

# YOUTH PRACTICE INTERCONNECTIONS

## FEBRUARY 9, 2020: "MAKING FRIENDS WITH MONKEY MIND"

This newsletter shares ideas and activities from [Youth Practice at Clouds in Water Zen Center](#) with the community. Class contents vary with the needs of the students. Visit [cloudsinwater.org/youth-practice/interconnections](https://cloudsinwater.org/youth-practice/interconnections).

"Monkey Mind" is something that people talk about in Buddhist practice. It refers to the many thoughts and feelings that pop up in our heads even when we don't want them to. Most people are like that: our minds are very busy.

But why do we have "monkey mind"? It's actually to help us. Our "monkey mind" is also our "clever mind," which lets us do complex things like go to school, get a job, or be safe while crossing the street.

As useful as monkey mind is, sometimes we get carried away with it. Chasing all those thoughts and feelings around can be exhausting. But if we make friends with our monkey minds, we can be more calm, happy and aware. That is Zen practice.

### Monkey Warning

It's a bad idea to call anyone a monkey. We're only talking about our minds' way of jumping around. If there's an animal you like better, feel free to use that instead.

## Full Group Activities

### Game: Frogger

Let's play [this old favorite game](#). It's kind of about the law of the jungle. And also, there is a Detective who needs to use their clever mind to identify the Frogger.

### Song: "Junk Mail" - [Lyrics](#)

This song is definitely about "monkey mind." It suggests an approach to working with our busy thoughts: we don't have to take them quite so personally.

### Song: "Monkey Mind!" - [Lyrics](#)

Monkey mind gets a "bad rap" sometimes, so here is a brand new song about the amazing things our monkey minds do every day - to the tune of 70's hit "Macho Man" by The Village People. Students can suggest more things our brains do for us, so that we can add them to the song.

**Open the Altar** - offer any feelings or concerns.

## Age Group Activities

### Guided Meditation: Monkey Mind

Usually, all we need to do to prove the existence of "Monkey Mind" is to try the most basic meditation: following the breath. So let's do that now. Find a spot to sit down, and close your eyes. **(Bell)** Pay attention to your breath, without trying to change it. With the in breath, count "one." Let the breath go. With the next breath, count "two," and so on. Keep going. When your mind wanders off, come back to following the breath and start again at "one." Let's be silent for a few minutes, and keep counting ...

**(Bell)** How far up did you count before your mind wandered off? Where did your mind go? That's monkey mind.

### Check-in: How are you?

How busy is your mind today?

### The Buddha On 'Monkey Mind'

The Buddha said: "Just as a monkey swinging through the trees grabs one branch and lets it go only to seize another, so too, that which is called thought, mind or consciousness arises and disappears continually both day and night." (This quote is from [a nice article about monkey mind](#).)

- What does this say about mind or consciousness?
- In this analogy, what does the tree represent?
- What is the alternative to monkey mind?

### What Are Monkeys Like?

We talk about "monkey mind," but what are monkeys like, really? Well, they seem smart, curious, a little greedy, and they get into everything. Let's watch three short videos about monkeys.

[Video 1: "Mischievous Monkeys | Clever Monkeys"](#)

[Video 2: "Why Are These Monkeys Stealing From Tourists?"](#)

In video 2, Humans and monkeys seem to understand each-other pretty well. How is this possible? In the second video, check out the monkey communicating emotion through body language: it yawns in a way that clearly says, "I'm not interested in that kind of food, and not impressed by you at all. Try again."

- Can you think of examples where humans (like you) communicate this way, through body language?

- Are these monkeys violating the Buddhist Precept of “not taking that which is not given”?
- Are humans breaking the precept of “not taking that which is not given” by taking the monkeys’ environment?
- Do you think these monkeys need to be quite as ‘grasping’ as they are? Should they try some meditation?

### Video 3: Life - Highly Intelligent Monkeys

In this amazing video, highly intelligent monkeys use tools to survive in the wild, demonstrating intelligence, memory and dexterity. These are some smart monkeys.

#### For Younger Students

### Story: “The Magic of Patience” (order)

Story will be available in book form and on the computer.

This is the story of a mischievous monkey and a peaceful buffalo. The monkey teases the buffalo constantly; but the buffalo accepts it all with patience and loving kindness. The buffalo knows that this is the best way to work with the monkey: to be its good friend. But a dangerous ‘forest sprite’ would like to argue otherwise.

You can look at this story as how to be patient with a friend who teases you; but it may be more interesting to look at the monkey as your own monkey mind. The way to work with monkey mind is to be patient and loving. If monkey mind feels accepted, sometimes it will settle down and work with you, and you will have made an important friend.

- What does the mischievous monkey do to the buffalo?
  - *Taunts him.*
  - *Gets in the way of what he wants.*
  - *Prevents him from seeing clearly.*
  - *Tries to get him to do things he doesn’t want to do.*
- Has your own “monkey” ever done these things to you?
- Should you try to control your monkey mind? How?
- Does ‘monkey mind’ include feelings? What kind?
- If the monkey represents ‘monkey mind’, what does the buffalo represent? What about the forest sprite?

#### For Older Students

### “Why Bad Zazen is the Best Zazen”

Watch “[Why Bad Zazen is the Best Zazen](#)” on YouTube (9 minutes)

Brad Warner is a popular Zen teacher who sometimes talks about the Zen of punk rock and monster movies, among other things. In this video, Brad talks about how many people do zazen (seated meditation) for a while, and then they think, “I’m not making progress; this is not the kind of zazen I want.” Brad argues that this is the best thing that can happen to you in zazen; because, in that moment, you are coming up against how you want things to be, and how

they really are. This is a good thing to practice with, because a lot of our problems come from our inability to accept things as they are. Brad also says there are good reasons that we have trouble accepting things as they are: as a species, we have survived by not accepting things as they are. But in a more spiritual way, this can cause problems for us. At time 4:30, he gives an example about “Ghoulardi,” a popular figure in Ohio in the 1960’s who didn’t realize his own success.

- What would you like to do with your life?
  - Does it need to be big? ... or a certain way?
- Is there something you’re already doing in your life that you could appreciate more?
- How could accepting things as they are help you to move forward?
- Discuss this idea: Discomfort is where growth happens.

#### For Teens and Adults

### “Why Are People So Crazy Sometimes?”

With older students (and maybe some younger ones too), a frequent question about life is: “Why are people so crazy sometimes?” In Buddhism, the answer might be: “Because the Three Poisons of Greed, Anger and Ignorance rise endlessly.” According to science, one answer might be, “Because of evolution. Natural selection shaped our development a certain way, in order to survive.”

These two answers may have some common ground. In the book [Why Buddhism is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment](#), author Robert Wright suggests that natural selection ‘designed’ us so that pleasure is fleeting, so that we will seek out more of the things we need to survive. This is the scientific basis of the First Noble Truth: “Life is unsatisfactoriness.” (Sometimes translated, “Life is suffering.”) But he also suggests that our brains are adaptable, so we can change; and mindfulness meditation is a good way to do that. (That’s just Chapter One of the book. [Here’s an excerpt.](#))

### (In Class) Hand out Magnets

### Craft: Draw Your Monkey Mind

Draw what’s in your monkey mind. This is

pretty easy to do: draw whatever is in your mind. Perhaps draw a tree with your thoughts. There will be paper and colored pens to draw with during discussion or afterward. There will also be legos, to continue the “Build a Neighborhood” project.



**Credits** Youth Practice Leader: Kikan Howard. Grades 1-6 Teachers: Leslie Stoy, Towa Kurt Errickson, Jishi Megan Henrichs, Dylan MacWilliams.