

Dharma Friends

Dedicated to Sharing the Dharma, Healing Each Other, All Sentient Beings, and Ourselves

February 2006

OUR 9th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE issue #109

Copyright c. 2006. Compassion Works for All

The DHAMMAPADA The teachings of the Buddha



Verse 1: Twin Verses

Spoken at Sravasti concerning the monk Caksuspala:

1. All things have the nature of mind. Mind is the chief and takes the lead. If the mind is clear, whatever you do or say will bring happiness that will follow you like your shadow.
2. All things have the nature of mind. Mind is the chief and takes the lead. If the mind is polluted, whatever you do or say leads to suffering which will follow you, as a cart trails a horse.

Spoken in the Jetavana Grove to Tisya:

3. "They would harm me. They would embarrass me. They would rob me. They would defeat me." Those who think in such a way will never be released from their hatred.
4. "They would harm me. They would embarrass me. They would rob me. They would defeat me." Those who do not think in such a way will be released from their hatred.

Spoken to Kali in the Jetavana Grove:

5. Your enemies will never make peace in the face of hatred. It is the absence of hatred that leads to peace. This is an eternal truth.
6. We are but guests visiting this world, though most do not know this. Those who see the real situation, no longer feel inclined to quarrel.

Spoken in Sravasti concerning the Elder and Younger Kala:

7. Living for the pursuit of pleasure, senses endlessly stimulated, all appetites fed, undisciplined and lazy, you will be blown away by Mara, powerless, like a twig in a storm.
8. Aware of the unpleasant side of life, senses controlled and appetites contained, full of faith and effort, you are like a mountain of rock in a storm, and Mara cannot touch you.

Spoken in Sravasti concerning Devadatta:

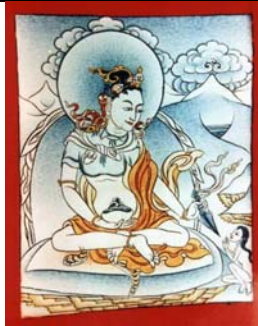
9. One who wraps himself in the robes of a monk without first clearing away his worst defilements, one who lacks both self-restraint and truth, is unworthy of the saffron robes.
10. One who holds tightly to self-discipline and clears away all inner pollution, one endowed with both discipline and truth, is worthy of the saffron robes.

Spoken in the Bamboo Grove concerning Sanjaya:

11. Seeing the meaningful as meaningless and the meaningless as meaningful, one is capable only of falsehood and fiction, and will never arrive at true meaning.
12. Seeing the meaningful as meaningful and the meaningless as meaningless, one is capable of genuine understanding, and will gain the heart of meaning.

Spoken to Nanda in Sravasti:

13. Just as rain leaks into a house with a poorly-made roof, desire and attachment will seep into a house unprotected by meditative awareness.
14. Just as rain does not enter a house with a well-made roof, desire and attachment do not enter a house protected by meditative awareness.



Some thoughts about this *Dhammapada* verse: Twin Verses

Twin Verses is the first chapter of the [Dhammapada](#), a compilation of many of the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha who taught in India in approximately 400 B.C.. As longtime [Dharma Friends](#) readers know, we have cycled through these teachings many times. But as we have said again and again, the teachings that take us on our spiritual journeys take us inward rather than towards an expertise in spiritual knowledge. Starting again with chapter 1 is similar to taking a circle and placing your finger down on any place and calling it the beginning. Then we just go round and round the circle, spiraling towards our true self. Each time the words give us hints that, when meditated on, slowly allow us to experience their essential meaning. But, because we are starting with chapter one again, it might help to focus on the first step of a spiritual path: ***Taking Refuge***.

First, here is a short preface to remember the ultimate goal of our journey. It is very important to recognize that the very first words of the [Dhammpada](#) text and of this verse are a reminder of our ultimate destination. ***“All things have the nature of mind.”*** Verse say: *“All things have the nature of mind”*. If we read these few words and perceive their meaning instantaneously and from that moment on know all reality as nature of mind, then we are one of the few beings ever born to achieve such awareness with a whisper. Then, we have no need to follow a spiritual path because we are already there. For most of us, the text shares the ultimate wisdom, *all that is*, in those first seven words, but then we must grow to understand them. Even the very good practitioner who reads these words has no deep understanding as to what they mean and we do not know truly how they reflect our highest realization, our enlightenment. Somehow, though, we have an inner push to keep searching. Our inner wisdom vaguely stirs to conscious awareness and we know that we already know but that knowing is deeply in our confused mind. We want to remember, so we know we must follow our path to find our true self and true wisdom understanding.

The verses in the [Dhammapada](#) can act as a guide to our practice. We can reflect on the teachings and begin to build a foundation that will hold us as we grow stronger in our spiritual emergence. Consider that we have each met with these words because of a spiritual connection to the teachings. Imagine being held in the teacher’s mind, the mind of true compassion, as these great words are being given to you.

Some of our readers do not follow a Buddhist path, but it is easy to translate the Buddhist terms into words that have similar meaning in your own tradition. The Dalai Lama teaches that a true spiritual path is one of love and benefit for all, and does not include words of exclusivity and superiority. When we realize the true, vast state of love, there are no words or concepts that separate us and we all rest in purity. I hope everyone feels supported as they read *Dharma Friends*, and feels that we all long for each of us to realize their true nature. In that realization, we will recognize that we are all one essence.

Taking Refuge on our Journey

As we begin our spiritual journey, there are three important supports that we need. We need a teacher, and for Buddhists, that is the Buddha. We need a path to follow that offers tried and true methods to enable us, such as lots of patient meditation practice, and that is the Dharma. And, we need others who love and support us along the way, the Sangha. For Buddhists, these essential elements have been taught to students like us for almost 2400 years and we call it, Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels, or sometimes it is called The Triple Gem. Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels is the first vow one takes who is beginning a Buddhist path. There are many branches of Buddhism that offer different teachings about refuge but all agree that we need protection from the ignorance that creates our suffering until we realize the purified, stainless mind of enlightenment. A Buddha is one whose mind is completely purified. Therefore, we take refuge in this purified mind until we ourselves recognize it as our own true state. Those who practice the Mahayana traditions of Buddhism take refuge not just for themselves but for all beings everywhere.

What Do We Rely On When We Are Vulnerable?

It is often a little hard to understand what taking refuge means and how we take refuge all the time in our everyday world. Taking refuge means to place our trust in something. When we are newborn babies we take refuge in our mothers and trust that they will take care of us. Later we might take refuge in our fathers and trust that if he takes us out in the world, he will keep us safe and get us back home. In the same way, we take refuge everyday in the people who drive the cars that we are riding in, the pilot flying the plane, the doctor treating our illness, or anyone who appears to be our protector or caretaker when we are not able to protect ourselves from perceived danger. However, we can easily see that all of these people that we take refuge in are fallible and could fail us. Of course they are not able to protect us from all dangers. It is okay to take temporary refuge to help us negotiate life tasks and we might also realize that these helpers in our daily life may actually be recognized as expressions of wisdom and compassion.

Often, though, we take refuge in things that clearly risk our precious lives by our wrong choices. Here is a story of a man I know. He loved fishing and yet he could not swim. So he bought one of those, now old-fashioned, big orange life preserver vests that he wore whenever he went out in his fishing boat. For twenty years he went fishing often and dutifully wore his life preserver so that he felt safe in case of emergency. In keeping with our discussion, he was taking refuge in this life preserver vest. There were a number of times that he would forget his life preserver and go back and get it, but he never got in the boat without it. Then, one day, juggling gear and ice cooler as he loaded his boat, he knocked his life preserver into the water. He watched, horrified, as it sunk to the bottom of the lake like a rock. Hmmm.

We should examine whether our sources of refuge really serve us. Many times we choose refuge with something that will positively fail us and potentially destroy us. We need to honestly realize where we are taking refuge so that we can assess whether the life preserver we choose will sink to the bottom of the lake. What do we rely on as we go through our life? Do we take refuge in drugs, alcohol, money, sex, food, power, our looks, our reputation, a loved one, our family, our intelligence, our goodness, our badness, a leader, our fantasized future, our freedom, our friends, our death? Can we see how it would be good to realize that our source of refuge will actually plummet to the bottom of the lake long before it actually happens? Maybe you have already been shocked and devastated when your refuge source failed you. But, had you thought about it, wouldn't you have already known that it would?

How are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha an Infallible Refuge?

On the Buddhist spiritual path, we are taught that there is one infallible source of refuge that we can trust. That infallible source is the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. At first, as students taking our first steps, we only know a reality that is more external and concrete. We take refuge in a Buddha who once walked the earth and who became enlightened by following ancient meditation teachings and then taking them all the way to supreme realization by following his own inner wisdom. He achieved ultimate wisdom and compassion and then he shared all that he realized with us. Trusting in the protection of wisdom mind as we walk this path is an infallible refuge because it is the true essence of all that is. The Buddha merges his wisdom mind with ours until we find our own realization, even when we have barely a clue of what we are doing. Even though Shakyamuni Buddha is no longer living in his body, we take refuge in the purified omniscient wisdom that he is and *all that is*.

Secondly, we take refuge in the Dharma. The Dharma means the path. Dharma is the teachings that lead one to enlightenment, our highest wisdom awareness. The teachings include those that we read that have been passed down from Shakyamuni Buddha to us, and those written or offered by teachers who have studied and practiced the sacred traditions, and who have achieved high levels of accomplishment. Our personal teacher also instructs us in meditation tools that allow us to quiet and focus our mind. They teach us to be free of the constant chatter of our ordinary mind. As this confusion and chaos lifts, we experience an increasingly more subtle and sacred reality. The only way our path will bear any fruit at all is if we do the meditations and apply our realizations in order to awaken to this deeper reality within us.

We are encouraged to not place our trust in a teacher or a teaching until we know that he/she/it is trustworthy and that the teachings have validity in our own personal experience. This may take years. Only the teachings of great wisdom masters who have themselves realized pure view can guide us along the dharma path. Only they know how to help us to apply the

teachings as we stumble in our stuck places. There are millions of valid and invalid teachings and there are many that hold themselves out as teachers. We must be impeccable in discerning which teachings will benefit us and which teachers are our true and reliable teachers. You may be asking, “I have no teacher coming into my prison, so what should I do?” I would say that even if a teacher is coming into your prison, read and listen to what you are exposed to that feels like it is furthering you on your path in loving ways. If you have a “teacher stand-in” such as texts, a sangha leader, or *Dharma Friends*, take everything that is said and see if it is helpful to you. Don’t just accept anything until you find that it is true for you. Someday, an authentic teacher will appear and you will know then how this has all been a time of preparation for that next step. Always, we must be open-minded and compassionate enough to allow others to choose the teachings and teachers that direct them on their path. This is taking refuge in the Dharma.

Third, we take refuge in the Sangha. The sangha refers to all those others who travel with us on the path to spiritual awakening. These are all the people from the past who practiced for thousands of years in monasteries, in caves, in temples and in their homes, praying for the liberation of all beings from pain and suffering - and those prayers included each of us. The sangha also includes those in our lives today that we practice with and that we know love and support us in these very noble aspirations to benefit all beings. If we begin to go astray, they reach out to bring us back. When they go astray, we remind them that we are here. Amazingly, to me, *Dharma Friends* has become a sangha of enormous caring and compassion for all of us and offered by all of you. I am happy that the energy of hundreds, most of whom have never seen one another and are of many backgrounds and traditions, are all held in a palpable love that includes everyone and we all pray for the emergence of the highest self of each. In our one mind, we share the wish for happiness for all and we want everyone to know that they are not alone. Even though we might have little misunderstandings, we know that every being is a manifestation of compassion. Each of you is a teacher when we remember that everyone brings us an opportunity to examine where we hold tightly to our cherished views of self. We know that every word shared is, in its essence and at its core, words of great compassion and wisdom. None of you, no matter how you might perceive it, is left out of our one heart. We are a wonderful sangha.

There are many traditional ways to practice taking refuge in various traditions of Buddhism. Even if you embrace a path of spirituality other than Buddhist, you can also take refuge. You might remember those beings that have embodied the highest realization of purity and they are the teachers in whom you may take refuge. Since Dharma simply means “the path”, this includes your spiritual path and all of its teachings as it takes you to greater wisdom and compassion. Taking refuge in your sangha may mean to join with millions, or it may be the sangha of just a few friends. All of you from all traditions are all held in our *Dharma Friends* sangha but also remember those who have led the way for you. Look to offer support to those walking with you and lean on them as you need to, but support everyone as they make their best efforts to grow spiritually and in kindness to others.

On all of our wisdom paths, we grow to a more subtle awareness of reality. As we meditate in those ways that our teacher shares with us, the obstacles to a pure view begin to fall away and our ordinary perception of reality changes. Our conceptual ideas gently lift and we view the sacred that is truly there always. As we develop realization of our essential nature, we know ourselves to be enlightened mind. Resting in wisdom, we know that we are never separated from that one mind of pure essence shared by us all. In this way, the Buddha and all realized beings are inseparable from us always. Wisdom will guide us unflinchingly towards remembering our true nature.

Ultimate refuge is the practice of letting go into all that is sacred just as it is. Khyentse Rinpoche said, “Leave everything as it is in fundamental simplicity, and clarity will arise by itself. Only by doing nothing will you do all there is to be done.”

When we take that first step and take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, we take refuge in all that is infallible and that will never lead us into danger. In awakening true essence, true wisdom mind, there comes the complete realization that “*All things have the nature of mind.*” Living in this view, there is no death, no birth, no beginning, no ending, and no thing other than pure and sacred essence. Until we know this, we must start with chapter 1. Read the words of Twin *Verses* again and let the words sink into your heart to stir the memory of your true essence. You already know their true meaning. You just temporarily forgot.



A MEDITATION

Let's pretend that we have a Step 1 to start with on our path. Even those like me who have been practicing meditation for a long time will do well to remember that Step 1 is always a good place to be. Step 1 is *focused awareness*.

What does this mean? Let's leave the stream of thoughts, judgements, likes, dislikes, and the endless internal dialogue about "us" and the world as we ordinarily see it. Sit quietly.

After we notice that distracting thoughts arise unsummoned and pretty constantly, we have an incentive and a choice to develop focused awareness instead. To focus for even a moment on our *present* experience alters our perception of who we are and our view of reality. Focused awareness is the gateway to perceiving that we *are* awareness.

So, let's take Step 1.

Gently look at the words you are reading here on this page. If thoughts arise, notice them and return to a focus on the words. Breathe and feel your breath - in - out.

Thoughts? Just let them go Focus on *this* word, here and *now*
 It doesn't matter what you focus on Have you forgotten to focus? Focus again, here, on
this word **Just look.** Just be aware
 Just breathe Was that a thought? Let go ----- watch it go Focus on this word See
 the space and **now this** word Expand your view **Hold it all** Breathe Focus on it all
 Relax. Thoughts? Let them stir in the view too. Hold it all Breathe
 Watch
 A word space between the words breathing relax
 effortless hold it all who are you that is watching? This word **now**
 this space **now** this breath **now** this thought **now** this now
 now **Awareness** **Now**

Awareness holding all

resting in vast space

keep going joyfully

Dedicate your meditation to benefit all beings everywhere so that they might be happy and free of suffering.....

The greatest support we can have is mindfulness, which means being totally present in each moment. If the mind remains centered, it cannot make up stories about the injustice of the world or one's friends, or about one's desires or sorrows. All these stories could fill many volumes, but when we are mindful, such verbalizations stop. Being mindful means being fully absorbed in the moment, leaving no room for anything else. We are filled with the momentary happening, whatever it is--standing or sitting or lying down, feeling pleasure or pain--and we maintain a nonjudgmental awareness, a "just knowing."

-Ayya Khema, "Be an Island"



FROM YOUR LETTERS

HAPPY BELATED VALENTINE'S DAY – We do well when we remember to love all beings without any discrimination or partiality ♥

"When we try to pick up anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe." -- John Muir

From L.K.: Right Action

Don't surround yourself with yourself.

Surround yourself with the teachings of the Buddha and you will see and understand that self is not important.

Open your eyes to see what needs to be done, understand the situation and act accordingly.

Finding a way to put others before self is sometimes a very difficult thing to do.

Showing compassion towards others can leave you vulnerable in a big time way.

Often people think that your kindness is a sign of weakness.

I choose to believe that without kindness our pain and suffering will never go away.
Self-centered people usually understand after its too late that in order to receive you have to give.
The right action in life is to be thoughtful, kind, and caring toward others compassionate in very possible way. This will make your world a better place.

Leave the mind in its natural, undisturbed state. Don't follow thoughts of "This is a problem, that is a problem!" Without labeling difficulties as problems, leave your mind in its natural state. In this way, you will stop seeing miserable conditions as problems." -Lama Zopa Rinpoche, "Transforming Problems Into Happiness"

From DD: Thank you for *Dharma Friends* newsletter. If it seems like I am not putting enough into the program believe me I am there in spirit and all.

There is a school of psychologists, one of the most important schools, called the behaviorists. They think man is his behavior. You are nothing but the totality of your actions, so if your actions can be understood you are understood. Man is much more than the sum total of his actions; man is not only his behavior, man is the innermost consciousness of his body, of his mind, of his actions.

Unless you become conscious of your consciousness, unless you become aware of your Inner Light, you go on living in illusions. I guess that is why the wise say look within for the answers, not without. But we perpetuate illusions because they are cheap, easily available; they cost nothing and they can be handed over to us by others. Discovering oneself is arduous it is going on the greatest exploration. Some will make it, others will grow weary and tired because it is not easy to erase what we have put into our conscious or what others have drummed into us. It is easier to go to the moon, easier to go to the top of Everest. It is far more difficult to go to one's own center - for the simple reason that you will have to travel alone, all alone. As one of the great Greek mystics, Plotinus, says, "It is a flight of the alone to the alone."

That's why very few people have become enlightened, when it is really everybody's birthright to become enlightened. And even if sometimes, by some accident, people become interested in knowing about themselves, they immediately become victims of words - theories, philosophies, ideologies. They become victims of scriptures, doctrines, dogmas; again they are lost in a jungle of words.

Words you can accumulate. You can become scholars, great scholars. And again you have created for yourself a new kind of illusion: the illusion that information creates. The more information you have, the more you start feeling you know.

Information is thought to be synonymous with knowing. It is not. Knowing is a totally different affair. Knowing is experience; information only accumulates in the memory system. A computer can do it; there is nothing especially human about it.

Two large rats walked into a movie house one day and went straight to the projection room. Once inside they ate the entire reel of film. After eating, one rat looked at the other and asked, "Did you like the movie?"

To which the other replied, "No, I liked the book better."

These are scholars - the rats. They go on eating words, they go on accumulating words. They can have mountains of words and they become very articulate about words. He may know, we may not know. Ninety-nine point nine percent of the people of the world are behaviorists - whatsoever they say does not matter. If you look deep down,

they belong to the school of Pavlov and Skinner. They all believe in behaviorism. They all believe that your behavior can be changed. Then you are changed because you are nothing but your behavior. They may not say so, they may not even be aware. Of their fundamental belief, but that's how society has lived up to now.

This society is not religious. Religious man has yet to arrive. A religious society has yet to happen, a religious culture is yet in the future - on the horizon - but we have to bring it, it has not happened. It has happened in a few individual cases here and there but those people can be counted on our fingers.

We must become consciously aware of our inner light, know ourselves, and change that which is holding us back from being enlightened. Our greed, hate, anger and learn that all is impermanence.

An added note from D: We were caught in the force of Rita. The heavy rain and wind. I lost some papers and books on Buddha's teachings but I can't dwell on them because they were in that category of impermanence. And it's not these things that matter but what I retained in keeping myself in tune with the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path.

Thank you for being there.

A Poem from O.M.: "The Wild HoneySuckle" by Philip Freneau

Fair flower that dost so comely grow.
Hid in this silent, dull retreat.
Untouched thy honied blossoms blow,
Unseen thy little branches greet:
No roving foot shall crush thee here,
No busy hand provoke a tear.

By Nature's self in white arrayed,
She bade thee shun the vulgar eye,
And planted here the guardian shade,
And sent soft waters murmuring by;
Thus quietly thy summer goes,
Thy days declining to repose.

Smit with those charms, that must decay,
I grieve to see your future doom;
They died - nor were those flowers more gay,
The flowers that did in Eden bloom;
Unpitying frost, and autumn's power
Shall leave no vestige of this flower.

From S.B.: I have really enjoyed the recent issue of *Dharma Friends*.

I've been thinking a lot about all the suffering I hear about when I watch the news on television. I like to watch BBC News because there isn't so much of the political posturing I see on many of the major US networks and more of a global perspective ... The news is not all bad, but I like to think that being informed of suffering that happens world-wide is an opportunity for some real spiritual practice. At the end of my day, I like to practice Tong Len, or "Sending and Taking." As I breathe out, I visualize sending all merit I have accrued to all these suffering people. I include suffering people I interact with in my daily life, as well as those who "challenge" me. I imagine that it goes out as white light and I cultivate the sincere hope that they all receive benefit. As I breathe in, I think that I take in all the suffering of these people, and cultivate the wish that I may experience their negative karma, so they may be freed from suffering, and have the opportunity to practice dharma and achieve complete enlightenment. Tong Len is a wonderful practice, which I recommend whole-heartedly to any of your readers who do not practice it. It is too easy to feel that one is being victimized by the system. This perspective may in some cases be true, but it is a disempowering approach to life, which only increases self-centered egotism, and a narrow view of life. The root of so much suffering is self-cherishing, and practices like Tong Len help us to step out of the suffocating walls of our delusion by showing us that compassionate concern for others is the real Key to peace in this world. Of course, selflessness is the foundation of the Buddha's teaching. So when it seems like all the news is bad news, don't complain about it. Instead, take it as a message that it is time to awaken our compassion. Someone may think while reading this, "That's well and fine, but what good will my compassion do from behind bars?" Certainly, it is good to be able to back up our compassion with our actions in the world ... but there is also another perspective that was shared by the enlightened Indian guru Ramana Maharshi. One of his new disciples wanted to know why he wasn't sharing his message with the whole world. Ramana said to him: "Don't you know that if a single person meditating in a remote cave thinks a single, perfectly selfless thought, those vibrations go out into the world to do what must be done?" We each do make a difference in the world, from right where we are, no matter where that is. That difference - good or bad - hinges on the quality of our thought. And if you want to lend a helping hand, why not start in your own neighborhood? How about that person in the next cell, who's going through a difficult time? The last time you saw someone who appeared lonely and in need of friendship, did you keep up "convict appearances", or did you decide to make a difference in the person's life?

Opportunities abound; we only need the courage to act on them. In fact, the worse things seen on an external level, that is an even more wonderful condition for dharma practice. The suffering right before us is the rich compost from which the compassionate flower of our own Buddha-Nature blossoms.

I noted the kind offer of free videotapes from your teacher, Lama Tharchin Rinpoche. I would like one sent to our chaplain so that our entire sangha will have a chance to see them.

When I am done reading each of your newsletters I pass them on for others to read.

Readers – the videotapes from Lama Tharchin Rinpoche are still available. See the information in the back of the newsletter about them.

Resistance does not mean walls and fences, nonresistance does not mean open space. If you can understand in this way, mind and matter are fundamentally the same. -Tsu-hsin

From P.W.C.: Dear Editor of ***Dharma Friends***,

I am a 35 year old male with an established career as a political strategist and activist for peace-affirming causes. I consider the East San Francisco Bay Area of California my home, but am currently serving a 16-month prison sentence in Texas due to a credit card abuse conviction.

I was graduated from the Ca. State University at Fullerton in 1995, earning a Baccalaureate of Arts (political science). I consider myself "pan -Buddhist", but my practice roots are in the Soto Zen tradition of Suzuki Roshi and the SFZC. I remain dedicated to continuing my practice here despite the violence, hatred and viciousness of the daily environment.

The piece enclosed, ***I Don't Feel Like "Being Buddhist" Today***, is one of many I have written since my sentence began. In fact, it was the first essay regarding my practice while incarcerated that I wrote. Upon my release, there are plans to compile these and other Dharma writings into book format, but for now I'd like to make some of them available to any readers that might gain benefit, insight, or encouragement from them while still in prison. Though I do wish to retain copyright to this essay, I would consider it an honor to have it included in your newsletter.

I Don't Feel Like "Being Buddhist" Today by PW
Covington copyright 2005

A friend of mine once remarked to me that one of the worst things about being homeless is that there are never any days off. The same can be said about trying to live a life in step with the Buddhadharm, especially in prison.

The plain truth is that I don't feel very Buddhist today.

My ego is complaining. I am feeling like I deserve something better than what is. The "me" I think of as myself is whining for comfort, fairness, and just to be "left alone." These thoughts are festering - infecting my words and countenance. Such feelings are often encountered when we find ourselves in situations where we face what we perceive to be a lack of options, or what seem like unjust demands from more powerful others.

At home, surrounded by familiar people, chosen pets, and comforting possessions, these emotions can be challenging enough to process and reconcile to our practice. When you live in a one-room metal shed, at the mercy of the extremes of Texas climate, along with 57 other men, it can be, understandably, more difficult.

Most of those around me look upon my practice with a degree of novelty, curiosity, or uncertainty due to the seemingly "exotic and unfamiliar nature of meditative traditions in this state. To the men I live with, everything I do and say is testimony for all Buddha-dom. Like it or not, for

many here, I am not so much seen for my Buddha nature, but am seen as the embodiment of the entire Buddhist tradition. This weighs a bit heavy at times.

Sitting in silent meditation in an environment deliberately designed to preclude privacy is, in itself, making a bold statement. As a practitioner of a meditative tradition, with no access to chapel facilities allowed, I practice on my bunk, in plain sight of all, amid an environment rife with sanctioned prejudice and disenfranchisement.

I mentioned earlier that I don't feel very Buddhist today. I have convinced myself that most days, I am able to reconcile my practice and my incarceration pretty well. I meditate twice daily. I make a conscious effort to keep a true smile on my face and to share it with others. I try to notice and contemplate the small mindful moments as they reveal themselves throughout the day. Things like the sunshine through the translucent plastic skylight, maybe a songbird perched on the razorwire encircling the recreation yard, possibly just the feel of water on my face as I shave at a mirror-less sink. I've gotten to where most of the time, I don't let those around me upset me.

In this prison neighborhood, it is accepted as fact that simply brushing against someone unintentionally, or walking unaware into an area of the dayroom declared off limits to prisoners of certain races can result in hospital grade violence. Here, hostility and fear are rules rather than exceptions.

A smile of goodwill, a gentle word, or a true gift of spirit extended across racial or gang divides is the purest form of revolution here. Thinking, acting, and living in a style contrary to the contemporary status -quo will always be considered revolutionary and threatening by those holding power and influence. This is no less true for a Buddhist maintaining a practice within the Texas prison system than it was for Jesus the Christ, who lived out his teachings of love and acceptance in the first century Middle East.

Most of the time, I can accept all this.

Last week, I had a hearing in front of the unit classification committee in order to be assigned to a new work detail.

The Texas prison system doesn't financially compensate its convict laborers as most states do (not even at token levels). The law also fails to provide any incentive in the way of "good behavior" time for State jail offenders. Texas prisons are, however, required by the State Constitution to operate self-sufficiently to the maximum possible degree.

Unit and System administrators are judged (and rewarded financially) for keeping operating expenses at or below set budgetary levels. This pressure has led to felonious abuse and scandal in the past and continues to perpetuate a system of often brutal, de-facto slavery. Everything from the food served in inmate and officer dining halls (which are segregated and offer vastly different menus), to the uniforms worn by both; white for prisoners, confederate gray for guards - is produced within the system itself.

What starts out in prison operated pork or cattle slaughter houses or state owned cotton plantations passes through convict staffed distribution warehouses and sweat shop garment factories (it is condemned death row inmates who are forced to sew their executioner's uniforms). Eventually all these crops, materials, and goods are shipped to one of nearly 150 prisons, state jails, or community

supervision centers to be served, worn, processed, consumed, or otherwise used by over 150,000 state prisoners who, in truth, are forced to build their own prisons.

In theory at least, everyone held by the government of Texas must work; with no payment, benefit, or reward, in order to keep this bloated system operating.

Anyway, about a week ago, I had been called before a committee comprised of two uniformed correctional supervisors and a plain-clothed agent of the warden's office. Less than 20 seconds after being instructed to sit down, I was told that I was not approved; nor would I ever qualify to be approved for assignment to any "job" that would make use of my life experience, training, or education.

I had held out hope that I'd be able to assist those studying towards their high school equivalency as a tutor or teacher's aide, or maybe to work as a clerk in the law or general library. Even in prison, I had hoped to find some semblance of right livelihood.

I was declared ineligible for any such assignment because, as the official responded when I asked, I did not have a "visiting list" in place listing the contact and personal data of any blood relatives living in Texas; nor was my pre-arrest address in this state. Evidently, this deemed me a security risk and as thus, untrustworthy; compared with other, native, Texas felons. I was assigned to clean the dormitory I live in - to sweep the sealed-concrete floors, scrub the sinks, showers, and toilets and generally restore the human habitat we call home to inspection standards every night, as the others sleep.

Honestly, I must admit to a degree of selfish pride. I could have never foreseen that I, a college-educated, liberal, professional from the San Francisco Bay would ever be forced to scrub toilets in a Texas prison. Yet here I am.

I have witnessed the way some of the guards bully and emotionally abuse the overnight janitorial workers. I have often prayed them the Buddha's compassion and strength, yet, I surely never wished to be in their place.

I am now faced with the vanity of my practice to this point. Though I may vow to relieve the suffering of all beings and strive to become a bodhisattva, my commitment might just not be strong enough to withstand the cleaning of penitentiary toilets. It is the directness of this revelation that troubles me.

This might be easier to indulge in if I had never heard the Truth of the Dharma. If my attachment to ego wasn't being displayed like a sale poster in a Market Street window, it might be easier for me to vent my frustration. If some small part of the Buddha within wasn't teaching me, even now, that serving those around me, even in this most menial way, is great practice in itself; it would be a lot more fun to bitch, moan, grumble and generally make ugly faces.

When others are looking to me to see for themselves "how a Buddhist acts", am I setting a bad example because I just don't feel like "being Buddhist" today?

One of my many room mates with whom I've spoken a little about meditation and Dharma practice, asked me a while ago if anything was wrong; as I seemed upset or worried.

I told him I was disappointed at having been named a janitor, then, adding with a forced smile, that I would "get over it" soon. I mostly have.

I have much practice left before I can presume any lasting mastery of the "self". Great teachers have taught that even those born as gods in the highest realms of heaven

continue grasping after the conceived self, and thus, even with their near infinite life-spans, are destined to return to a samsaric existence.

With this in mind, and for the benefit of all beings who suffer, I will strive to purify my practice and guide my True Self towards the ego-less ideal that both Jesus and the Buddha showed the world when they knelt and cleaned their respective follower's feet.

Some days, still, I just don't feel like "being a Buddhist" - and being honest to myself about that feeling may be the most mindful meditation I can practice.

How much of your life do you spend looking forward to being somewhere else?

-Matthew Flickstein, "Journey to the Center"

From F.S.: Dear *Dharma Friends*,

My name is F.S.. I am a member of the Gateless Sangha located in the Airway Heights Correction Center. I have just started on this path and needless to say it is very different from my Christian upbringing.

I have learned a little and have much more to learn, I am very fortunate in having friends who are willing to share their knowledge, plus we have wonderful sponsors from the Padma Ling Center in Spokane, Wa. who come in every Friday evening and share their time and knowledge.

When I started on this path, my motivation was less than honorable (better food and incense oils and sticks). When my good friend invited me to a meeting and the once yearly celebration, it wasn't what I thought it would be (I'm not even sure what that was) and I got a lot more than what I had bargained for.

Since that time things have changed for me and within me. For the first time in my life things (some things) and people are starting to make sense. The teachings of Buddha have changed my life. I can't begin to describe my horror when I first felt someone else's pain and knew that I had added to it, then realized all the other people I have hurt in the past.

I haven't so much embraced Buddhism, but found my last path in life. I have had some growing pains (still am) and some of my worst thoughts and attitudes haunt me still, but I am committed to this path that has already enriched my life and that of others. It has made me a better person and in turn has enabled me to help others.

I now have found my way onto the 2 committees for our sangha. The first is for our yearly Celebration, the planning, activities, guests, proposal to the prison administration, fundraising, etc. This committee is also planning on getting other smaller events planned in the near future, which I think is really great. We just got a new chaplain at this prison who is more receptive to more Buddhist activities and is easier to work with.

The other committee I am on is the food committee for the celebration. We are charged with planning and procuring the meal for our celebration. I'm sorta known for preparing and enjoying good food, yes, even in prison.

I have 2 reasons for writing. First of all is your publication *Dharma Friends*. I would gladly put it in our collection of materials so others in the group might enjoy it also. We have 2 copies, one that I have already read and returned that was from, I think, January of 1996 or 1997 and

another from Sept. 2004. These were both left behind by another inmate. I myself have enjoyed both immensely, as have others. If you could do this, it would not only benefit me but as many as 30 or maybe more that are in our group. You have a very good publication and keep up the good work.

My second reason for writing is to ask for any ideas, suggestions or thoughts you may have for our next celebration. It will be this group's 11th (my 2nd) and I'd like to do what I can to make it special. The theme is going to be The Three Jewels. Any and all help you can give in this matter is greatly appreciated.

In the issue that was from Jan of 96 or 97 you asked us to write and tell about ourselves so here it is.

My name is F. S. I am 35 years old. I am married and the father of 2 girls. I have a wonderful family.

I have been in prison for 4 years and 3 days. I am here for armed robbery and my early release date is 9-20-10. I first used marijuana when I was 4, and started drinking regularly at 10. I have been an addict and alcoholic most of my life (clean and sober for 4 years 3 days by choice). I have felt lost and alone all my life. My mom left when I was 2 1/2 and my father spent most of his time working and in the bar. For most of my life I have felt lost and alone. I have been eaten up by anger and a feeling of inadequacy and incompleteness. Christianity helped some but there was much I didn't agree with or understand.

In Buddhism I am finding peace and compassion and understanding (of myself and others) that I have never known before.

That is my story, a condensed version of it anyway. Thank you for your time, consideration and fine publication.

In meditation, don't expect anything. Just sit back and see what happens. Treat the whole thing as an experiment. Take an active interest in the test itself, but don't get distracted by your expectations about the results. For that matter, don't be anxious for any result whatsoever. -Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, "Mindfulness in Plain English"

From J.H.: Dear Anna

About issue #105 - I was pleased to see my letter but I was shocked to see some apparent anger jump from the pages. Incarceration is no picnic, to be sure, but I had thought myself more detached than that. Please accept my humblest apologies if I offended in any way. I know for certain that I hadn't intended to lash out yet it seems that's exactly what I did.

I cannot undo my letter and, in truth, I stand by many of my assertions but some one once told me to not remove a fly from a friend's forehead with a ax. I fear that's what I did.

It's only been 2 months since I sent that, yet both my practice and understanding has leapt tremendously. This publishing of my letter shows just how far I've come in dealing with my own vitriol. It also serves to point out several other areas where I have need for improvement.

I got a personal note from you telling me that I was “good to give (your) self awareness a little kick.” It seems I’ve kicked my own self-awareness in the process.

So in the final evaluation, *Dharma Friends* is a teaching tool of great value. I thank you for your equity in publishing. It’s been rather enlightening. I look forward to sending more (hopefully objective) letters.
Your newest *Dharma Friend*,

*“Perhaps a new spirit is rising among us.
If it is, let us trace its movements and pray that our own
inner being
may be sensitive to its guidance,
for we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness
that seems so close around us.”*
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

From S.J.B.: Know I read and even study *Dharma Friends*, then I pass them along. My copy even eventually ends up donated to the county jail. So one copy gets some miles. And smiles. Thank you for sending it to me.

“No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.”
-- Aesop (c.620 - 560 BC)

*“We stand at the crossroads, each minute, each hour, each day, making choices.
We choose the thoughts we allow ourselves to think, the passions we allow ourselves to feel, and the actions we allow ourselves to perform. Each choice is made in the context of whatever value system we’ve selected to govern our lives. In selecting that value system we are, in a very real way, making the most important choice we will ever make.”*--
Benjamin Franklin

From E.B.: I’ve been studying Buddhism and Spirituality for 2 years now. It’s all I read. It’s now my way of life. Along the way I’ve sorted through many resource guides for prisoners. With the help of family, I’ve sent out close to 140 requests for books. I’ve read and sent home about 125 books and have 22 in front of me now un-read. I also receive 8 publications either monthly, every 2 months, quarterly or bi-annually, yours included. There is a wealth of material available for prisoners if they seek it. I have included a list of 58 sources that replied to my requests. That left about 80 that did not respond. These are gold to me. Yes I’m “attached” to them. I spent 5 hours weeding through everything to compile this list. Sorry, no access to a computer or typewriter.

We have a small monthly group here that I would like to share the list with.
Suffice it to say that my study of Buddhism has profoundly changing my life. I feel alive! It’s wonderful! So if my list helps another to find what I’ve found, then I’ve given a bit back. Everyone on that list sent me something free of charge. That’s a lot of folks who care.

People sometimes ask what type of Buddhist I am. I’ve usually replied Theravadin as I’m in this for myself. There is so much more to life than that though. I “feel” so much gratitude and compassion for all that you folks do for

us that it brings tears to my eyes as I write this. Perhaps bodhicitta is sneaking up on me. I do know that for many years there was little hope. Now there is little despair.

Readers – Here is E.’s RESOURCE LIST. *He worked hard on it but sent it to me last summer. I am so far behind, I have not been able to include it until now. Some of these resources may no longer be valid, but most probably are. Also, I have not let these resources know that 900 individuals will all be getting the list at the same time, so if they are a bit swamped, please do understand! Sorry for the small font but I wanted you to have it but still had to be mindful of space. Thanks so much to you E.*

THE RESOURCE LIST

Arkansas:

Dharma Friends Newsletter, Compassion Works for All, c/o Anna Cox PO Box 7708, Little Rock, 72217-7708

California:

Berkeley, 94703-9906, Box 3470, **Buddhist Peace Fellowship**, Books and other info.

Berkeley, 94707, Box 7355, **Parrallax Press** - Buddhist Books

Berkeley, 94702, 2910 San Pablo Ave, **Dharma Publishing** Buddhist Books

Claremont 91711, 915-C W. Foothill Blvd. #128, **Foresthill Prison Library**. Ask for books by subject.

City of Industry, 91745, 16925 East Gale Ave., **Society for Buddhist Understanding**. Buddhist Information.

Escondido, 92026, 2496, Melra Lane, **Deer Park Monastery**. **Mindfulness Bell Magazine** and other information.

Los Angeles, 90006, 928 S. New Hampshire Ave., **International Buddhist Meditation Center** (I.B.M.C.)

Excellent Zen material and courses

Los Angeles, 90075, 3521 W. Sixth Box 75217, **Science of Mind Foundation** - spiritual books and monthly magazine

North Hills, 91343, 2950 Columbus Ave., **Phat-Hoc-VienQvoc-Te** Buddhist Books

Redwood City, 94062, 1205 Hopkins Ave., **Insight Meditation Society** - Buddhist Books and info.

San Francisco, 94131-0527, Box 31527, **Liberation Prison Project** Buddhist Books, Calendar, etc. They also now

mail out the Naljor Prison Dharma Service Prayer Cards
San Francisco, 94102 300 Page St., **San Francisco Zen Center** Zen Books

San Francisco, 94112, Box 12037, **Saraha Buddhist Center** -- books

San Rafael, 94903-0657, Box 6657, **Allen Publishing** Toltec Books

Santa Cruz, 95063-2021, Box 2021, **Sati Center Book Fund** and **Sati Center for Buddhist Study**, - Buddhist

books, including 4 volume set, **“Handful of Leaves”**
Sunnyvale, 94087, 50 S. Bernardo Ave., **Amitabha**

Buddhist Society -- Buddhist books
Soquel, 95073, Box 1788 **Foundation for the Preservation**

of the Mahayana Tradition (FPPMT) **Mandala Magazine** and other info.

West Sacramento, 95605, 1715 Lisbon Ave, **ABS Society of Sacramento** - Buddhist Books

Woodacre, 94973, Box 909, **Spirit Rock Insight Prison**

Project - Buddhist info.

CANADA

The Buddhist Library Box, 20101 Fredericton, NBE 3 B 6Y8 Books magazines etc. Put 60 cents postage on your envelope – now maybe more.

Colorado

Boulder, 80306-4623, Box 4623, **Prison Dharma Network**
Books and info

Boulder, 80302, 1507 Pine St., **The Ratna Foundation**
(used to be Shambhala Prison Community) books, mags. Etc, courses

Michigan

Howell, 48843, 10515 N. Latson Rd., **American Buddhist Association**. Books

Massachusetts

Barre, 01005, 149 Lockwood Rd., **Barre Center for**

Buddhist Studies - Books

Barre, 01005, 1230 Pleasant St., **Insight Meditation Society**
Books

Boston, 02116, 110 Arlington St., **Lucy Parsons Center** -
books by subject

Boston, 02117, Box 194, **Lionheart Foundation** books

Brookline, 02146, Box 1095, **Lama Yeshe Wisdom**

Archive - books, Buddhist

Somerville, 02144, 199 Elm St., **Wisdom Publications** -
Buddhist books

Weston, 02493, Box 356, **Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive**
- Buddhist books

Worcester, 01609, 210 Park Ave #321, **Central**

Massachusetts Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Buddhist
info

North Carolina

Durham, 27715, Box 61619, **Human Kindness Foundation**
- spiritual books, including Bo Lozoff's wonderful book, **We**

Are All Doing Time

Michigan

Howell, 48843, 10515 N. Latson Rd., **American Buddhist Association** Books

Ann Arbor, 48104, 1923 Geddes Ave. **Anthroposophical Prison Outreach** spiritual materials

Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, 19143, 4722 Baltimore Ave., **Books Through Bars** - Books by subject

New York

Bronx, 10463, 3070 Albany, **Crescent Temple of Enlightenment** -books and info

Bronx, 10468, 2611 Davidson Ave., **Young Men's Buddhist Association** - Buddhist books

Burdeth, 14818, 4936 Route 414, **Larson Publications** -
book, **"What is Karma"**

Carmel, 10512, 2020 Route 301, **Chuang Monastery** -
Buddhist books

Carmel, 10512, 2020 Route 301, **The Buddhist Association of the US**, Book Circulation Dept., Buddhist books

Elmhurst, 11373, 90-56 Corona Ave., **Chan Meditation Center** - Buddhist books

Mt. Trumper, 12457, Box 197 South Plank Road, **Zen Mountain Monastery** Buddhist books and info

Oregon

Culp Creek, 97427-0016, Box 16 **Buddhist Inmate Sangha**
Buddhist info

Florida

Tarpon Springs, 34689, **Buddhist Correspondence Course**
c/o Richard Baksa 1709 Mexico Ave. Books and courses

Miscellaneous

Foundation of Human Understanding Box 1009, Grants Pass, Or. 97526 -- spiritual info

The Gangaji Foundation, 2245 Ashland St., Ashland, OR 97521 Indian philosophy, Hindu type

Sivananda Yoga Prison Project, Box 195 Route 1 Budd Rd., Woodbourne, NY 12788 --yoga book and info

Prison Legal News, 2400 NW 80th St. #148, Seattle, Wa. 98101 -resource guide and info

Healing Tao Center - Box 471, Revere, MA 02151 Tao Information

World Service Meditation Group, Box 818, Atascadero, CA 93423-0818 spiritual info

Meditation Group for the New Age, Box 566, Ojai, CA 93023 spiritual info

Syda Foundation, Box 99140, Emeryville, CA 94662 monthly Indian/Hindu 12 year reading course

Inquiring Mind Magazine, Box 9999, Berkeley Station, CA 94709 free Buddhist magazine

Boxcar Books, 310 a S. Washington St., Bloomington, IN 47401 books by subject

Clovis Press, 229 Bedford Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11211 books by subject

The Asian Classics Institute, Box 144, New York, NY 10276 15 audio/written courses. Must be able to receive tapes. Buddhist

Special Alert to all of you who are WRITERS and MEDITATORS

Here is another resource that just asked to be included in our resource list:

Wildmind, PO Box 212, Newmarket NH 03857

Wildmind, the publisher of a book now in the works, **"Buddhism Behind Bars,"** a compilation of writings by Buddhist inmates and volunteers showing the transformative effect of Buddhist practice, is still looking for more inmate contributors. They ask, "Perhaps you could mention that we have a packet of information for potential contributors that we're happy to send out. When we receive a draft contribution that we think has some promise, we find an editor/mentor/Kalyana Mitra to work with the inmate to help him (or her, although so far we have no female inmates contributing) find their voice and tell their story. So there's an important educational aspect of this project as well. Our address for requesting the contributor guidelines is the one above. Royalties from the book will be donated to the Khanti Outreach Project, which is a New Hampshire nonprofit run by Dave Carr, who aims to set up a halfway house for Buddhist inmates. **Wildmind**, the publisher, is a small nonprofit that I founded to promote meditation. We run websites giving information on meditation, run online meditation courses, publish meditation titles, and also have an involvement with a local prison Sangha that Dave founded six or seven years ago.

Additionally, **Wildmind has published a cassette of guided meditations that is available free to inmates.** If anyone would like copies of this cassette, write to us and we'll be happy to ship them. With best wishes, Bodhipaksa

***Subscription information:** I have gladly been offering this newsletter free of charge to those in prisons. I am so happy to have a vehicle for those who have little dharma support to feel united with others who identify with*

*their life situation. It is truly important to remember that we are all mirrors of each other. We are all one with each other. And we can recognize that samsara is suffering for us all whether behind the bars of a prison or behind the bars of our own ego structure. For anyone who is not in prison and who would like to subscribe to Dharma Friends, here is what to do. The fee is \$15 for six months or \$30 for one year. Mail a check or money order made out to **Dharma Friends**: and send to **Dharma Friends subscriptions, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, AR. 72217-7708**. This amount covers the subscription for you and also for one and a half free subscriptions for prisoners. I also want to acknowledge the enormous generosity of many of those in prisons who have sent stamps and letters of support and appreciation. Far more important than anything material are the letters and notes that say that you are benefiting from being part of this sangha of **Dharma Friends**. I think that many feel less alone on their journey because we are connected beyond all time and space to each other.*

PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOUR ADDRESS CHANGES.

AND A NOTE TO FREE WORLD SUBSCRIBERS: Would you prefer to get your

From Chokyi Lodro (C.H): Just started reading issue #105 of **D.F.**.. and I decided to forward the poem I'm enclosing **I AM A BREATH OF LIFE**.. The poem is a gift to everyone.

I Am A Breath of Life

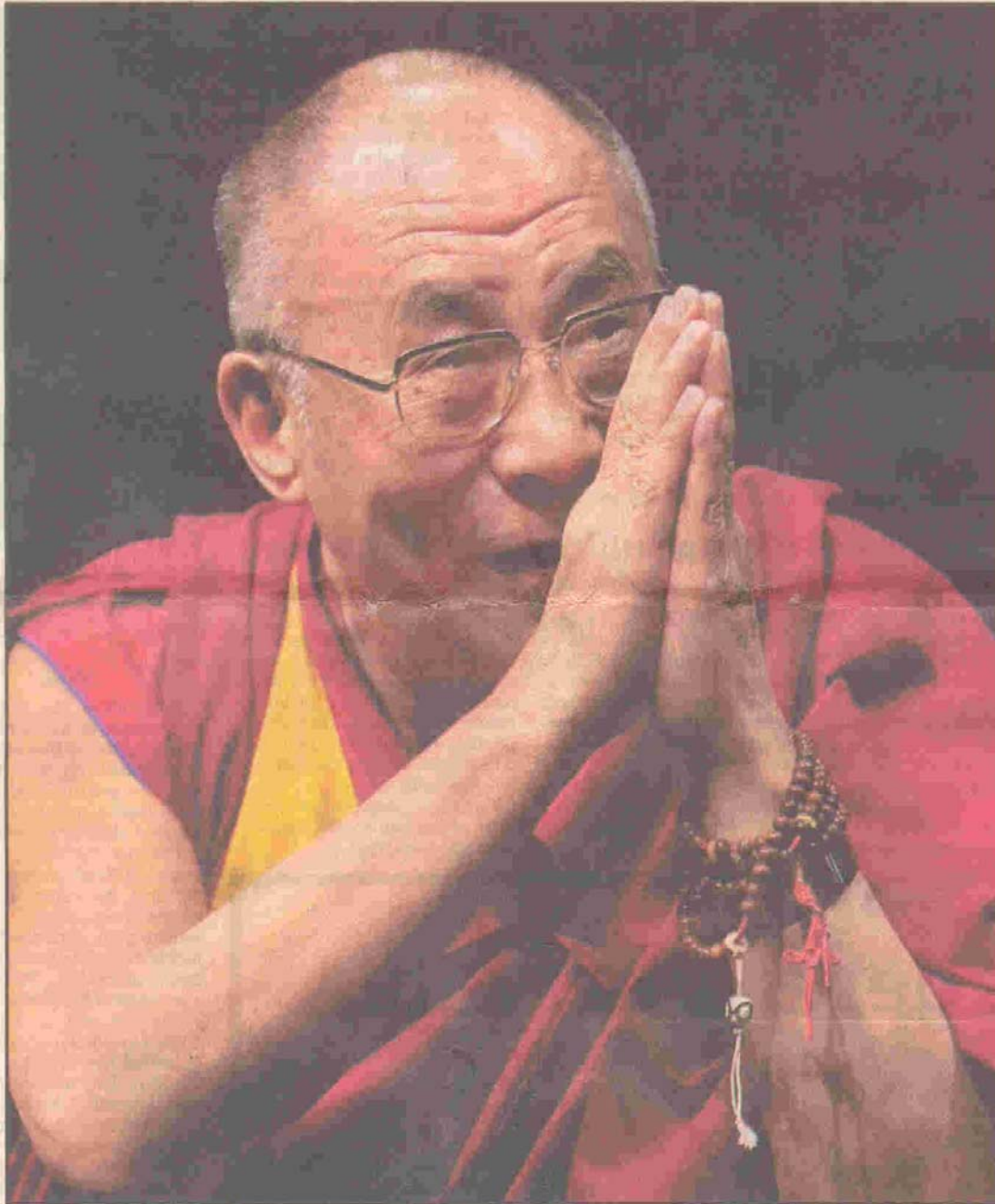
By forgetting what they've said..
I realize there's no one to blame
and in wonderful clarity
I was born a miracle
and I am perfect as is ---
regardless of my mistakes,
no more wrestling my demons
because I am loveable and
capable of becoming my dream
given the opportunity or
I'll make it happen since
I am spontaneous with
infinite potential from all
of life's possibilities,
I have taken control and
I will make a difference --
one contribution at a time,
I know life is a self-repeating cycle --
I am a breath of life --

Dharma Friends issues via email?? We could send it to you in PDF format (just like your **Dharma Friends** booklet) and you could save it to your computer - no more stacks of back issues! Or you could print it out to read anytime. We would save money that could then go to issues for those in prisons. We are happy to send your issues via US Mail, but if you like this new idea, please let us know and send us your email address. Thanks so much for considering this option!!

AND - A fabulously kind offer! My teacher, Lama Tharchin Rinpoche, a Vajrayana teacher of the Nyingma lineage, is offering to you free video tapes of his teachings.. There are a very wide range of teachings but each has true gems throughout. Even if Vajrayana study and practice are new to you, these tapes will be very wonderful. But it must be ok to have video tapes at your facility - if for your study group or for you personally. I would recommend that you clear this through your mail room and chaplain, or perhaps your chaplain could receive them and allow you to come to watch them. Once you have checked this out, write to me and I will send a tape to you.

not misery ... I refuse to put
myself down or judge others because
compassion guides me down
a new path called progress,
my new high.

‘It is very important
to build a calm heart’



Mamta Popat / Arizona Daily Star

The Dalai Lama delighted the crowd with his folksy manner during his only Tucson appearance before the general public.

Buddhist leader delivers straight talk on peace



Dharma Friends Compassion Works for All
PO Box 7708
Little Rock, AR. 72217-7708

Permit No. 160
Non-Profit Organization
US Postage PAID
Little Rock, AR



The ancients thought it shameful to seek advancement or to want to be the head of something, or the chief or senior. - Dogen