Year may our face light up with the smile of love. May our minds become serene, free from fear and angst. May our hearts be filled with compassion. ~ Amma, "the hugging nun"
- 23) Looking behind, I am filled with gratitude. Looking forward, I am filled with vision. Looking upwards, I am filled with strength. Looking within, I discover peace. ~ Apache prayer
- 24) I am loving awareness. I am loving awareness. I am loving awareness I am loving awareness. I am loving awareness. I am loving awareness, and that brings me through the spiritual heart. The spiritual heart has the doorway to the soul. The soul is a plane consciousness other than this. The soul reacts compassionately and lovingly, in wisdom, peace, and joy. It is the loving perception inside of us, the mindfulness inside us that mirrors the mindfulness in children. We are conscious people. We become the community aimed towards truth, aimed towards truth, ..yeah...yeah!
~ some last words of Ram Dass
- 25) Be well. Do good work. Keep in touch ~ Garrison Keillor
- 26) Once an optimist and a pessimist ran into each other on the street. They wound up having a conversation. The optimist said to the pessimist with great joy, "Did you know that we live in the best of all possible worlds?" The pessimist sat for a while with a grim expression on his face and then he said, "I am afraid that is true." ~a joke told by Anam Thubten
- 27) Dog's eyes, enlightened eyes, what happens when we start dividing things, ourselves, enough and not enough, life and death? ~ Bonnie Myotai Treace
- 28) If we pay attention and open our hearts, every day brings many wonders and opportunities to grow, mature, to become an awakened heroine or hero. ~ Anam Thubten "Choosing Compassion"
- 28) Just wait. Can you wait a little bit? We don't know exactly what will happen. Conditions may change or they may not, but the state of your consciousness changes. And the state of your consciousness can be changed. Imagine that you travelled to a distant land to see the Northern Lights. Then you become very impatient. Maybe you had to wait just half an hour longer, But you said, "I have already been here 3 hours. I am leaving now. ~ Anam Thubten "Choosing Compassion"
- 29) Perhaps you have the experience of walking somewhere when you unexpectedly came across something so wonderful that the magic of existence just shocks your mind. The whole sky turns a bright orange color, and you realize that actually, this is magic. This sacred manifestation is the play of the universe. Sometimes you want to take a picture of it, but by the time you pick up your camera, it is already gone. ~ Anam Thubten "Choosing Compassion"

30) Happiness isn't having what you want, it is wanting what you have.

31) The most important realization was that all I had to do to live in heaven on earth was to love everybody, and the way I could, was to smile. Even smile to people who don't merit it. If someone bad vibes you, smile. It shakes them up. ~ Tommy Hancock of The Supernatural Family Band

32) I think being able to contact your own soul is one of the most important things in life. I can't hardly hear, I can't see very well. My mind doesn't work very well. I meditate to make up for it. Getting old would be a tough trip without it. ~ Tommy Hancock

33) Everybody should be quiet near a little stream and listen.

34) I had nothing better to do than listen. I mean this seriously. ~ Mary Oliver

35) Just let your mind be alone, as it is. Let yourself completely rest in this awareness. ~ Anam Thubten

36) Be still, we are on the edge of the roof, and we are all drunk. ~ Rumi

37) Now, as I look back, it seems that life is filled to overflowing with signs of peril and disaster. If we cower before every storm cloud that gathers and cover our heads when the wolf howls outside our night window, our days would become flight, not life. We would be driven to the ground by fears and our fear of fear. ~ Janice Woods Windle

38) I long, as does every other human, to feel at home wherever I find myself. ~ Maya Angelou

39) When you go out into the woods, and you look at trees, you see all these different trees. And some of them are bent, and some of them are straight, and some of them are evergreens, and some of them are whatever. And you look at the tree and you allow it. You see why it is the way it is. You sort of understand it didn't get enough light and so it turned out that way. And you don't get all emotional about it. You just allow it. You appreciate the tree.

The minute you get near humans, you lose all that. And you are constantly saying "You are too this, or I'm too this." The judgement mind comes in. And so I practice turning people into trees. Which means appreciating them just the way they are. ~ Ram Dass

40) When peace like a river descends on my soul, When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, you have taught me to say "It is well, it is well with my soul." ~a favorite song from an old hymnal

Small Stones from the River
by Kat Lehmann

If you are waiting
for circumstances to shift
so you can be happy,
you will never be happy

If you are waiting
to resolve an old hurt
so you can be happy
you will never be happy

If you are waiting
for happiness to find you
so you can be happy
you will never be happy

Happiness
is the work of the soul
a simple choice
a difficult choice
the project to carve
an inner oasis
beneath the noise
beneath the surface.

Daily Sitting Practice – Journal

Record your meditation time for each day of the Winter Feast. (You can sit one or more times during each day to reach your goal.) Also write a little about your experience each day. For example, you might comment on:

- The challenges that arose for you
- Bodily sensations you were aware of
- Your state of mind before and after the session
- How you brought your meditation practice into your daily life

Day/Date	Sit Time	Notes
1 Jan 15		
2 Jan 16		
3 Jan 17		
4 Jan 18		
5 Jan 19		
6 Jan 20		
7 Jan 21		
8 Jan 22		
9 Jan 23		
10 Jan 24		

Daily Sitting Practice – Journal

Day/Date	Sit Time	Notes
11 Jan 25		
12 Jan 26		
13 Jan 27		
14 Jan 28		
15 Jan 29		
16 Jan 30		
17 Jan 31		
18 Feb 1		
19 Feb 2		
20 Feb 3		

Daily Sitting Practice – Journal

Day/Date	Sit Time	Notes
21 Feb 4		
22 Feb 5		
23 Feb 6		
24 Feb 7		
25 Feb 8		
26 Feb 9		
27 Feb 10		
28 Feb 11		
29 Feb 12		
30 Feb 13		

Daily Sitting Practice – Journal

Day/Date	Sit Time	Notes
31 Feb 14		
32 Feb 15		
33 Feb 16		
34 Feb 17		
35 Feb 18		
36 Feb 19		
37 Feb 20		
38 Feb 21		
39 Feb 22		
40 Feb 23		

LOVINGKINDNESS MEDITATION

Excerpt from: "Loving-Kindness: Healing Your Inner Child"

by Peggy Rowe Ward and Larry Ward; Lion's Roar, December 25, 2019

Love is transformative, yet hard to give ourselves unconditionally, especially when we have had early experiences that did not honor us or nurture an inner sense of being worthy, understood, and loveable. We often bury parts of the past and of ourselves that are too painful or tinged with shame, fear, and horror. Early experiences of trauma can impact our capacity for self-love as a result of stress trapped in the body. Yet, the injured "inner child" is not a separate, unchangeable self, but rather reflects deep patterns resulting from many causes, conditions, and perceptions that are both individual and collective.

Thankfully, this type of disconnection from parts of ourselves and from unconditional self-compassion is something that can be worked with through meditation. Our brains and minds have neuro-plasticity that allows us to shrink the seeds of self-aversion, self-criticism, shame, and guilt inside and grow our hearts as wide as the world. When we are able to practice self-love consistently, returning over and over to maintain a soft heart in the face of our own suffering, eventually we're able to let go of our negative thought patterns and find ourselves transformed.

Here are several ways we can practice love for ourselves, heal the wounds within us, and expand our capacity to love other people, because to fully love others we must first love ourselves. When we experience our own suffering, the first invitation is to name this experience. In Thich Nhat Hanh's words, "We call it by its true name." Whatever arises, you can name it and send it the energy of loving-kindness. This is the kind of love in which we hold the suffering child within us. There are several practices from Thich Nhat Hanh's tradition that have helped each of us build a loving and trusting relationship with the suffering child within us. The first step is building our resources- with supportive people, peaceful images, readings, mantras, or whatever allows us to build a sense of inner peace and sustenance. Second is to bring a sense of mindful attention and appreciation to the body and breath. Finally, offer love to your inner child by silently offering these words:

Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.

Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.

I bring my kind attention to the in-breath.

I bring my kind attention to the out-breath.

Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body, right here.

Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body, right here.

Aware of body, here and now.

Breathing in, I see myself as a five-year-old child, fragile and vulnerable.

Breathing out, I smile to myself as a five-year-old child.

Breathing in, I am aware that the five-year-old child is in me.

Breathing out, I hold this child tenderly.

This meditation can help us see and honor our vulnerability, increase our resilience, and allow the divine hidden child within to be strengthened and healed. True strength encompasses all aspects of our human experience.

Please Call Me by My True Names

by Thich Nhat Hahn

Do not say that I'll depart tomorrow—
even today I am still arriving.
Look deeply: every second I am arriving
to be a bud on a Spring branch,
to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings,
learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.
I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry,
to fear and to hope,
the rhythm of my heart is the birth and death
of all that are alive.
I am the mayfly metamorphosing
on the surface of the river,
and I am the bird which, when Spring comes,
arrives in time to eat the mayfly.
I am the frog swimming happily
in the clear water of a pond,
and I am the grass-snake
that silently feeds itself on the frog.
I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks.
And I am the arms merchant,
selling deadly weapons to Uganda.
I am the twelve-year-old girl,
refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean
after being raped by a sea pirate.
And I am the pirate,
my heart not yet capable
of seeing and loving.
I am a member of the politburo,
with plenty of power in my hands.
And I am the man who has to pay his
"debt of blood" to my people
dying slowly in a forced labor camp.
My joy is like Spring, so warm
it makes flowers bloom all over the Earth.
My pain is like a river of tears,
so vast it fills the four oceans.
Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and laughter at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can wake up
and so the door of my heart can be left open,
the door of compassion.