

Expressions

A Publication of the Claremont Center for Spiritual Living
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Seeing Beyond Our Differences



by Sheri White

This essay was originally broadcast on the NPR program "Tell Me More" for February 26, 2009. It was part of a four-year-long series, "This I Believe." In 2009, Sheri White was living with her wife in East Falmouth, MA, and was an assistant scientist in the Deep Submergence Lab at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. She holds engineering degrees from Purdue University, as well as a Ph.D. in marine geophysics.

My mother is a geneticist, and from her I learned that despite our differences in size, shape and color, we humans are 99.9 percent the same. It is in our nature to see differences: skin, hair and eye color, height, language, gender, sexual orientation, even political leanings. But also in our nature, way down in the DNA that makes us human, we are almost identical.

I believe there is more that unites us than divides us.

My mother came to the United States from India. She is dark enough that she was refused service in a diner in 1960s Dallas. My father is a white boy from Indiana whose ancestors came from Germany in the mid-1800s and England in the mid-1600s. I am a well-tanned mix of the two of them.

It seems silly to admit now, but I never noticed that my parents were different colors. One day when I was a junior in high school, I watched my parents walk down the aisle of our church together. ("Seeing Beyond" continues on page 2...)

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Claremont CSL 69th Annual Meeting Sunday, February 17, 12:15 PM

Our congregation's 69th Annual Meeting will be held in Holmes Hall on Sunday, Feb. 17 beginning 12:15 PM. (The date, time and location are corrected from the last edition of *Expressions*.) Please attend to hear year-end summaries of projects, learn about our finances, approve next year's budget, and elect new members to the Board of Trustees.

We have 4 positions open on the Board of Trustees: 3 for 3-year terms and 1 for a 2-year term.

If you would like to serve as a Trustee, please contact a member of the Nominating Committee: Chris McDowell, Graham Dunlap, or Bettye Francis.

Edward Graff, Editor

Send your essays, poetry, interesting pictures, inspirational/thought-provoking quotations to:

eemgraffvz@gmail.com



(“Seeing Beyond,” continued from page 1...)

They were participating in the service that day, and as they walked, I saw their hands swinging together in unison. I noticed for the first time how dark my mother was, and how white my father was. I knew them as my parents before I saw them as people — before I perceived their skin color. I'm sorry to say that now when I see a mixed-race couple walking down the street, I see the "mixed race" first and the "couple" second.

When my parents married in 1966, there were still places in this country that had laws against interracial marriage. The landmark *Loving v. Virginia* case was the following year. My white grandfather, whose father had been a member of the KKK, was not against their marriage. But he was concerned about how others would treat them and about their safety. Thirty years later, my father fully understood how his father felt when I came out to him as a lesbian.

Some of us are men, some are women. Some are gay, some are straight. Some are young, some old. Some are Christian, some Jewish, some Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and some atheist. Some of us are short, and others tall. Some right-handed, some left-handed, some disabled. We have lots of differences; we are all unique. But deep down inside us, down in our DNA, we are 99.9 percent the same. And I believe we need to remember that.



An unhealed person can find offense in pretty much anything someone does.

A healed person understands that the actions of others have absolutely nothing to do with them.

Each day you get to decide which one you will be.
Found on Facebook and shared by Susie Graff



Read Past Issues of 'Expressions'!

For past issues of *Expressions*, go to:

<http://www.claremontcsl.org/expressions/expressions.html>

And if you have something *you* would like to contribute, please email it to: eemgraffvz@gmail.com

Eight Weeks to a Better Brain by Brent Lambert

Test subjects taking part in an 8-week program of mindfulness meditation showed results that astonished even the most experienced neuroscientists at Harvard University. The study was led by a Harvard-affiliated team of researchers based at Massachusetts General Hospital, and the team's MRI scans documented for the very first time in medical history how meditation produced massive changes inside the brain's gray matter. "Although the practice of meditation is associated with a sense of peacefulness and physical relaxation, practitioners have long claimed that meditation also provides cognitive and psychological benefits that persist throughout the day," says study senior author Sara Lazar of the MGH Psychiatric Neuroimaging Research Program and a Harvard Medical School instructor in psychology. "This study demonstrates that changes in brain structure may underlie some of these reported improvements and that people are not just feeling better because they are spending time relaxing."

Sue McGreevey of MGH writes: "Previous studies from Lazar's group and others found structural differences between the brains of experienced meditation practitioners and individuals with no history of meditation, observing thickening of the cerebral cortex in areas associated with attention and emotional integration. But those investigations could not document that those differences were actually produced by meditation." Until now, that is. The participants spent an average of 27 minutes per day practicing mindfulness exercises, and this is all it took to stimulate a major increase in gray matter density in the hippocampus, the part of the brain associated with self-awareness, compassion, and introspection...

"It is fascinating to see the brain's plasticity and that, by practicing meditation, we can play an active role in changing the brain," says Britta Hölzel, first author of the paper and a research fellow at MGH and Giessen University in Germany. You can read more about the remarkable study by visiting Harvard.edu. If this is up your alley then you need to read this: "Listen As Sam Harris Explains How To Tame Your Mind (No Religion Required)"

Found and shared by Rev. Tracy Earlywine.



"American Sonnet for the New Year" As Written by Terrance Hayes

Published in The New Yorker magazine January 14, 2019.
The original appearance of the poem is below:

things got terribly ugly incredibly quickly
things got ugly embarrassingly quickly
actually things got ugly unbelievably quickly
honestly things got ugly seemingly infrequently
initially things got ugly ironically usually
awfully carefully things got ugly unsuccessfully
occasionally things got ugly mostly painstakingly
quietly seemingly things got ugly beautifully
infrequently things got ugly sadly especially
frequently unfortunately things got ugly
increasingly obviously things got ugly suddenly
embarrassingly forcefully things got really ugly
regularly truly quickly things got really incredibly
ugly things will get less ugly inevitably hopefully



Terrance Hayes, a former MacArthur Fellow, is the author of, most recently, "American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin" and "To Float in the Space Between."

If you've read something interesting, share it with us! Send contributions to eemgraffvz@gmail.com

"American Sonnet for the New Year" As Read by Terrance Hayes

Read on The New Yorker Radio Hour for January 14, 2019.
Punctuation is added to reflect the author's phrasing:

Things got terribly ugly incredibly quickly.
Things got ugly embarrassingly quickly, actually.
Things got ugly unbelievably quickly, honestly.
Things got ugly seemingly infrequently, initially.
Things got ugly, ironically, usually awfully carefully.
Things got ugly unsuccessfully occasionally.
Things got ugly mostly painstakingly quietly, seemingly.
Things got ugly beautifully infrequently.
Things got ugly, sadly, especially frequently, unfortunately.
Things got ugly increasingly obviously.
Things got ugly suddenly embarrassingly forcefully.
Things got really ugly regularly truly quickly.
Things got really incredibly ugly.
Things will get less ugly inevitably, hopefully.

Terrance Hayes' comments on his sonnet:

"I started writing these sonnets right after the 2016 election, and I was essentially writing one a day, just to cope with the noise: the political noise, the cultural noise, America as it stands. This poem predominantly feels a little bit shocked by the shift in, again, the country and what we think the country is. But I do believe that the turn that always has to happen in the sonnet...is really the last line, perhaps even the last word..."

"And so I felt like maybe this is the last one, because something about the end of this year, and some shifts in all kinds of ways made me feel like 'Oh, maybe we're having a turning point here, maybe something's gonna change for the country in this new year.'

"So this is me thinking differently, really, feeling and hoping, hoping that something's about to shift here. That's what would be American about this thing, I think, is always to kind of hope for some better future, or some kind of transformation out of even our least attractive positions in the world."

Celebrating Chinese New Year the Buddhist Way by Wong Weng Hon of Buddhistdoor International, Malaysia

狗 龍 馬 猴 牛 猪 兔 羊 鼠 雞 蛇 虎
Dog Dragon Horse Monkey Ox Pig Rabbit Ram Rat Rooster Snake Tiger

The Chinese New Year celebration in Chinese communities in all corners of the globe is characterized with heart-warming traditional greetings like “Jinyumangtang” – (May wealth fill your hall!); “Dazhanhongtu” (May you realize your aspirations!); “Wanshiruyi” (May your wishes be fulfilled!); “Zhaocaijinbao” (Acquire wealth to gain more jewels!). All these Chinese New Year greetings pertain to well-wishes about prosperity and happiness.

Prosperity and happiness are obviously related to Buddhist teachings of blessings derived from wholesome behavior. Ordinary Chinese Buddhists conceive that wholesome results derived from good karmas (actions) are a source of happiness. Such mundane happiness is superficial and temporary. It is merely hedonist pleasure. Hedonist pleasure, however, is not genuine happiness. Genuine happiness is spiritual pleasure without denying worldly sensual pleasures. Buddhism, like any other world religion, teaches us the art of genuine happiness through altruistic giving of non-clinging. During the Chinese New Year celebration, giving away red packets of cash and bonuses to others concurs with Buddhist altruistic giving.

When the Chinese New Year celebration is sanctified with Buddhist wisdom, the Chinese New Year wishes for prosperity and happiness are more meaningful. It produces a hybrid celebration of Chinese New Year celebration and spiritual ascent for genuine happiness. Mundane attainment of happiness is *samsaric*. Supra-mundane attainment of happiness is *nirvanic*. What is *samsaric* is the relative phenomenal world of secular attainment. What is *nirvanic* is the absolute principle of human spiritual maturity and adulthood. The Unity of both the mundane and the supra-mundane is genuine happiness. Mundane and supra-mundane attainments are inseparable to produce genuine happiness.

How do we gain genuine happiness from Buddhist wisdom to sanctify or justify celebration of the

Chinese New Year? The standard measurement of genuine happiness is altruistic pleasure while denying egoistic pleasure. Altruistic pleasure is sensual pleasure derived from making others happy through giving (*dana*) or non-clinging. Egoistic pleasure is sensual pleasure derived in satisfying one’s own pleasure through reception instead of giving without concern for the happiness of others. The Chinese New Year celebration is full of altruistic pleasure that intensifies the joy of festive celebration. The Chinese New Year celebration is altruistic because giving is more active than receiving for the generous elders or bosses or hosts.

Buddhism does not require a Buddhist to renounce personal pleasure to partake of altruistic giving. Buddhism teaches a Buddhist to enjoy life by making others happy through altruistic pleasure. Altruism is affected by renouncing egoistic pleasure. A traditional Chinese New Year greeting promotes and fosters altruistic happiness. Thus, a Chinese New Year celebration is also a Buddhist celebration. Otherwise, it becomes only an ordinary cultural or traditional celebration of the Chinese lunar New Year. The Chinese New Year celebration can thus be further elevated spiritually through Buddhist wisdom of altruistic compassion. Just make the correction from egoistic pleasure to altruistic pleasure to celebrate the Chinese New Year. Greet others with utmost sincerity in this Chinese New Year celebration. Buddhist practice is about mental correction. Egoistic pleasure is self-pleasure. Altruistic pleasure is non-self pleasure. Non-self pleasure is Buddha pleasure. Renowned Asian Pure Land Master Ven. Chin Kung always stresses, “Learning the *Dharma* is the greatest living joy.” The greatest living joy is altruistic pleasure. A Chan Patriarch says, “Every day is a good day. Every day is New Year celebration.” Make every day a daily New Year celebration.

Found and shared by Brad Orton

Calendar of Events for February, 2019

Claremont CSL Events

Ongoing:

Sundays -

AA Meetings, 8 AM; Chapel
Meditation, 10 AM; Chapel
Sunday Service, 10:30 AM; Sanctuary
Fellowship Hour, 11:30 AM; Holmes Hall
Apostolic Church, 2:00 PM; Chapel
Living Proof Meeting, 4:30 PM; Chapel

Mondays -

ManKind Project, 7 PM; Chapel

Wednesdays -

Meditation, 6:15 PM; Practitioner Room
Wednesday GATEway Service, 7 PM; Chapel

Thursdays -

Kindly Conversations, 10 AM; Chapel

Saturdays -

Yoga classes are canceled until further notice...

For February:

- 2 Drum Circle, 3-5 PM, Chapel
- 3 Call to Prayer Sunday, 10:30 AM; Sanctuary
Potluck Sunday, 11:30 AM; Holmes Hall
- 7 Foundations of the Science of Mind Class,
6:30-9:30 PM; Chapel (continues on
Thursday evenings until April 11)
- 14 Brown Bag Lunch with Rev. Tracy, 11:30 AM;
Library
- 15 Sacred Frequencies Sound Meditation,
7-8:30 PM; Chapel
- 17 Annual Meeting of the Membership,
12:15 PM; Holmes Hall
- 23 Essential Ernest Holmes Class, 9:30 AM-12 PM;
Board Room (continues on Saturday
mornings until April 27)
- 28 Brown Bag Lunch with Rev. Tracy, 11:30 AM;
Library

What I find most disturbing about Valentine's Day is, look, I get that you have to have a holiday of love, but in the height of flu season, it makes no sense. – Lewis Black

Sacred and Cultural Events

- 2 Candlemas Day - Christian: Celebrates the presentation of the baby Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem 40 days after his birth.
- 3 Setsubun-Sai - Japan: Known as "Bean Throwing Night." Beans are thrown to protect against demons with shouts of "Devil out, Good Fortune in!"
- 5 Chinese New Year - Buddhist: This is the year 4717 in the Chinese lunar calendar, the year of the Pig.
- 8 Great Prayer Festival - Buddhist, Tibet: Monks from the Three Great Monasteries of Tibet assemble in Jikhang to pray to Shakyamuni's image as if it were the Living Buddha. Pilgrims come from every corner of Tibet.
- 10 Basant Panchami - Hindu: Heralds the approach of spring, and yellow colored clothes are symbolically worn. The festival honors Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, Wisdom and Creative Arts.
- 12 Abraham Lincoln's Birthday - American: The 16th President was born on this day in 1809.
- 14 Valentine's Day - Canada, UK, USA: It marks the day a priest named Valentine was martyred for secretly marrying couples against the orders of the Roman Emperor, Claudius II. It is also the night before the Roman festival Lupercalia, associated with fertility.
- 22 Abu Simbel Festival - Egypt: Built by Ramses II, his temple is angled so that the inner sanctum lights up twice a year: on the anniversary of his rise to the throne, and on Oct. 22 to mark his birthday. Crowds pack the temple before sunrise to watch the shafts of light illuminate the statues of Ramses, Ra and Amon.

I've realized that although Valentine's Day can be a cheesy money-making stint to most people, it's a day of expressing love across the world. It doesn't have to only be between lovers, but by telling a friend that you care, or even an old person that they are still appreciated.
– Reeva Steenkamp



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prayer@claremontcsl.org

You may also call Practitioners directly
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Why is February Black History Month?

Carter Godwin Woodson (1875-1950), a famous black historian, established Negro History Week to recognize the immense contributions of African Americans to the society and culture of America. Negro History Week was first officially celebrated the second week of February, 1926. Woodson chose February to pay tribute to Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, both born in February. (Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation that allowed slaves to be free members of the society. Douglass was a renowned black orator and journalist who spent his life highlighting the contributions of blacks to society.) Also, the NAACP was founded on February 12, 1909, the centennial anniversary of Lincoln's birth.



February officially became Black History Month
in 1976.