

Welcome to the Winter Feast for the Soul

For forty days, you will be part of a world-wide community. Every day, spiritual brothers and sisters across the planet will meditate, or walk mindfully, or pray, or chant, or just sit quietly—whatever practice they choose. How you keep your commitment for the next forty days is up to you. In the invitation letter for the Winter Feast, we provided some suggestions and they are included again below.

This packet contains materials to help you through the forty days of the feast. You will find:

- a journal for you to record your daily experience throughout the feast
- guidelines for an opening ceremony and a picture to use to decorate the space where you meditate
- contemplations – spiritual quotations that you can reflect upon each day of the feast, and a space to write about your favorite quotations
- A few additional materials just because we liked them.

If you have done the feast before, you may notice that the packet is shorter this year. Please let us know if it is missing anything that you found valuable in the past.

Some Suggestions for your Daily Practice

Sitting Meditation: Sit quietly with your eyes closed. Isn't that simple? And yet...you may find that it isn't easy to sit "quietly" for five minutes let alone ten. The mind is a very busy place, something like a jungle full of wild beasts. We have given our mind the position of Supreme Ruler of our lives and allowed it to dictate our sense of self. The mind, for the most part, was formed when we were young and unable to filter or discern right from wrong, or true from false. It was formed when we were unable to recognize that peace is more powerful than war, that forgiveness is more powerful than anger, that deep inside we all know what is right and true. We just have to get quiet to find that place - to hear that small voice that resides within.

So here are some suggestions for how to hold your quiet time – in other words, instructions on how to meditate:

- Find a quiet place where you can sit with your spine erect, perhaps with your back against a wall. You want to be comfortable and supported without getting so comfortable that you fall asleep.
- With eyes closed begin to focus on your inner world.
- Tell your mind that you are going to give it a rest for the next few minutes. This will not be easy, because the mind is a thought-making machine and it must be retrained to be still so that you can do more inner listening.
- Focus on your breath. It is that simple. If you can just focus on your breath for five or more minutes a day, you will be rewarded in ways that you will never guess. Focusing on your breath takes your attention away from the mind and helps to create the inner peace that you are after.
- As your breath slows down your whole nervous system will begin to unwind. This is where new habits of mind can be formed.
- No matter what happens during your Quiet Time, do not judge yourself or what happens. The fact that you are sitting quietly and that you hold the intention of creating inner peace makes you a hero. No one can take that away from you. Once you learn to stop judging yourself, you will eventually stop judging others. Your compassion toward yourself will grow. You can't be loving and compassionate toward others until you are loving and compassionate toward yourself.

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 do your daily meditation, feel gratitude, keep your temper, or notice the beauty in the world around you. You might intend to develop clarity and insight, love and compassion for yourself 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. Imagine that you have a bell. In your imagination, ring the bell and listen to the sound fade away. Notice that as you are listening, you are still. The longer the chime takes to fade away, the more seconds you have of precious quiet time. While you are listening, you stop what you are doing outwardly and you stop the thoughts racing through your mind. This will give you a little distance from whatever stress you are feeling and shift your perspective. If you want, instead of an imaginary bell, you can assign a sound you hear during the day to be your signal for a few seconds of quiet time - even the whistle for count.

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 you might take and their consequences. Is there really a need for you to follow your emotions, or are they just 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 lungs and expanding 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 wish.

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 earths' 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 indoors or outside.

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 within like the sun, the moon, and the stars.

Prayer, Chanting, Poetry, some kinds of Music. These can be wonderful activities for finding the quiet place within.

Other Activities. There aren't any rules. If there is an activity (or non-activity) that leads you to a place of quiet, calm, and reflection, that leads you to be kinder to others and to yourself, that helps you to let go of your grievances and your hurts, do it.

☪ All Blessings to All Beings ☪

Opening Ceremony – to be done on either January 14 or 15

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 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. Looking at the enclosed altar picture, say these words silently or aloud:

I open this ceremony with the earnest desire to know the Truth.

The following prayers reflect the different approaches people have adopted in their pursuit of the truth. 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 Divine Abodes, or the Four Immeasurables

c. 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

d. 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 - Rabbi Harold Kushner – 2003

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

h. Finally, honor "all those, known and unknown, who have held aloft the lamp of Truth".

3. End the ceremony with being aware of your breath – from 1-30 minutes.

4. If you like, write a little about your experience of doing this ceremony. Use the provided Winter Feast journal.

Meditation Journal - Opening Ceremony

What did you do for an opening ceremony?

Describe your state before you started.

What challenges arose for you?

Please describe any images that arose during your meditation.

What bodily sensations were you aware of?

Describe your state after the session.

Take a moment to consider: What do you think will be your greatest challenges in doing the Feast? How will you support yourself to build new habits of self-care and mindfulness?

Daily Sitting Practice – Journal

Record your meditation time for each day of the Winter Feast. (*Please note that 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:

- Your state before you started
- The challenges that arose for you
- Bodily sensations you were aware of
- Your state after the session
- How you brought your meditation practice into your daily life
- Anything else you want to say

Day	Sit Time	Notes
1 Jan 15		
2 Jan 16		
3 Jan 17		
4 Jan 18		
5 Jan 19		

Winter Feast: Daily Contemplations for days 1- 10

Day 1

I see myself as a rose. Each petal is part of my transition, and now I'm blossoming.

Janet Contreras

Day 2

Divine love is incessantly restless until it turns all woundedness into health, all deformity into beauty and all embarrassment into laughter.

Beldon Lane

Day 3

Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world awaits in darkness for the light that is you.

L.R. Knost

Day 4

To earn the trust of your meditation, you must visit it every day. It is like having a puppy.

Chelsea Richter

Day 5

Love is a state of Being. Your love is not outside; it is deep within you. You can never lose it, and it cannot leave you.

Eckhart Tolle

Day 6

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

Day 7

Ring the bells that still can ring. - Forget your perfect offering. - There is a crack in everything. - That's how the light gets through.

Leonard Cohen

Day 8

Just as a solid rock is not shaken by the storm, even so the wise are not affected by praise or blame.

the Buddha

Day 9

Our bodily food is changed into us, but our spiritual food changes us into itself.

Meister Eckhart

Day 10

Some believe it is only great power that can hold evil in check, but that is not what I have found. I found it is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay...small acts of kindness and love.

Gandalf

How to work with the contemplations/quotations

- Meditate a few minutes to settle your mind. For this, try a simple meditation like counting your breath, following your breath in and out, or any other meditation that is short and doesn't involve complicated images.
- When your mind has settled enough to be able to focus with quiet attention, read the quote for the day. The first time you can read it either out loud or silently. Then slowly repeat it silently to yourself a number of times. You can either choose a set period of time (for example, 10 minutes) or you can just keep repeating it until you feel like it has sunk in and is complete.
- Notice what comes up as you repeat it silently to yourself. You don't need to hyper-focus on it or think too hard about it, and if you are not sure what a word means don't worry about that. Just notice: are there any specific images, memories, feelings, thoughts, ideas that come up? What does the quote mean to you? Is there anything in that quote that can help you experience more freedom or feel more grateful for life?
- As you move through the 10-day period, choose two of the quotes – the ones that spoke most to your heart – to write about below. (Use another sheet of paper if you need more room.) Of course, you are also welcome to keep a journal after each Contemplation.

Quote 1: (Please write the quote)

Your thoughts and reactions:

Quote 2: (Please write the quote)

Your thoughts and reactions:

- Your state before you started
- The challenges that arose for you
- Bodily sensations you were aware of
- Your state after the session
- How you brought your meditation practice into your daily life
- Anything else you want to say

Day	Sit Time	Notes
6 Jan 20		
7 Jan 21		
8 Jan 22		
9 Jan 23		
10 Jan 24		

On Daily Practice by Anam Thubten

Anam Thubten is a Tibetan Buddhist who travels the world teaching and supporting people in their meditation and study. He is the teacher of many of the meditation volunteers who come to the Crain unit.

Recently, a friend of mine quoted someone at a meditation retreat, “we’re in a race between love and hatred.” I would like to rephrase that as, “we’re in a race between awareness and unawareness.” This sounds quite dramatic, making us feel that there is urgency happening and we have to act as quickly as possible. But let’s not use this statement to feel that the world is in a race, even if that might be true. Let’s use it to see what is happening in ourselves. Since we have little power to influence the consciousness of others, the best way to bring about change in the world is through changing our own consciousness. It can give us extra impetus by intentionally feeling that this race is taking place in oneself.

Our tradition also encourages us to “practice like our hair is on fire” - to not be complacent but feel that we have to do everything possible in order to wake up inside. Now the question is, what can we do to expedite inner awakening or growth? The answer can be simpler than we expect. It doesn’t have to be profound. All we really need is to remember to practice meditation every day. Yet there is resistance to keep this commitment and resistance can arise in many forms. Sometimes it can be a simple excuse that can have quite powerful psychological components.

We might like to contemplate the power of spiritual practice and how it changes us by bringing more meaning and joy in our lives. Recently, a friend of mine said that he has no choice but to practice meditation when he thinks of the benefits that come with practice. He also said that he cannot rely on any outer circumstance as a source of happiness since they’re transient and unfulfilling and true happiness is often found from inside. In that moment, his words literally struck a chord inside and I felt this is what I should remember all the time.

It is important for us to sit at least once or even a few times each day to practice meditation. The big, open secret for continuing the practice is not so much about thinking that we’re going to meditate or have some profound experience. Instead, all we need to do is to remember to let our body rest in a meditative posture. From there the meditation, calmness, and awareness can happen on their own. This is why the usual sitting posture is strongly emphasized. A traditional saying goes, “when interdependence arises in the body, realization will shine in the mind.” Interdependence refers to the power of just sitting in the meditation posture and how we don’t even have to worry about meditating. We can simply relax in the posture with a straight back and shoulders, just as we see Buddha doing in statues and other representations of him.

The Winter Feast takes place at the start of a new year. One year from our lives is passing like a beautiful dream. It is a poignant time for each of us to make a vow to practice sitting meditation every day. May the light of truth shine in the hearts of many!

There have been thousands upon thousands of people who have practiced meditation and obtained its fruits. Don't doubt its possibilities because of the simplicity of its method. If you can't find the truth right where you are, where else do you think you will find it?

~ Dogen

- Your state before you started
- The challenges that arose for you
- Bodily sensations you were aware of
- Your state after the session
- How you brought your meditation practice into your daily life
- Anything else you want to say

Day	Sit Time	Notes
11 Jan 25		
12 Jan 26		
13 Jan 27		
14 Jan 28		
15 Jan 29		

Winter Feast: Daily Contemplations for days 11-20

Day 11

All things are inventions of holiness—some more rascally than others.

Mary Oliver

Day 12

Change is never painful. Only resistance to change is painful.

Anonymous

Day 13

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds.

Bob Marley, Redemption Song (based on a speech by Marcus Garvey)

Day 14

A spacious and undefended heart finds room for everything you are and carves space for everybody else.

Father Greg Boyle

Day 15

If we learn to open our hearts, anyone, including the people who drive us crazy, can be our teacher.

Pema Chodron

Day 16

Of a certainty, the man who can see all creatures in himself, himself in all creatures, knows no sorrow.

the Upanishads

Day 17

Our consciousness is like a factory where we create all kinds of imaginary problems.

Anam Thubten

Day 18

There are countless paths, each with its own landmarks, its own route.

Ram Dass

Day 19

Walking, I am listening to a deeper way. Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me. Be still they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands.

Linda Hogan

Day 20

You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.

Anonymous

How to work with the contemplations/quotations

- Meditate a few minutes to settle your mind. For this, try a simple meditation like counting your breath, following your breath in and out, or any other meditation that is short and doesn't involve complicated images.
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Your thoughts and reactions:

Quote 2: (Please write the quote)

Your thoughts and reactions:

Your state before you started • The challenges that arose for you • Bodily sensations you were aware of
 • Your state after the session • How you brought your meditation practice into your daily life • Anything else you want to say

Day	Sit Time	Notes
16 Jan 30		
17 Jan 31		
18 Feb 1		
19 Feb 2		
20 Feb 3		

Dear Winter Feast Friends,

By now you have reached the halfway mark – twenty days into the Winter Feast. How is it going? Have you been able to sustain a daily practice?

If not, how are you treating yourself about it? Are you beating yourself up because you have missed a day or two – or nineteen? It's so easy for most of us to get into the mode of making ourselves wrong. There seems to be something in our culture that teaches us from a very early age, and very thoroughly, that we are flawed, and the only way to fix ourselves is through flogging ourselves into being better human beings. I have noticed that when I "screw up" by say, missing a day or a week of meditation, the feeling that comes up for me is shame – I feel so ashamed I don't want to tell anyone – in fact, if anyone asks me, I am very tempted to lie about it – after all, they'll never know the difference, right?

Then it becomes all about keeping up the image I want people to have of me – someone who is so good that I always do the "right" thing. And holding that "secret" has me pull away from people, terrified they will discover I am not who I speak myself to be. And of course, it doesn't work, because whether the other person ever finds out or not, I know – and that is one person I can never escape from.

This morning I did a meditation on self-compassion. Wow! It opened my eyes to a lot of things that have eluded me all these years. I saw how unloving I am towards myself. What need am I trying to meet when I miss a day or more of meditation, when I have said over and over again, for years, that I want to have a daily meditation practice? Maybe it is my need for spontaneity – when I try to establish a discipline of any kind, I feel trapped. Now I can't sleep in in the morning. You mean, every day, no matter what, I have to sit and be still? No! I need to move, to have choice in my life. And I feel my little child inside rebelling.

And what makes me want to lie about it when I miss a day? Maybe it's my need for respect. If I say this time I am going to meditate daily, no matter what, and once again, I fail to keep that promise, and then I tell someone else that I failed AGAIN, I decide (of course without checking it out) that they will not have respect for me. I find myself "shoulding" myself – I should be consistent, I should never make a mistake, I should always do what I say I will do – and this is only the beginning of the "should" list.

So that brings me back to feeling ashamed and then I want to hide out. In this way, I isolate myself from the people in my life, because what if, horror of horrors, they should find out that I am a flawed human, not such a conscious being as I would like everyone to believe I am? So this shame-based way of trying to make myself into the kind of person I long to be only leads to more shame, more isolation, more likelihood that I will continue to mess up. After all, it helps keep in place my belief that I cannot trust myself to keep my agreements, especially around things having to do with taking care of myself.

As I have been working with these self-compassion meditations, I am getting more in touch with what I have always believed – that the most effective way we have of helping ourselves and others to make lasting change in our behaviors is to love ourselves into them, not to beat ourselves into submission.

So let me end by asking the question I started with – How is the Winter Feast going? On the back of this page, I invite you to answer that question truthfully, lovingly, compassionately. It is so challenging to establish a daily practice of any sort under the best of circumstances. You are living a particularly challenging life, so when you have difficulty staying with the practice, can you give yourself credit for the hard work you are doing and the success you are having? And can you love yourself into a deeper practice? I, for one, intend to give it a go. Will you join me?

Much metta,
Maya

Winter Feast Halfway Reflections

How is your winter feast going?

How have you treated yourself so far during the feast? Kindly? Critically? With patience? With unreasonable expectations?

How have you treated others during the winter feast?

What else do you have to say?

Write some words of encouragement to yourself.

- Your state before you started
- The challenges that arose for you
- Bodily sensations you were aware of
- Your state after the session
- How you brought your meditation practice into your daily life
- Anything else you want to say

Day	Sit Time	Notes
21 Feb 4		
22 Feb 5		
23 Feb 6		
24 Feb 7		
25 Feb 8		

Winter Feast: Daily Contemplations for days 21-30

Day 21

"Today" means boundless and inexhaustible eternity. Periods of months and years and of time in general are ideas of men, who calculate by number; but the true name of eternity is Today. Philo

Day 22

Forgiveness is unlocking the door to set someone free and realizing you were the prisoner.

Max Lucato

Day 23

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.

Anne Frank

Day 24

Each morning we are born again. What we do today is what matters most.

Anonymous

Day 25

In this place of which you say it is a waste...there will be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness...the voices of those who sing.

the prophet Jeremiah

Day 26

All the joy the world contains has come through wishing happiness for others. All the misery the world contains has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.

Shantideva

Day 27

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.

Henry David Thoreau

Day 28

Forgiveness means giving up all hope of a better past.

Jack Kornfield

Day 29

I am more afraid of not living my life fully than of dying – of living a life dedicated to cherishing and protecting myself. This fear-driven approach is like covering your couch in plastic so it won't get worn. It robs you of the ability to enjoy and appreciate your life.

Dzigar Kongtrul

Day 30

It is never too late to do a good act.

the Buddha

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- Anything else you want to say

Day	Sit Time	Notes
26 Feb 9		
27 Feb 10		
28 Feb 1		
29 Feb 12		
30 Feb 13		

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

How few understand what love really is, and how it arises in the human heart. It is so frequently equated with good feelings toward others, with benevolence or nonviolence or service. But these things in themselves are not love. Love springs from awareness. It is only inasmuch as you see someone as he or she really is here and now and not as they are in your memory or your desire or in your imagination or projection that you can truly love them, otherwise it is not the person that you love but the idea that you have formed of this person, or this person as the object of your desire, not as he or she is in themselves.

The first act of love is to see this person or this object, this reality as it truly is. And this involves the enormous discipline of dropping your desires, your prejudices, your memories, your projections, your selective way of looking ...a discipline so great that most people would rather plunge headlong into good actions and service than submit to the burning fire of this asceticism. When you set out to serve someone whom you have not taken the trouble to see, are you meeting that person's need or your own?

~ Father Anthony de Mello

- Your state before you started
- The challenges that arose for you
- Bodily sensations you were aware of
- Your state after the session
- How you brought your meditation practice into your daily life
- Anything else you want to say

Day	Sit Time	Notes
31 Feb 14		
32 Feb 15		
33 Feb 16		
34 Feb 17		
35 Feb 18		

Winter Feast: Daily Contemplations for days 31-40

Day 31

By learning to locate Consciousness in the heart, we can begin to know the world...Mineral, plant, animal, and human...In a way that is long forgotten, but most natural to us. Stephen Buhner

Day 32

Happiness is not something readymade. It comes from your own actions. the Dalai Lama

Day 33

Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away. Maya Angelou

Day 34

No despair of ours can alter the reality of things or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there...We are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance. Thomas Merton

Day 35

If you look at what you have in life, you'll always have more. If you look at what you don't have in life, you'll never have enough. Oprah Winfrey

Day 36

Dear gods...grant that I may become beautiful within, and that whatever outward things I have may be in harmony with the spirit inside me. May I understand that it is only the wise who are rich, and may I have only as much money as a temperate person needs. Plato

Day 37

The absence of self-love is shame, just as cold as the absence of warmth. James Gilligan

Day 38

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven: for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain to the just and to the unjust. Jesus

Day 39

Through forgiveness, which essentially means recognizing the insubstantiality of the past and allowing the present moment to be as it is, the miracle of transformation happens not only within but also without. Eckart Tolle

Day 40

Meditation is not a way to enlightenment, nor is it a method of achieving anything at all. It is peace and blessedness itself. It is the actualization of wisdom, the ultimate truth of the oneness of all things. Dogen

How to work with the contemplations/quotations

- Meditate a few minutes to settle your mind. For this, try a simple meditation like counting your breath, following your breath in and out, or any other meditation that is short and doesn't involve complicated images.
- When your mind has settled enough to be able to focus with quiet attention, read the quote for the day. The first time you can read it either out loud or silently. Then slowly repeat it silently to yourself a number of times. You can either choose a set period of time (for example, 10 minutes) or you can just keep repeating it until you feel like it has sunk in and is complete.
- Notice what comes up as you repeat it silently to yourself. You don't need to hyper-focus on it or think too hard about it, and if you are not sure what a word means don't worry about that. Just notice: are there any specific images, memories, feelings, thoughts, ideas that come up? What does the quote mean to you? Is there anything in that quote that can help you experience more freedom or feel more grateful for life?
- As you move through the 10-day period, choose two of the quotes – the ones that spoke most to your heart – to write about below. (Use another sheet of paper if you need more room.) Of course, you are also welcome to keep a journal after each Contemplation.

Quote 1: (Please write the quote)

Your thoughts and reactions:

Quote 2: (Please write the quote)

Your thoughts and reactions:

- Your state before you started
- The challenges that arose for you
- Bodily sensations you were aware of
- Your state after the session
- How you brought your meditation practice into your daily life
- Anything else you want to say

Day	Sit Time	Notes
36 Feb 19		
37 Feb 20		
38 Feb 21		
39 Feb 22		
40 Feb 23		

A Ritual for Winter Feast Remembrance

Here is a story that Jack Kornfield related in his book, “The Wise Heart”:

A psychologist named Alyssa came to a meditation retreat where I was teaching. Alyssa worked with the UN caring for refugees, especially those who had been tortured and who were seeking political asylum. Alyssa told me she found it hard to sleep, to let go of the stories and images of suffering she was hearing. These images arose even during her meditation. “It is sometimes too much,” she said.

During the retreat, Alyssa used practices of compassion and equanimity to work with these images. The meditation got easier. Then we talked about how these profound sorrows are not meant to be borne alone. I told Alyssa she needed backup. I suggested she create a large altar on the back wall of her office and place on it whatever inspired her spiritually. Initially she included statues and images of Kwan Yin, Tara, Buddha, Jesus, Guadalupe, and Mary. Over time she added images of Latin American, African, and Haitian gods and an Arabic passage of mercy from the Koran. Now when the refugees arrive in her office, they see behind her the sacred images of each of their gods. To start each day, Alyssa calls on the gods and ancestors to support her and hold those who bring their sufferings to her. At the end of the day she symbolically places the sorrows she has heard on the altar, in their compassionate hands.

Now she feels that she does not carry her burden entirely by herself. The altar is a daily reminder of how the forces of compassion throughout the world uphold her dedication. We do not work alone for change; the power of life works with us.

Creating a simple ritual, such as inviting a person to make a prayer or light a candle, can bring a sense of reverence and new possibility to that persons’ inner work. Sometimes crafting a personalized ritual on the spot is the best medicine. It may be the ceremonial burning of old love letters or the burying of relics of our grief; it may be a paper listing habits and fears to be released upon the waves, the ringing of a gong to symbolize the end of an unhealthy phase of life, or the dedication and lighting of a candle to symbolize a new-found freedom. All these rituals can release our past and reawaken our true nature.

You have made a connection with meditators and spiritual seekers around the world through your participation in the Winter Feast. You have been supported by the structure of the feast, by your commitment, by the materials sent to you, and by the journey you share with meditators and friends in your immediate environment. Think about this story Jack related as you come to the end of your feast. What will support you in the future?

Can you create some little ritual(s) for yourself? Can you pick an object to remind you that your place in the world extends far past the walls around you? Can you make a habit of saying a prayer or maybe one of the quotations from the feast that moved you, as a way to remind yourself every day that your spirit extends far beyond the confines of how you usually think about yourself? Can you color a little square of paper blue and carry it in your pocket to remind yourself of the sky-like vastness of mind? What would work for you?

When people go to a meditation retreat, there is usually a ceremony at the end to bring closure and to help everyone begin to think about “daily life.” Some will continue to meditate after the retreat, some will not, and most will meditate for a while and then find it harder and harder to continue. There is no right way or wrong way (but you know that, right?). There is always mindfulness, however, and compassion for one’s self. That is always available, no further away than a thought in your mind. The work you have done will help you to find your way back to compassion for yourself and for others. Believe it or not, and whether you consider your feast a success or not – you have changed the world.