

On the Spiritual Side

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Caroline Oakes: Mind and Spirit

The role of simple practices in spiritual transformation

"Wake up." "Keep awake." "Pay attention."

The theme of "waking up" is central to every enduring spiritual tradition, but it is an easy message to miss when we hear it. We're pretty certain we already are awake, considering how busy we are, morning through night, every day.

But are we really as awake as we think we are? So often our thoughts are anywhere but right here.

We're either mulling over what happened a few days ago (or a few years ago) or worrying about what will happen tomorrow, or in our

next conversation. We are awake but not paying attention, alive but not living our life.

What if we allowed ourselves to listen to the still, small voice calling us to a more soul-nourishing way of being — of slowing down, reacting less, and responding with more insight and reflection? According to Rick Hanson, Ph.D., neuropsychologist and author of "Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom," living a life fully awake need not be out of reach.

New findings in the field of contemplative neuroscience con-

firm that cultivating awareness, attentiveness and insight are a matter of intentional "practices" — taking regular action in thought, word or deed, a little at a time.

As Hanson explains, what we pay attention to gradually changes our brains through "experience-dependent neuroplasticity."

If we focus on anger, self-criticism and worries, our brains develop dynamics of anxiety and reactivity to others. But if we shift our lens of perception even slightly, and focus on our strengths, our positive qualities, and on releasing attachments, our brains devel-

op dynamics of calm, self-confidence and inner peace.

Taking just a few moments to pray, meditate or feel gratitude, or to intentionally stop and notice our natural surroundings, or to really connect with the eyes of our loved ones, are just a few examples of simple practices that can gradually transform our brains and make us more skillful in accessing insight and inner wisdom and other qualities that define our human potential.

"Practice is a process of personal transformation, gradually pulling the roots of hatred, heartache and delusion, and

replacing them with contentment, peace, love and clarity," says Hanson.

"Sometimes this feels like you're making changes inside yourself, and at other times it feels like you're simply uncovering wonderful, beautiful things that were already there, like your natural wakefulness, goodness, and loving heart."

Caroline Oakes, a Bucks County resident, has a master's degree in Practical Theology and leads spiritual practice seminars and workshops in the Philadelphia region. oakes.caroline@gmail.com

Trinity U.C.C. Pleasant Valley hosts Passover Seder

Rose Strong

It's not often that a Passover Seder takes place in Upper Bucks County.

In fact, the closest synagogue might be in the Lehigh Valley, but that doesn't stop the Rev. Denise Fry of Trinity United Church of Christ in Pleasant Valley, Springfield Township, from having one with her congregation and community members.

"I'm not sure about this, but I think it has been for the last five years that we've held this celebration, with the first few years during Holy Week on Maundy Thursday. That became difficult to do with our own activities," said Fry. "So we've scheduled this right after Easter this year." Fry explained she came to

know Judaism while in college. She had several Jewish roommates. One invited her to a Seder while she was in seminary, and Fry would occasionally join her at synagogue on Friday nights.

"My friend often invited a large crowd to her Seder meals, and one year my cousin was sitting next to me giggling. I asked him what was so funny and he pointed out that if you went around the room of about 25 people, the Christians in attendance outnumbered of Jews," she said.

Fry said she believes the experience of learning another culture's rituals gives us a better understanding of the people within that group and helps us better understand our own faith. There were 45 people sched-



The Rev. Joseph Karanja, Benson Nga Nga and the Rev. Denise Fry.

uled to attend at last count; only half showed, but that didn't stop the event from being an interesting celebration.

"Of those signed up, only six are from our congregation. The

rest are from the surrounding community, and we have two special visitors this evening, The Rev. Joseph Karanja, who is

from Kenya, but is pastor of the Rehoboth Harvest Ministry, a

Kenyan church in Allentown, and his friend, Benson Nga Nga, visiting from Kenya," said Fry.

In years past, she's had Jewish friends help lead the meal, but this year Fry led the service with everyone following a written guide called the Passover Haggadah.

Prayers are chanted, songs are sung and through each portion, certain foods are consumed and each has its own symbolism.

The main meal, prepared by Fry and her mother and several others, was served; it consisted of matzo ball soup, lamb stew with potatoes, roast turkey, zucchini casserole, sweet potato casserole, a salad of cucumbers, onions and tomatoes and, at the end, various desserts.

A door was opened for the prophet Elijah to join the dinner, and grace was said after the meal.

All Saints Cemetery in Newtown holds blessing to celebrate opening

For 45 years, the grounds of All Saints Cemetery have sat bare, with no grave markers, flowers or flags.

The cemetery at 291 W. Durham Road, Newtown, has now opened its gates. It is the only Catholic Cemetery in Newtown with available burial plots.

All Saints occupies over 300 acres, with just about 20 acres currently developed.

The developed land already includes a large, bronze statue of

Mary, which overlooks the vast property.

In addition to a future garden mausoleum, there will also be niches for cremated remains, creating intimate spaces on the vast grounds.

The community is invited to the grounds from 1 to 3 p.m. on Saturday, May 9, when Monsignor Michael Picard of St. Andrew Catholic Church will officiate the Blessing Ceremony and lead the community in a short prayer.

Attendees will be shuttled to the location from St. Andrews School, where parking is available. In years past, she's had Jewish friends help lead the meal, but this year Fry led the service with everyone following a written guide called the Passover Haggadah.

Those in attendance will be entered into a raffle for a chance to win a burial space at no cost.

Refreshments will be provided, and guests will be able to view the grounds and offerings up close. Those interested in attending can call 215-621-8787. Visit all-saintscemeterynewtown.com for information.

Mount Carmel hosts blood drive, following record collection

Kathleen Vantine

Monday, Jan. 5 was a day of love and giving in Doylestown.

Our Lady of Mt. Carmel hosted its annual January blood drive, and many parishioner and residents from across the county came to St. Mary's Hall to donate blood, making this drive, the 83rd blood drive for co-coordinators Loretta Jenkins and Kathy Vantine, the most successful ever; 164 pints of blood were col-

lected. As a result of this drive, the co-coordinators have been awarded a Lifepak CR Plus Defibrillator as a special gift, and they are giving the defibrillator to the church for its use.

Over the past 15 years, Mt. Carmel's blood drives have been awarded "best in the area" on three different drives, but this drive exceeded all other drives.

Many people helped to make this drive successful; John Frekot, Tony Graff, Joan Clougherty, Janice O'Donnell, Marianne Antonelli, Mary Jane Sheridan, Sam Coniglio and Allen Roser all donated their time

making phone calls to schedule donors for over 100 years.

Mt. Carmel's rectory staff and custodial staff help above and beyond by relaying calls and keeping the area clean.

Many, many thanks to all of Mt. Carmel's other callers, Eileen Raines, Alice Scholter, Rosemary Ramil, Barbara Barber, Lisa Whelan, Sandy Harrigan, Mary Ann McNeil, Lori Roche, Charlene Winters and Adelaide Skautela, and above all, to the donors who kept their appointments and with each donation saved three lives.

The next blood drive at Mt. Carmel will be Monday, May 11.



Music and Movement

New York-based performer and Jewish music educator Shira Kline, also known as ShiLaLa, rivet, presented a lively concert at synagogue Kehilat HaNahar, The Little Shul by the River, in New Hope, April 12. She blended words, story and music to create a rich experience for children and adults alike during the Ruth Morris Memorial Music Concert. Kline is pictured with Susan Morris, center, and a photo of her mother, Ruth Morris. Ruth loved music and loved helping Jewish children learn to read Hebrew. The fund was created to celebrate and inspire the next generation of Jewish children through music.

HAPPENINGS

Buckingham Meeting hosts Games Night

Games Night is set for the Buckingham Meetinghouse at 6 p.m. May 9. For information, contact hollybcq@verizon.net or 215-860-9747.

Interfaith Service set for New Hope

As part of New Hope Celebrates, the annual festival of Gay Pride, St. Philip's Church and Martine's Restaurant co-sponsor an Interfaith Prayer Service at 7 p.m. Thursday, May 14.

The Rev. Ammon Ripple will preach; he is the statewide faith organizer for Equality Pennsylvania, working with clergy and congregations who support LGBT equality.

Representatives of many belief systems, including Judaism, Christianity, Wiccans, Islam, Buddhism and maybe more, will participate in the service at St. Philip's Episcopal Church, 10 Chapel Road, New

Hope. It will be followed by a reception catered by Martine's on the terrace outside the church.

As part of the service, Jessica DiDonato will perform. In addition, attendees will have the opportunity to sign a petition to end discrimination in employment in Pennsylvania; a company in the state can fire gay employees with no other cause.

For information, call the Rev. Michael Ruk at 215-862-5782, or e-mail Michael@stphilip-snewhope.org.

Program explores Jewish liturgy and Baroque composers

Synagogue Kehilat Hanahar, 85 W. Mechanic St., New Hope, also known as "The Little Shul by the River," hosts a presentation at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, May 14, about the relationship between Jewish liturgy and music of the Baroque era.

"Did you know that the sounds of Jewish liturgy have filled concert halls — and cathedrals — across Europe? And that it has been that way for centuries?"

Reprising his role as the temple's favorite music lecturer, Dr. Lewis Baratz will explore that relationship in a presentation, complete with musical examples.

He is an adjunct professor of music at Mercer County Community College, Artistic Director of the period instrumental ensemble La Fiocco, and creator of WWFPM's new program, "Well-Tempered Baroque."

The program is free and open to the public. For information, call 215-862-1912.

Salem offers Westfall concert

Salem United Church of Christ, 186 E. Court St., Doylestown, hosts a Chris Westfall concert at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 16.

Tickets are \$10 at the door. Call 215-348-9860 or visit DoylestownSalemUCC.org.

Worship Directory

SALEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Sunday, May 10, 2015

The Rev. Dr. Tyson L. Frey

9:30 am Worship / Sunday School

10:30 am Fellowship and Refreshments

Nursery Service available

186 E. Court St., Doylestown • www.DoylestownSalemUCC.org

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