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My religion is very simple.

My religion is kindness.

*Dalai Lama (1935 - )*



## MITZVAH, INJI-GYO, KINDNESS AND LENT

Ash Wednesday is next week — the beginning of Lent, a time in the lives of many people when they try to live good and nourishing lives.

“Lent” is simply the Anglo-Saxon word for “Spring.” And, like the Jewish Passover, is set at a time near the first full moon following the Spring Equinox. OK, so far so good. But during the Middle Ages, some dour monks came up with the idea that it was an ideal time for penance and fasting. In the minds of many, it is still a penitential

time. When I was a child we talked about, “What are you giving up for Lent?” Even at that early age, I could not see what interest God would have in whether or not I went to a Saturday matinee.

Gradually the concept of Lent has been changing. Today many Christian people make it a time for greater awareness of the Way of Jesus in regards to social justice, peace and compassion. Often these are simply referred to as “The Corporal Works of Mercy (or Justice).” Some years ago I



arranged Chapter Four of the Rule of St. Benedict (480–547) into a reflection on these “works” for each day of the week. There is a copy at the end of this Friday Reflection. However, I like to explore some other approaches as well.



What is often called “Buddhist Lent” takes place in the three months of rain in Asia during which monks and many other people stay inside and study. They avoid travel. They are very careful when plants and other living things are young and might accidentally be stepped on. It is very important during this time to practice basic principles of faith and refrain from “bad actions.” Other people are invited to the spiritual center to hear sermons. The idea of being careful about nature and not thwarting new growth particularly appeals to me.



I also like the practice in Zen monasteries of INJI-GYO, where the monks try to do good deeds in secret, such as mending another monks worn out wooden shoes, taking in washing before the rain comes, or cleaning the bathrooms. Things of that sort, I think, often bring out the best in us.



We have a long time Jewish friend whose late father would call his son up every day and start the conversation with the question, *“Have you done a Mitzvah today?”* Now our friend asks himself the same question every day!



Rabbinical scholars have deeper meaning for “Mitzvah” but the common understanding is that it means doing a good deed. The concept is very old. The Jerusalem Talmud refers to any charitable act as a Mitzvah. As one Spanish scholar put it just before the

Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, *“Attitudes are molded more by what people do than by what they think about.”* I believe a society that values doing charitable acts is a society that will nourish its people. An ancient Jewish saying reminds us that, *“The world is built on kindness.”*



In the 1990s, a free-floating movement started in California and quite rapidly encompassed the world including all faiths and none. Originally it was described as, *“Practice Random Kindness And Senseless Acts Of Beauty.”* As the concept spread it was shortened to *“Random Acts Of Kindness.”* Now there are little signs that simply say, *“Be Kind”* and can be found any place — from fortune cookies to public bathroom stalls!



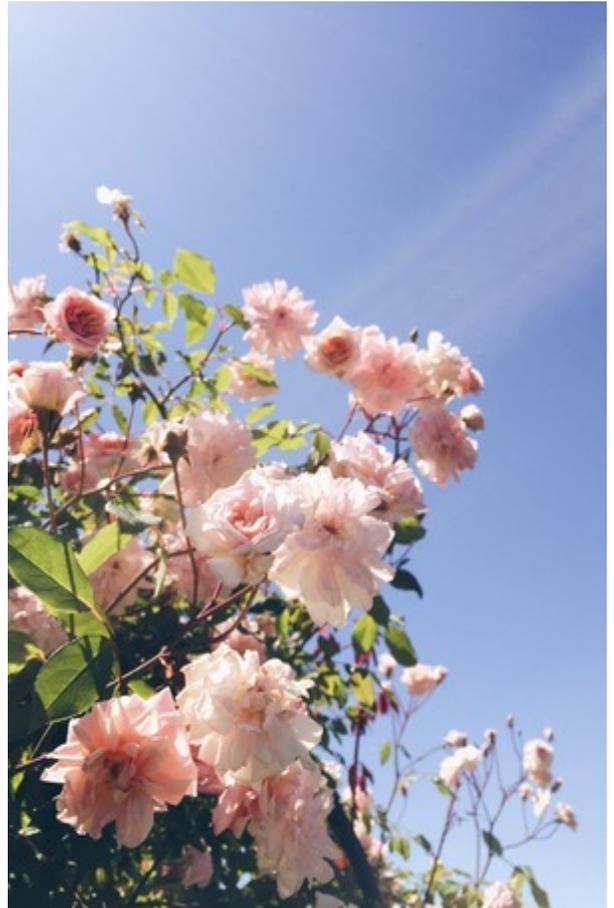
Well, back to Lent, as St. Benedict saw it many years ago. Here it is arranged for daily reflection and practice. Change a few words and we are talking about MITZVAH, INJI-GYO, KINDNESS!

## SUNDAY

*Love God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.*

## MONDAY

*Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not covet,  
Do not bear false witness  
You must honor everyone.  
Never do to another what you do not want done to you.*



## TUESDAY

*Support the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, bury the dead, help the troubled, console the sorrowing.*

## WEDNESDAY

*Do not act in anger, nor nurse a grudge. Rid your heart of all deceit.*

*Never give a hollow greeting of peace, nor turn away from someone who needs your love.*

## THURSDAY

*Do not return bad deeds with bad deeds.*

*Do no wrong to anyone and bear wrongs patiently.*

*Love your enemies.*

*Do not curse those who curse you but bless them.*



## FRIDAY

*Be not proud, nor addicted to wine, nor food, nor sleep.*

*Do not be lazy, nor grumble, nor speak ill of anyone.*

## SATURDAY

*Walk in God's way every day.*

*Do not hate or be jealous or envious of anyone.*

*Avoid contention and arrogance.*

*Respect elders and love the young.*

*Make peace before the sun sets.*

*Never lose hope in God's mercy.*



Let me sum up with a thought from  
Maya Angelou,

*Continue to be who and how  
you are,  
to astonish a mean world  
with your acts of kindness.*

Have many good days and in the  
process make the world a better  
place!

***Brother Toby***



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