



Cultivating Peace in Our Relationships

By Kathy Baxter

This month at the Upaya Zen Center in New Mexico, a faithful group of peacemakers will undertake a month of uninterrupted practice in learning to live in peace. It is a good and grand thing that there are those who will leave their ordinary lives for a stretch like this, and dedicate themselves to transforming their relationship with the value of peace. Among the agreements these students have made are these four commitments:

The Four Commitments

- I commit myself to a culture of nonviolence and reverence for life.
- I commit myself to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.
- I commit myself to a culture of inclusiveness and a life based on truthfulness.
- I commit myself to a culture of equal rights between men and women.

When we consider all of the ways we are in relationship, be it romantic, familial, social, vocational, are there any of these relationships that would not be profoundly improved, enhanced and empowered by taking as a sacred trust a personal vow to approach the relationship with a fundamental commitment to bringing peace?

The energies of 2009 are already feeling robust and insistent. It will be a year that rocks us, challenges us and rewards us with emergence into a new level of reality. Perhaps if we begin this year with a renewed dedication to the cultivation of peace – in ourselves

first, and then in the world – we can manage these energies more gracefully.

One tool that you can use to begin to notice your own progress towards peace is the practice of tracking. Angelus Arien talks about this practice in her book *The Second Half of Life*. This is a tool to use when you want to fully investigate how you are behaving, feeling, thinking and talking about your life. Begin by identifying an area of your life where you would like to make better and wiser decisions, more informed by the passion for peace. Consider this issue by answering these five questions:

What would you like to be doing and where are you called?

What are you searching for and how can you make a contribution?

How are you struggling, and do you see patterns in the struggle?

What kind of breakthrough are you looking for? What is your plan of action?

What can you harvest from what you have learned in this interface?

In making the commitment to walking in peace, and taking on the practice of tracking experiences, you begin to build a structure for creating a life in line with your sacred intention. From that place, all of your relationships will take on new authenticity, and most especially, your relationship with yourself.

Kathy Baxter is a metaphysical counselor and writer in the Seattle area. To learn more about her visit www.harvestoftheheart.com.

Winter: A Time For Socializing

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sleep like a bear until noon the next day. Although that is withdrawal, it isn't always true rest.

The Seattle Latvian community has its own group of women, named after this tradition, who meet regularly to knit, crochet, embroider, and produce handcrafts that are sold at the annual holiday bazaar. They are proud to tell the history of their name, what vakarot really means. Women would come from miles in farming communities, meeting at one another's house, bringing crafts to work on. It was the Latvian equivalent of a quilting bee. Free to be themselves, to express themselves without husbands or children around, it was a time to be creative, to meet friends and neighbors, and freely exchange opinions about anything and everything. This is only possible in the winter, when there is

nothing else to do on the farm in the long afternoons and evenings.

Those of us who live in the city, who get our milk and vegetables from a farmer's market or grocery store, have a somewhat warped or romanticized view of what it's like to live in the country, to work the earth. The closest I can come to this experience is to work on my 10-foot by 10-foot p-patch. Even that small plot of soil requires a tremendous amount of work throughout most of the year. On a real farm, during the spring and summer, the community is so busy working the soil, planting, weeding and harvesting, that there is precious little time or energy left to be creative in other ways. Winter allows us that rest from work, and allows us to free our inner child.

The best antidote for fear and loneliness is activity, meeting with others. True, it's good to spend time meditat-

ing and getting in touch with your innermost needs and desires, but it's also good to balance that with play and socializing. On the farm, winter is kind of like a vacation from work.

So, the next time your yoga teacher or meditation leader suggests withdrawal of some sort in order to be in harmony with the winter season, don't go off into a closet wearing a brown robe, eating nothing but bread and water. Instead, visualize this: a log cabin, a roaring fire, you surrounded by your closest friends, chatting and laughing and sewing or knitting (or whatever activity you can relate to). Now, doesn't that sound like rest?

Anita is a writer living in Seattle. She is currently trying to finish warping her loom, and welcomes contact from other weavers. She can be reached at anita@legsdin.com

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IF YOU SLEEP...

it may be time to wake up to what you are sleeping on.

Sleep constitutes an entire third of your life and your bed plays a critical role in your achievement of a wakeful and dynamic state of being. We are all trying to wake up and be present in the moment, finding that anytime we reside in the dead past or the non-existent future, it hurts. When we allow ourselves to be in the present moment we are alive—fully alive! Though not always easy, this is the most loving and gracious action we can perform for ourselves, everything and everyone.

We ask that you please take the time to wake up to what you are sleeping on and consider how sleep is often the most overlooked element of optimum health.

So, what are you sleeping with? Unlike beds of forty years ago, mattresses are now manufactured with increasing amounts of petroleum-based foams, volatile chemicals and fire retardants. In fact, you can be made ill by repeated exposure to these chemical emissions during the sleep process.

What can you do? You've taken responsibility for your food, your exercise, your environment...Isn't it time to take responsibility for the one third of your life over which you have absolute and complete control? A commitment to your well being is a blessing. It is a conscious creation of an alter/bed which provides you with the necessary profound rest essential for a dynamic wakeful life and the ultimate attainment of a relaxed and forgiving state of being.

Please, please allow us to serve you. We have found that the more we know about something the more we can appreciate it. We offer links to other like-minded sleep conscious companies along with exceptional resources through our website. We strongly encourage you to do your own research. Finding the right bed for you is our motivation—and it might not be one of our beds. All we ask is that you consider us in your process.

Visit us at <http://www.soaringheart.com> or we'd love to hear from you (206) 282-1717.

Thank You and Sleep Well!

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