

**Touchstones Faith in Action**

**In-Reach / Out-Reach / Justice-Making**

**Spirituality**

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**1.0: Introduction**

 In chapter 5 of the *Epistle to the Galatians*, Paul wrote, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” While there is not a direct link to focus on spirituality in the month of November, there are several approaches that are worthwhile. Two of the most powerful are kindness, listed above, and gratitude.

 The primacy of kindness is symbolized by the Buddhist loving-kindness meditation. Importantly, Buddhism also stresses the cultivation of gratitude independent of circumstances. Gratitude is a virtue in itself, but it also fosters patience, another fruit listed above by Paul.

 Ajahn Brahm, a Buddhist monk, coined the term “kindfulness” to underline the importance of kindness to mindfulness. In noting this, Shamash Alinda writes, “Mindfulness on its own is simply a …non-judgmental awareness…. But to develop the …peace, gentleness, and stillness of meditation, a kindly awareness is required. In his article, *It’s Not Mindfulness Without Kindness*, Alinda also explores the way that kindness (or kindfulness) can be used to reduce stress. Given the stress we face with all of the chaos in the present moment, we need practices to alleviate our stress. (See <https://www.mindful.org/its-not-mindfulness-without-kindness/>)

 Beyond the above, the Hindu festival of Diwali, November 12-16, 2020, is a spiritual celebration of light over darkness is also worth exploring.

**2.0: Observances**

**2.1: Ninth Annual Dance for Kindness, November 8, 2020**

Because of the pandemic this dance will be virtual. See <https://www.danceforkindness.com/>. It is an outreach program of Life Vest Inside. See 3.1.2 below.

**2.2: World Kindness Day, November 13, 2020**

This international observance was founded in 1998 by the World Kindness Movement, a coalition of NGOs. For resources, see <https://kindness.org>.

**2.3: Diwali: Hindu Festival of Lights, November 14, 2020**

The Hindu festival of lights, symbolizes the spiritual victory of light over darkness, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance. It is celebrated over five days (November 12-16, 2020.

**2.3.1:** *National Geographic focus on Diwali*

Link to Video: <https://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/00000144-0a35-d3cb-a96c-7b3d59ac0000> (3:05)

Resource for Children: <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/diwali/>

**2.3.2:** *Children’s Books about Diwali*

**2.3.2.1:** *Binny’s Diwali* by Thrity Umrigar, author and Nidhi Chanan, illustrator (2020)

 “Binny woke up happy but nervous. It was her day to share about Diwali, the Festival of Lights! Binny is excited to talk to her class about her favorite holiday. But she struggles to find the words. Taking a deep breath, she tells her classmates about the fireworks that burst like stars in the night sky, leaving streaks of gold and red and green. She shares with them delicious pedas and jalebis. And she shows them clay lamps, called diyas, which look so pretty all the children ooh and aah.”

Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFHln5LeBUg> (8.12)

**2.3.2.2:** *Let's Celebrate 5 Days of Diwali!* by Ajanta Chakraborty and Vivek Kumar (Maya & Neel's India Adventure Series, Book 1) 2016

 “You know about the 12 Days of Christmas. But do you know about the 5 days of Diwali, India's Festival of Lights? Go on an adventure with Maya, Neel and their cute little partner, Chintu the squirrel, as they learn all about this famous Indian festival of lights including Dhanteras, Diwali sweets, Rangoli drawings, fireworks and the special sibling bond of Bhai Dooj.”

Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_nuCHUhUcE> (7:56)

**2.3.3:** *Diwali - The festival of Lights video*

Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPwmXRws7FA> (13:05)

 “Diwali is certainly one of the biggest, brightest and most important festivals of India. While Diwali is popularly known as the "festival of lights". The celebration of Diwali as the "victory of good over evil" refers to the light of higher knowledge dispelling all ignorance. While the story behind Diwali and the manner of celebration of the festival differ greatly depending on the region, the essence of the festival remains the same - the celebration of life, its enjoyment and goodness.

 “The word Diwali is derived from the Sanskrit term "Deepavali", which translates to "Rows of lamps". Based on the Hindu lunar calendar, Diwali falls between October and November on an Amavasya or moonless night. Celebrated as the victory of good over evil, the festival is associated with the legend of the Hindu god, Lord Ram's return to his kingdom Ayodhya, after 14 years in exile. The Demon king Ravan of Lanka had abducted Lord Ram's consort Sita only to invite his own death as a result. Lord Ram, along with his brother Laxman and an army of monkeys defeated and killed Ravan and returned to his kingdom with Sita. According to mythology the people of Ayodhya lit up clay lamps known as diyas to welcome him on his return from exile.

 “Diwali is a five-day affair and kicks off with Dhanteras. 'Dhan' means wealth, hence this day is considered auspicious for buying items related to prosperity like utensils or gold. Vijay and his family also plan to buy something in keeping with the customs of Dhanteras.

 “The day after Dhanteras is known as Narak Chaudas or Choti Diwali. In short, it is Diwali on a smaller scale, with fewer rituals. Hindus get up before dawn, clean their houses, take a fragrant bath and dress up in festive clothes. Vijay and his family follow suit; they are decorating their house with much excitement to invite Goddess Lakshmi. The whole family rejoices on the occasion by singing aartis or religious hymns while they take part in the puja.

 “The third day of the festival, also known as Lakshmi puja, is the main Diwali celebration. The day is devoted to Goddess Lakshmi - Goddess of Wealth and Lord Ganesh, the 'Lord of auspicious Beginnings' and 'the Remover of Obstacles'. The devotees worship them seeking prosperity and wealth.

 “Govardhan puja is the fourth day of the Diwali festival. In some parts of India this day is also known as 'Annakoot'. Legend says that Lord Indra, the Hindu Lord of rain and the king of gods, got angry with the people of the land of Gokul, the birthplace of Lord Krishna. To punish the villagers, the rain god poured out endless rain flooding the village. However, Lord Krishna came to the rescue of the village and sheltered the villagers under Govardhan hill by lifting the entire hill onto his little finger, thereby protecting the villagers and their livestock. Since then this day is celebrated to thank Lord Krishna. This day is also known as Padwa in some parts of the country and people visit their friends and family with gifts and goodies on this day. Vijay's family has a tradition of celebrating this day. The women of the family and neighborhood make a cow dung hillock to perform the ritual of the day. The hillock is built symbolizing Govardhan hill and then decorated with flowers and other elements. The menfolk then pay obeisance to this symbolic hillock by circling around it and singing religious songs. Vijay and Vishal join in the prayers.

 “Bhai Duj marks the end of the five days of the Diwali celebrations. Diwali is known as the festival of lights but with so many rituals and traditions it can also be named as the festival of sweets, gifts, fireworks and family.”

**2.3.4:** *Celebrating Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights* by Indra Persad-Milowe

A thoughtful article about the celebration2.4: of Diwali.

Link: <https://swampscott.wickedlocal.com/news/20201029/opinion-celebrating-diwali-hindu-festival-of-lights>

**2.4: Thanksgiving, November 26, 2020 (US), October 12, 2020 (Canada)**

**2.4.1:** *Celebrating Thanksgiving*

UUA Resources regarding Thanksgiving.

Link: <https://www.uua.org/worship/holidays/thanksgiving>

**2.4.2:** *Thanksgiving Day Reconsidered: 2016 GA Business Resolution*

This business resolution asks that we take note of the reality of the treatment of Native American by Europeans.

Link: <https://www.uua.org/action/statements/thanksgiving-day-reconsidered>

**2.4.3:** *Ways to Practice Thanks-giving* by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

Twenty-two ways to practice thanks-giving in the run-up to Thanksgiving Day.

Link: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/features/view/16274#todays-way>

**2.4.4:** A Harvest of People by Rev. Max Coots (1927-2009)

 Let us give thanks for a bounty of people:

For children who are our second planting,
and though they grow like weeds
and the wind too soon blows them away,
may they forgive us our cultivation
and remember fondly where their roots are.

 Let us give thanks:
For generous friends . . . with hearts as big as hubbards
and smiles as bright as their blossoms,
For feisty friends, as tart as apples,
For continuous friends, who, like scallions and cucumbers,
keep reminding us that we've had them.

 For crotchety friends, as sour as rhubarb and as indestructible,
For handsome friends, who are as gorgeous as eggplants
and as elegant as a row of corn;
And the others, as plain as potatoes and as good for you,
For funny friends, who are as silly as Brussels sprouts
and as amusing as Jerusalem artichokes,
And serious friends, as complex as cauliflowers
and as intricate as onions.

 For friends as unpretentious as cabbages,
As subtle as summer squash,
As persistent as parsley,
As delightful as dill,
As endless as zucchini,
And who, like parsnips,
can be counted on to see you through the winter.

 For old friends, nodding like sunflowers in the evening-time
And young friends coming on as fast as radishes,
For loving friends, who wind around us
like tendrils and hold us,
despite our blights, wilts and witherings,

And, finally, for those friends now gone,
like gardens past that have been harvested,
but who fed us in their times that we might have life thereafter.
For all these, we give thanks.

 **(Note: a hubbard is a large squash.)**

**2.4.5:** *Responsive Reading: Let us Give Thanks* by Rev. Max Coots (adapted)

For our children who grow like weeds and, though the wind too soon blows them away, may they forgive us our cultivation and fondly remember where their roots are.

*For generous friends with hearts and smiles as bright as blossoms and feisty friends as tart as apples;*

For continuous friends, like scallions and cucumbers, who keep reminding us that we've had them and crotchety friends, as sour as rhubarb and as indestructible.

*For friends as unpretentious as cabbages, as persistent as parsley, as delightful as dill, as endless as zucchini, and who, like parsnips, can be counted on to see you throughout the winter;*

For loving friends, who wind around us like tendrils and hold us, despite our blights, wilts and witherings;

*And finally, for those loved ones now gone, like gardens past that have been harvested, and who fed us in their times that we might have life hereafter; for all these let us give thanks.*

**3.0: Resources**

**3.1: Kindness**

**3.1.1:** *Kindness.org*

This organization provides various resources about kindness on their website at <https://kindness.org/>

**3.1.2:** *Life Vest Inside*

Life Vest Inside, founded in 2011, is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering the masses to engage in acts of love and kindness. Curriculum for purchase.

Website: <http://www.lifevestinside.com/>

Following are some of the videos at their website:

Life Vest Inside - Kindness Boomerang - "One Day" (5:44)

Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwAYpLVyeFU>

Life Vest Inside - Revolution of Love (7:20)

Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4o2B7j4ZXiA>

TED Talk - Kindness - Orly Wahba (10:16)

Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn9VxUPlC5g>

Consider organizing a Dance for Kindness at a middle school or high school. Details at <https://www.danceforkindness.com/> While this is usually done in November, doing it around Valentine’s Day also makes sense.

See the following as well:

<http://www.spreadkindness.org/>

<http://www.doinggoodtogether.org/bhf/24quickactsofkindness/>

<http://www.timetoorganize.com/resources/kindness/>

<http://www.momentsaday.com/making-kindness-cards-for-community-helpers/>

**3.1.3:** *Random Acts of Kindness Foundation*

 The phrase “practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty” was written by Anne Herbert on a placemat in Sausalito, California in 1982. Paloma Pavel writes, “Anne Herbert and I were responding to our despair at accelerating systemic violence, specifically the Rodney King incident of racial violence and police brutality, and the international drum beat to war in the Persian Gulf that was engulfing the nighttime news. We wanted to stop the wars…. To create a spell that would shatter the trance. So, we took the phrase “random violence and senseless acts of cruelty” and created a “reversal” (to use feminist philosopher Mary Daly’s strategy). It was not too tough to find kindness for violence. Not wimpy kindness but tough Dalai Lama “never give up kindness.” “Beauty” for “cruelty” was the radical innovation.”

 Neither violence nor cruelty needs planning. They can emerge in an instant out of the darkest regions of humanity, so random and senseless are apt depictions for violence and cruelty.

 Kindness and beauty are products of an enlightened mind, heart, and spirit. Herbert's book, *Random Acts of Kindness*, was published in February 1993 in which she shared true stories of acts of kindness.

 The Foundation offers a range or resources including curricula. See <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>.

**3.1.4:** *Kindness: The Center for the Greater Good*

Extensive Resources on kindness.

Link: <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/search?q=kindness>

**3.2: Gratitude**

**3.2.1:** *Spiritual Practices regarding Gratitude*

Three thoughtful articles about gratitude.

**3.2.1.1:** *The ABCs of Grateful Living: A Practice* by David Steindl-Rast

Twenty-six perspectives on gratitude.

Link: <https://gratefulness.org/resource/the-abcs-of-grateful-living-gratitude-alphabet-practice/>

**3.2.1.2:** *Why Is Gratitude Important for Recovery, Success, Mental Health and More?* by Katie Holmes

An extensive compilation of material regarding gratitude.

Link: <https://outwittrade.com/why-is-gratitude-important/>

**3.2.1.3:** *Why Gratitude Is Good* by Robert Emmons

Good article with four embedded videos on gratitude

Link: <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good>

**3.2.2:** *Gratitude: The Center for the Greater Good*

Extensive Resources on gratitude.

Link: <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/search?q=gratitude>

**3.3:** *Loving-Kindness Meditation* from Touchstones

**A Path With Heart**

 Jack Kornfield’s book, *A Path With Heart*, is a thoughtful guide about Buddhism. The title of the book relates to these words from Carlos Castenada: “Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good? If it doesn’t, it is of no use.”

 Kornfield understands that love is a primary attribute of Buddhism, if not the primary attribute of this religious tradition. Kornfield begins his book with a chapter entitled, *Did I Love Well?*

 He writes, “In undertaking a spiritual life, what matters is simple: *We must make certain that our path is connected with our heart*.”

 Kornfield continues, “The happiness we discover in life is not about possessing or owning or even understanding. Instead, it is the discovery of this capacity to love, to have a loving, free, and wise relationship with all of life. ...Out of love, our path can lead us to learn to use our gifts to heal and serve, to create peace around us, to honor the sacred in life, to bless whatever we encounter, and to wish all beings well.”

**Reflections on Loving-Kindness**

 Thích Nhất Hạnh writes, “Practicing loving kindness meditation is like digging deep into the ground until we reach the purest water. We look deeply into ourselves until insight arises and our love flows to the surface. …We stop being a source of suffering to the world, and we become a reservoir of joy and freshness.”

 Sharon Salzberg observes that, “Loving-kindness and compassion are the basis for wise, powerful, sometimes gentle, and sometimes fierce actions that can really make a difference—in our own lives and those of others.”

 Steven Smithdescribes loving kindness as “love with wisdom.” He writes, “It has no conditions; it does not depend on whether one ‘deserves’ it or not; it is not restricted to friends and family; it extends out from personal categories to include all living beings. There are no expectations of anything in return. This is the ideal, pure love, which everyone has in potential. We begin with loving ourselves, for unless we have a measure of this unconditional love and acceptance for ourselves; it is difficult to extend it to others.”

 Pema Chödrön advises that, “loving-kindness—maitri—toward ourselves doesn’t mean getting rid of anything. Maitri means that we can still be crazy after all these years. We can still be angry after all these years. We can still be timid or jealous or full of feelings of unworthiness. The point is not to try to change ourselves. Meditation practice isn’t about trying to throw ourselves away and become something better. It’s about befriending who we are already. The ground of practice is you or me or whoever we are right now, just as we are.”

 Chödrön adds, “Practicing loving-kindness toward ourselves seems as good a way as any to start illuminating the darkness of difficult times.”

**Loving-Kindness Meditation**

 The principal vehicle for cultivating loving-kindness is the loving-kindness meditation. There are many variations of this. Kornfield shares one that is both ancient and spare. It begins,

*May I be filled with loving-kindness.*

*May I be well.*

*May I be peaceful and at ease.*

*May I be happy.*

 Kornfield suggests, “As you say the phrases, you may also wish to use the image from the Buddha’s instructions: picture yourself a a young and beloved child, or sense yourself as you are now, held in a heart of loving-kindness.” He continues, “Adjust the words and images so that you find the exact phrases that best open your heart to kindness. Repeat the phrases again and again, letting the feelings permeate your body and mind.”

 Before shifting your attention to others, counsels Kornfield, “Practice this meditation repeatedly for a number of weeks until the sense of loving-kindness for yourself grows.”

 Once this happens, expand the meditation to include others. Kornfield recommends that you begin with a benefactor, that is, “someone in your life who has truly cared for you.” As you picture that person, modify the phrases as follows: “May he/she be filled with lovingkindness,” etc.

 When an authentic sense of loving-kindness grows for this person, add another person, gradually including family members, friends, neighbors, people in the community, people everywhere, including those with whom you are estranged, those you find challenging, and even those who you may consider an enemy. Slowly expand the circle to include people everywhere, animals, the whole earth, and all beings.

**Variations on the Meditation**

 There are many variations of the loving-kindness meditation. Thích Nhất Hạnh shares one that was adapted from the Visuddhimagga by Buddhaghosa, a 5th century C.E. systematization of the Buddha's teaching. It is as follows:
 *May I be peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit.
May I be safe and free from injury.
May I be free from anger, afflictions, fear and anxiety.
 May I learn to look at myself with the eyes of understanding and love.
May I be able to recognize and touch the seeds of joy and happiness in myself.
May I learn to identify and see the sources of anger, craving, and delusion in myself.
 May I know how to nourish the seeds of joy in myself every day.
May I be able to live fresh, solid, and free.
May I be free from attachment and aversion, but not indifferent.*
 Tara Brach offers the following: *“May I be filled with lovingkindness; may I be held in lovingkindness.
May I feel safe and at ease.
May I feel protected from inner and outer harm.
May I be happy.
May I accept myself just as I am.
May I touch deep, natural peace.
May I know the natural joy of being alive.
May I find true refuge within my own being.
May my heart and mind awaken; may I be free.”*

Sylvia Boorstein offers this version:

*May I feel protected and safe*

*May I feel content and pleased*

*May my physical body provide me with strength*

*May my life unfold smoothly with ease.*

 Another version (source unknown) reads:

*May I be well, safe, and peaceful.*

*May I be free from the suffering of fear, anger, and ill will.
May I find forgiveness for the harm we*

*bring to one another.
May I cultivate lovingkindness, compassion, and joy.
May I live in peace and harmony with all beings.*

 Finally, Peter Carlsonwrites,

*May I be safe.*

*May I be happy.*

*May I be healthy.*

*May I be content.*

*May I love myself completely and with great kindness, just as I am now no matter what happens.*

 Consider creating your own version of a loving-kindness meditation so that it includes aspects of loving-kindness that are especially important to you.