

# Dharma Friends

***Dedicated to sharing the Dharma, Healing Each Other,  
All Sentient Beings and Ourselves.***

July 2005

issue #102

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## **The DHAMMAPADA The teachings of the Buddha**



### **Verse 20: The Path**

*Spoken in the Jetavana Grove:*

1. Best among paths is the eightfold path. Best among truths are the truths in four lines. Best of all Dharmas is freedom from desire. Best among two-footed beings is the one with Vision.
2. This is the only path that leads to pure vision: There is no other. Enter it, and on this path you will confound the demon Mara.
3. Enter this path and you will bring an end to sorrow. This is the path that I described having completely understood the basis of affliction.
4. The Tathagatas merely show the way; you must make the effort. Through meditation and equanimity, you free yourself from the bonds of Mara.
5. All conditioned things are impermanent. When you truly comprehend this, you will no longer be afflicted by suffering. This is the path of purity.

6. All conditioned things are suffering. When you truly comprehend this, you will no longer be afflicted by suffering. This is the path of purity.
7. All elements (of conditioned things) are self-less. When you truly comprehend this, you will no longer be afflicted by suffering. This is the path of purity.

*Spoken in the Jetavana Grove:*

8. Not getting up when it is time to rise; lazy though young and strong; confused and lackadaisical, how can the indolent find the path of the wise?



*by J.J. (Dainin)*

*Spoken in the Bamboo Grove:*

9. Guard your speech and use your mind well. Keep your body from unvirtuous action. In purifying these three paths of action, you rely on the path which was taught by the Rishi.

*Spoken in the Jetavana Grove:*

10. Wonderful qualities arise from yoga, but they dwindle if you cease your practice. There is progress, and there is loss. Understanding both of these, increase what is truly positive, and enter into Certainty.
11. Cut down the tree; destroy the whole forest. From the forest danger arises. If you cut away the trees and the roots, O Monks, you will pass from sorrow.
12. As long as a man is attached to women, his smallest desire, if not destroyed right away, will bind him completely, like a suckling calf to its mother.
13. Cut away the self you hold so dear, as you would a faded autumn lotus. Earnestly take up this path of peace, the passage from sorrow as taught by the Buddha.
14. Here I will stay in the summer, in the winter, as well as the spring. So thinks the fool. He never dreams that obstacles might rise before him.
15. Death approaches and sweeps away the man attached to his children and cattle. Death approaches and takes hold of him in the same way a raging river carries off a sleeping village.
16. Your children are no haven; nor are your parents or kin. Once under the sway of death, not even your dearest friends can help you.
17. Those who are wise, those endowed with restraint and good conduct, understand this powerful message of death, and quickly clear the path to nirvana.



## **Some Thoughts About this Dhammapada verse**

### **The Path**

#### *Honor the Path of Another and Support Them on Their Journey*

We are often told to walk the “path” of (fill in the blank with any of the world’s religious traditions), and one may even be told that they are on the “path to Hell” if they don’t. Again and again, we hear proponents of various paths advocating their beliefs with huge emotional certainty. Of course, the one who makes such a statement about a right path is also clearly stating that all others are the wrong path. The speaker thinks he has the TRUTH. I think that such willingness by some to announce with authority that they know what religious path is right for other individuals, societies, or countries is responsible for enormous pain. And horrifically, we know that a great many of our wars have been due to such certainty of right and wrong religious beliefs. To me, it is amazing hubris to tell another what is right for the very heart of another. But, judge for yourself what you feel about this issue, as it may be more complicated than it appears at first glance.

### **A Child Knows Sacredness**

I have never known a small child who did not have a natural appreciation for the sacred universe and who was not full of questions in their attempts to learn about this realm. Few parents would knowingly squelch such innocent love of the divine and, understandably, most give answers that share their own belief system. As a child explores, they may adopt a family religious tradition or change to another tradition, but when they feel loved and honored in their search and they at least embrace the family’s basic principles of goodness, most successfully find their own way. As a psychotherapist, unfortunately I saw many who were criticized by their loved ones when they adopted a different religion. Some people were even told that they were evil and were ostracized from their family. I remember one very sad story of a woman who was dying and who had long held a liberal theology. Her family was very fearful that if she did not adopt their beliefs before she died, she would go to hell. She died alone because they could never give up their closed views.

Another young woman I knew was lesbian. Her family and church told her that if she was a good follower of their truth, her homosexuality would be “driven from her”. She tried that path and then, after

never having been in a relationship, she found a wonderful partner. When the congregation found out about her secret love, they rebuked her in front of everyone at church one Sunday morning. She hated to make a choice between her faith and her beloved, but unable to feel love and support for who she was spiritually and sexually, she chose to end the relationship. She continues to go to church, admitting to me that she is despondent and suicidal. There is tragedy for those who stay in more rigid religious communities while believing that they are horribly flawed, or who may reject all spirituality, believing that all traditions are toxic and judgmental. I expect that many who do not easily fall into familiar, family religious traditions or who do not feel support in their search, quietly drift away from their own sacred center. We all need affirmation from others. It takes a strong inner voice to continue to search while feeling prejudice and rejection.

### Right or Wrong - So Many Judgments

Some who read this, no matter whether Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, a Native American tradition, Hindu, or others, may feel that I am very misguided. They may truly believe that their tradition is, in fact, the only True path. I have had teachers who have said very strongly that the only path is a specific Buddhist path. Of course, I and many other Buddhists have had an uncountable number of those followers of various western religions tell us forcefully that we are spiritually lost because we don't practice their one path to heaven. Some of our *Dharm a Friends'* letters have dealt with this issue of a right and wrong religion, and even the right and wrong lineage within the same religion. Hmmm. And look at this. The first line in this month's **Dhammapada** verse, *The Path*, could lead one to think that we are reading a teaching that declares a superior way. "*Best among paths is the eightfold path.*" I still think that the **Dhammapada**, as one of the foundations of Buddhist tradition, is a helpful text that can provide all of us with moral, ethical, and spiritual guidelines. I draw on it each month because I believe it can benefit all of our readers, no matter what path is unfolding for them. But, a few lines later in the **Dhammapada**, we read, "*This is the only path that leads to pure vision.*" Is this any different than a Christian who says that one is saved only through a belief in Jesus? Or a Catholic who says that only through Catholicism can one go to Heaven? Or an extreme fundamentalist of almost any tradition who declares that those who do not live by their religious dictates is deserving of (fill in the blank with almost any horrific and punishing destiny)?

### The Unfolding Path

All paths were at first a unique individual's unfolding, guided by inner and outer wisdom, who later became a great teacher. These most remarkable beings are noticed by others and as great numbers in a society find their words beneficial, their reputations spreads. Many came to hear their stories of how they found such great ability to go beyond ordinary reality. Those beings seem to relate directly to the most profound and sacred aspects of existence. Somehow they walked a path that resulted in an extraordinary clarity in living life and we wish to do so too. Very often their wisdom paths teach us open and compassionate hearts, an understanding of reality that transcends ego and intellect, and sometimes an ability to accomplish beneficial feats beyond the intellectual and physical capacities of most of us. Meeting them or studying about them, awakens in us a longing for their wisdom. Many adopt them as teachers and their way becomes the path of their students who are touched by a *knowing* that we too can actualize this same capacity.

### The 1<sup>st</sup> Steps

Followers want to learn and practice the teachings of these amazing beings that we are drawn to, but what is known by these fully accomplished teachers is actually an unexplainable state of awareness that goes beyond any intellectual description. We hear the teachings of those wise beings, but we are limited in our ability to understand them by our capacity to identify with them. We can comprehend them only through the

perspective of our own life experiences. Our teachers know that and can only offer their guidance and their love. The students are all on an evolutionary ladder of spiritual growth. At first they might hear the teachings at very basic and elementary levels interpreted through a literal intellect and ego understanding. At this introductory level, ego is often likely to appropriate the teachings in order to serve self. When we first begin to hear words of wisdom, full of hope and promise, we feel such enthusiasm that we are eager to share the teachings with everyone else. We feel that we have found an answer that stirs us in a way that we have never touched before. Faith awakens but ego too is often thrilled to have found an identity that sets them apart from the masses as somehow special and even superior. This all strengthens our commitment to the path in ways that will serve us well, but ego's determined grandiosity may hurt others that we come in contact with who are walking other paths. Eventually this long journey will transcend self but ego rewards are necessary at first to keep us on the path. If this is where we are, it is good at this stage of the path to hear a teacher say, "This is the place to start. These are the behaviors to do that will keep your life in balance so that you stay firmly on the path. Follow me and my teachings." It is also helpful to keep ego in balance by meditating on "Being Nobody."

### **Our Hearts Open Along the Way**

While the words of the various teachers or teachings in the great religions may not be dramatically different from each other at their core, there are students who are a bit further along in their journey who are able to know a deeper and more subtle level of understanding of them. These more advanced followers have a conceptual and experiential framework that provides a base of insight for the teachings. This next step in most traditions can open a compassionate heart that longs to alleviate the pain of others. Embedded in the teachers' words is guidance that motivates those who are ready to hear it to deepen a powerfully felt compassionate connection to all beings. Often these students are then seen by others as very special teachers as well. Their behaviors begin to touch and open the hearts of those a few steps behind them on the journey. Even though ego and intellect are less important as an identity for them, hopefully they have learned the lessons of Being Nobody Special and such adoration does not pull them away from their path. Ego and intellect are still present and it is still tempting to succumb to feelings of grandiosity and superiority. It is sometimes a challenging tight-rope walk to hold one's heart open to loving others while self competes with a desire to be special as well. This is an excellent task on the path because it forces us to fine tune our awareness of suffering for ourselves and others. If this is where we are on our spiritual path, a focus on Loving Kindness at all times may be helpful. At this stage, it is good to hear a teacher tell us to love all beings as ourselves. We remember to know all beings as one family, inseparable one from another.

### **The Wisdom Way**

I suspect that great wisdom teachers in their compassion chose their words very carefully so that those who have the capacity to recognize their subtle meanings receive teachings that point out the indescribable spiritual reality that we all eventually have the capacity to know and live. As we travel a path that awakens the most esoteric wisdom of each tradition, we recognize when we have transcendent experiences of the sacred. We know then that those times of opening into the divine are what the teachers have been guiding us towards. Once we have those experiences, we can learn to strengthen them in the ongoing practice of living our lives with awareness. We also know that we too will need to choose our words and actions impeccably so that we do not lead others astray or cause others pain. We know we know something of sacred reality but we know that there is no way to explain it to others. We can only live it. But, we too can lay out a little path of crumbs through the forest for others and it is up to those seekers to find them and then to find their own path Home. For all of us, when we see Home after years of searching, we recognize it immediately. We do not need to ponder, "Is this my path? Is this my home?" But when we are still seeking the path in a newly evolving and sometimes scary realm of consciousness, we need to have great faith in our teacher, our inner guide, and in knowing the way Home. At those times, we may need to hear our teacher say with certainty - "This Is The

Path You Remember. This Path Will Lead You Home.” The motivation of the teacher is not to say - This path is the one True path and you are RIGHT to have chosen it. Their motivation is to encourage the student to go deeper and deeper into the teachings that will bring the greatest results for THAT practitioner. For those at this stage of the path, it is time to commit as fully as we are able to **the** practice that will take us all the way Home.

### **The Way of No Path**

For one who has fully realized all that is sacred, I suspect that they know their inseparability from ultimate *knowing*. I expect that such beings *are* great compassion and great wisdom and are no longer searching or walking a path. I expect that to them there is no differentiation or separation or sense of unequalness among any beings or any path. Those who know this are the ultimate and great wisdom teachers of all humanity.

### **We All Walk Together**

In their great compassion, the great wisdom teachers of the world know that we, who are taking our first steps, need a path to follow. Since we all have different capacities and interests, there are a myriad of ways that are offered by these great teachers who are, in essence, one guiding wisdom. Because they love us, they give us different teachings that spark our individual egos and intellects in order to hook us. I doubt that they are competing to claim that they are Right. As we find gradual success, our inner true heart begins to awaken. Our teachers’ clues are left in just the perfect places for us to triumph over our spiritual challenges and to learn a little bit more wisdom from each life experience. We are all told that we have the capacity to become all that our inner wisdom urges nudge us to develop, and leading with our hearts will keep us on the path. For all of us, our offering to others is to always see them as pure essence as much as we can and to love them. Simply by relating to their true nature, we will be nurturing their seeds of awakening and supporting them on their journey while our own path develops ever-greater clarity. This is the net of support and love that will bring healing to the world as each being finds their way with the help of all others.



### **A Meditation**

Let’s start with tapping back into our childhood memories for a few minutes. Remember the feeling when someone in authority claimed to know more about you than you thought you knew about yourself. Now, some of those statements might have rung true and you agreed with them and felt understood. Some of those statements might have been positive or have proven to be positive because they supported you on a path that was really a good one for you. But some of those statements might have stung or were painful. Remember how it felt when someone said something about an important part of your being that you knew was not true but you could not protest. Or, maybe you did say something to defend your beliefs. What happened then? Were you allowed to say who you were and what you believed or were you told who you were

and what you believed?

Take a pen and paper and begin writing down any “pronouncements” that were said to you about yourself as your mind brings them back to you.

Read your list. As you browse through your memories, notice the emotions that arise. Let any painful emotion, even if just a hint, be the clue that somehow you may have lost some of your truthful self-knowing. If there are such issues, I wonder if it would be helpful to spend some time reclaiming what you know in your heart about those pieces of you. Retrieving lost pieces are a way to hear your own inner guide, that voice that directs your decisions and choices on your journey towards wisdom and true completion, much more clearly.

Here’s an example. J. remembers his father saying that he was retarded because he was not as smart as his brother. When he heard his father say that again and again as a child, it hurt his feelings but he believed it. He didn’t ever make choices to pursue his education because he felt like a failure before he began. When making his list of old “pronouncements”, J. started to cry when he remembered this one. There was so much he dreamed of doing and he felt like his life was a waste. In therapy for depression, he agreed to take an IQ test and was very surprised when he tested above normal in intelligence. He decided that he wanted to reclaim that “lost” smart part of himself and find confidence in his intellect. Since then, slowly but surely, he has been taking college classes and doing well. He has a dream of being a youth counselor so that he can help kids who got lost along the way like he did. This pain of a low self-image affected his spiritual life because he had shut down so much in depression, he could not explore his inner pull to read about various religions which he now studies voraciously.

Our spiritual self may have stirred or even danced very innocently as a child and you might remember those times. It might have been when you were in church, out in the woods, watching a sunrise, making art or music, sitting with your grandmother, or all of those times. Remember the heart quality that you felt that transcended ordinary love or joy? Remember the experiences of *knowing* a reality beyond what you possibly live most of the time? But, if it was too painful to listen to that voice as a child because someone would state that you were “wrong”, you might have learned to ignore it or even bury it. It isn’t too late to find it again.

The wisdom that guides us towards our ultimate and true expression unfolds from our all-accepting, open heart. Spiritual essence flows more easily and our spiritual voice is louder when all that arises in our awareness is able to be accepted in a wise and compassionate view. Wisdom Self is always speaking to us, not always with words but maybe with life events, symbols, dreams or fantasies, and felt insights and awareness, because, consciously or unconsciously, we want to find our wholeness and our sacredness.

Are there any old authoritarian voices that you believe that held you back from celebrating your true self? Do you need to revisit that part of yourself that believes the old messages and to now declare powerfully that your own full expression is the most important way to live your life? When was the last time you truly knew your own vibrant spiritual essence? When did you last know that you were in touch with the sacred? What supports and strengthens that experience for you? Do you fill with joy when you allow yourself such times? Do you need more opportunities to feed and grow your spiritual essence? What stops you from getting as much time as you need to practice your spirituality? Let’s go for it!

### **Our meditation for this month**

Starting now, spend 30 minutes doing the thing that brings the most joy to your heart. Call that your

*m e d i t a t i o n* . But, do it with awareness. If you want to draw, do that. If you want to read, do that. If you want to listen to music, do so. If you want to do yoga, stretch away! If you want to do silent meditation, get out your cushion. If you want to read the Bible, the Koran, your Buddhist texts, or those of any of the great religious traditions - read with your heart. Martial arts? Dancing? Singing? Making love to your beloved? Sleeping a lazy day away? Eating? Walking outdoors in a beautiful setting? Feel the fullness that comes when the focus is solely on making you happy. There is no other goal than just filling yourself with joy. The more your inner wisdom voice is appreciated and honored, the louder and clearer it will grow! Any truly joyful state of transcendent focus can then be recognized as spiritual essence and can be your meditation. See the sacred essence in your joy. Along the way, there may be changes, challenges, additions and all will strengthen your ever more subtle inner guide. This will become your pathway to actualizing your great wisdom self.



## FROM YOUR LETTERS

**From P.D.:** Dear Anna and ***Dharma Friends*** - I was introduced to ***Dharma Friends*** by a good friend of mine and I've always been curious about Buddhism as well as all other religions because I believe the keys to the mysteries of life lies within one's self and the different ways of life are the many facets that causes an ultimate glow and in our search for truth we seek out religions which are wars and when we find the path we choose it becomes a way of life and the enjoyment is that peace we sought. I was wondering would it be possible to acquire a friend or spiritual support person to correspond with. I prefer one who's in the free-world because I'm about to be released and I would like to continue to stay in touch possibly meet the person and learn more about Buddhism. Thanks for all you've done so far. With divine Love,

*Take no pleasure in worldly talk;  
Take delight in what passes beyond the world.*

*Cause good qualities to grow in others  
In the same way (you wish them) for yourself.*  
-Nagarjuna,

"Precious Garland"

**From S.S.:** Greetings,

I hope this finds all of you well and in great spirits. I am writing from deep in the great Gulag of the Texas Prison System. We have a small but very committed sangha here. As for myself, I feel that I am now on the Right path for spiritual well-being and enlightenment. I am in search of correspondence with positive minded individuals who wouldn't mind answering a question (or 2 ☺) as I journey this path into goodness and hopefully, eventual wisdom. I am 44 years into this travail, and I have taken many side roads but for the first time I feel I am on solid ground in my search for me.. Peace be with you.

*Those who have spent ten or twenty  
years brushing aside the weeds looking for the*

way and yet have not see the buddha nature often say they are trapped by oblivion and excitement. What they don't realize is that the substance of this very oblivion and excitement is itself buddha nature. -Kao-feng

**From J.P.:** Dear Dharm a Friends, I have just begun reading on the **Teachings of Buddha** and I try and practice the Eightfold Path every day. Of course it is hard to fully master these ways. However, with people and organizations like you and lots of patience I may achieve Buddhahood one day.

"IN ANCIENT TIMES, VARIOUS HOLISTIC SCIENCES WERE DEVELOPED BY HIGHLY EVOLVED BEINGS TO ENABLE THEIR OWN EVOLUTION AND THAT OF OTHERS. THESE SUBTLE ARTS WERE CREATED THROUGH THE LINKING OF INDIVIDUAL MINDS WITH THE UNIVERSAL MIND. THEY ARE STILL TAUGHT BY TRADITIONAL TEACHERS TO THOSE WHO DISPLAY VIRTUE AND DESIRE TO ASSIST OTHERS. THE STUDENT WHO SEEKS OUT AND STUDIES THESE TEACHINGS FURTHERS THE EVOLUTION OF HUMANKIND AS WELL AS HER OWN SPIRITUAL UNFOLDING. THE STUDENT WHO IGNORES THEM HINDERS THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALL BEINGS."

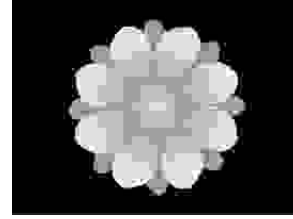
- Lao Tsu #54 in the Hua Hu Ching: The Unknown Teachings of Lao Tsu (a brilliant translation by Brian Walker)

**From Bali Maharagja dasa:** As the Chinese say, "May you live long and prosper."

One subject - karma - is a complex topic with many facets. For example, there is more to karma than just action and reaction. Two other lesser known aspects could be expanded on: vikarma (forbidden activities) and akarma (activities without material reactions, or in other words, actions on the transcendental platform). (The above terms are found in the Nirukti Sanskrit dictionary). Maybe this information would be suitable to share in your magazine?.

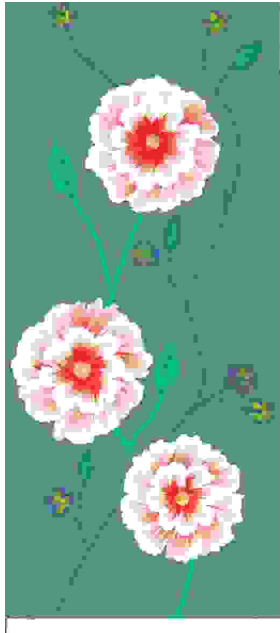
**We should not merely expend all our energy collecting pieces of information, but**

**make an effort to experience their validity through insight in our daily life.** -Geshe Rabten, in *Advice From a Spiritual Friend*



**From T.J.:** Dear Anna and Dharm a Friends, The letter I wrote that you printed in issue #97, was like a letter to myself. Funny how things work out. To use Thadeus Golas' analogy, I was on the matter end of the spectrum. After mail call I was reading Dharm a Friends and I realized not only was the letter I was reading my own, but the ego had derailed my train and taken over, almost completely. Self-talk snaps a man out of delusion, four months later! I remember you saying in one of your letters to me that you wanted to print one of my letters sometime. At the time I thought about how flat and lifeless my writing had been around that particular time. Until I read my letter in Dharm a Friends I'd forgotten writing it. No big surprise. All the weed, alcohol and stimulants, I'm lucky to have a functioning temporal lobe. I'm having facetious thoughts, maybe sacrilegious, it's not me it's the muse! I have an image in my mind of a monastery, microscopic in size, perched on the edge of a convolution in my brain. With monks in the stupa, reading the Bardo Thos Grol for my dead brain cells. "Oh, Brain Cell of noble birth..." I've had a few manifestations and I have to admit none of them were laughing, but that would be a projection of my own mind. ☺

I try to put my heart into my path and my practice. I try to understand myself and be a better human being everyday. It's nice to be recognized. You do a lot of good for me by printing *Dharma Friends* and sharing it with me and all the other aspirants who've gotten crosswise of the law. Thanks again. Tashi Delek



*"In the world at present, there is not much concern for humane values; there is too much dependence on money and power. If human society loses the value of justice, the value of compassion, the value of honesty, we will face greater difficulties in the future. Some people may think that these sorts of ethical attitudes are not much needed in the areas of business or politics. I strongly disagree. The quality of our actions depends on our motivation. What we must do is to balance external material progress with the sense of responsibility that comes of education and inner development."*

--The Dalai Lama

### **From M.C.:**

I write today to request you take my name off your mailing list. I discharge my sentence in 19 days and will be homeless for an undetermined amount of time. Thus I will not have a forwarding address.

Another, and most important reason I write is to attempt to share my deep gratitude for allowing me the pleasure and privilege of receiving your newsletter these past few years.

For the most part, I lean toward Christianity but I do not believe any one religion nor belief system nor perspective is inclusive to all Truth. While in prison I have been fortunate to do in-depth study of many different beliefs and my personal philosophy of life, death, existence and enlightenment include a various measure of all I've encountered.

Your newsletter has been very instrumental in my spiritual and intellectual growth. The meditations, insights and quotes have been of great help. However, the most vital part that has been rewarding to me has been other's letters - and your comments.

Others have asked the questions I've had and still others bring the answers or suggest a new perspective that offers growth. How great that is!!

I can't begin to properly thank you for all that I have received from your generosity and love. It is my hope that you and everyone connected to your wonderful publication find the peace they seek, accept the love that abounds everywhere and discovers enlightenment on whichever path they walk.

*Our echoes roll from soul to soul, and grows forever and forever.*

-- Tennyson



**From Adzom Rinpoche's sangha in Texas.** Rinpoche sent this poem that they say, seemed just to arise and tumble out most naturally despite a difficult phone connection and frequent pauses for re-translation back and forth to Tibetan! He was thinking of all of you, his friends and students.

\* \*

\*

*Your mind's happiness wells up from within!*

*Yet, since beginningless time we,  
Overpowered by ignorance,  
Fall short of understanding what reality is.*

*Even so, relying on the dharma , the Lama and on  
The most quintessential instructions  
We can come to understand.*

*For this we need faith, effort and wisdom (shes rab)  
With these three, right then,  
The state of the Buddha Conqueror is ours.*

*This is my heart felt guidance to you.*

\* \* \*

**From N.S.:** .... On a more personal level, I have been looking at myself and putting understanding to some of my wants and needs. It seems that I always find myself thinking about companionship. I don't know if it's the conditions of my situation that fosters this thought. Or its just one of our most basic needs. Me and another guy was talking about this. And my feelings were I feel that everyone has a part of themselves that needs fulfillment/Love. I understand that in order to love others we must first love ourselves. I also feel that in order to live and be healthy we have to find love, companionship and that sense of fulfillment outside of ourselves. If man were only created to explore his inner self then our Creator would have made man an island within himself. We talked on this subject for about 30 minutes....

They are having a speech contest down here and I'm going to enter it. I'll write and let you know the outcome on that.

*He who for him self or others  
craves not for sons or power or wealth, who  
puts not his own success before the success of  
righteousness, he is virtuous, and righteous  
and wise. --Buddha*

**From T.R.:** Thank you for your generous letter. You all are doing a wonderful thing for those incarcerated individuals seeking the truth of the middle way. May you find happiness.

As usual, I have many questions - This time mostly concerning my meditation practice. One problem, and I can hardly believe I'm calling it a problem, is that sitting is sometimes too pleasurable. I think the term is "blissing out." This is not the reason to meditate, is it? Have you experienced this? What measures, if any, should I take to overcome this? It will most likely pass of its own accord, right?

Also, what can I do to keep my mind from constantly clinging to every passing thought sometimes? Like I am my thoughts, or something. I know better, but the inclination to identify with them is strong. Who would have thought that letting go would be so difficult. Why does one's ego struggle so hard to be part of everything when actually, to the extent it exists, it is? I'm sure it's a continuous process, but does it get any easier? Or is it not supposed to be easy?

Namaste

*Dear T,*

I am so glad that you are enjoying your *Dharma Friends* issues and I am happy you have written and shared your thoughts with me. You asked about your practice and, knowing that the most important person to assess your practice is you, I'll share a few thoughts that hopefully will be helpful. First of all, I love your descriptions and your self-observations. In those ways you are doing a great job! Good for you. Meditation is in watching the arisings, of course - and some of the arisings are of ego, some are noticing vast emptiness, some are noticing physical sensations, some are watching intellect wanting to analyze, and everything else!. So - here is what I would offer

that may be your next step in your practice. Experience the essential purity in all that arises - the physical sensation of feeling your breath, your breath, the thought, the ego, the vast space, self and no-self, bliss, and even the pure empty essence of your cleverness. Effortlessly, rest in the purity of all that is as all stirs and arises and then dissolves away as manifestation of purity.

So have fun!! Keep writing. So many blessings to you,

*"Contemplative prayer, rightly understood is the normal development of grace...it is the opening of mind and heart -- our whole being-- to God beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Moved by God's preeminent grace, we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing-- closer than consciousness itself. Contemplative prayer is a process of interior transformation, a relationship initiated by God and leading, if we consent, to divine union.*

*It is as if God planted a great big kiss in the middle of our spirit and all the wounds, doubts, and guilt feelings were all healed at the same moment. The experience of being loved by the Ultimate Mystery banishes every fear."*

---- Father Thomas Keating

**From W.W.:** I want to thank you for the Brain article by Dr. Amen in the (April) issue. It confirms what I heard on the radio 2 months ago on "The People's Pharmacy". Prozac and Effexor are related to violent acts. I was placed on Effexor three weeks prior to being involved in the tragedy for which I am now in prison. I was never given a mental evaluation, although I was charged with two counts of capital murder. The Effexor issue was not known then and never came up except during the initial investigation. My sister still has the prescription bottle to this day. She showed it to the investigating officers and told them I had been very depressed and suicidal. Although I was a...*(his profession)* and enjoyed much success, I was prone to manic/depressive episodes for many years. After a breakup with my girlfriend/bride-to-be, I was so depressed that I could not prepare for *(a work obligation)* where I usually collected

thousands of dollars. I went to my family doctor and he gave me a prescription for Effexor. The beginning of the end.

I am curious if there are other people in the ADC with this same experience. I would be very grateful to receive any material that you can provide about Effexor. Any advice would be welcome. Thanks.

*Dear W,*

I appreciate your sharing so much of your life and know you have been through a lot. I'm also glad that the piece in *Dharm a Friends* from Dr. Amen's web site might have been helpful to you. Unfortunately, what is known now about antidepressants and their dangers were just not known when so many of these newer medications were coming out a few years ago. I know a number of people in exactly the same situation that you are in where their actions were very likely at least partly or wholly a result of a medication that greatly diminished impulse control or exacerbated their anger. Now it is known that certain kinds of psychiatric illnesses, most particularly Bi-Polar I, should not be treated with antidepressants from certain medication families. Unfortunately, even though this is well known in psychiatric medicine, I am very afraid that it still has very little influence in the courts. When and if medication was wrongly prescribed, it still does not seem to matter to the legal system. This is tragic for so many. I am so sorry that it happened to you. It is conceivable that if a lawyer had the latest medical information, they might be able to present an appeal depending upon where you are with your appeals process, but unfortunately, it would sure take a lot to convince a judge or jury that it should change your sentence. People on the whole understand so little about medications and about how the brain is affected by them. But it sure does not hurt to at least ask a lawyer about your situation relative to this. It may be that there was an error worthy of appeal in that they did not do a mental evaluation when you had a history of manic-depression and now they can very likely state that you were given a wrong medication for your illness. Let me know if you find anything out. I'm pulling for you and hope

there is a ray of light in this for you.

So many blessings to you,

*The Buddha was asked: "To what extent can a person be a speaker of the way?"*

*He answered: "If a person teaches the way in order to transcend the tyranny of material things and to teach how to transcend feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness – teaching non-attachment with regard to these – then that person can be called a speaker of the way. If he is himself trying to transcend the pull of the material world and to feel nonattachment toward it, then it is fitting to say he is living in accordance with the way. If he is liberated by this transcendence and non-attachment, then you can say he has found nirvana here and now."  
-Samyutta Nikaya*

From "*Buddha Speaks*," edited by Anne Bancroft, 2000.

**From TJW::** Dear Anna, First allow me to say your February 2005 issue #97 of *Dharma Friends* I thoroughly enjoyed. And of all the articles the letter from **A.H.** really touched my heart. I am currently incarcerated myself but will be released from 26 years of incarceration this year on 7/14th or 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Please Print for A.H.:**

A.H. My name is T.W., soon to be released in July 2005. My Buddhist name is Kwan BI. I am a member of the Gateless Gate Zen Center and have taken the first five precepts and vows in the Korean Style of Zen after the teachings of Zen master Seung Sahn.

I will gladly mail you a copy of the precept ceremony and taking the vows are easy. Putting them into practice and application in life must be in sincerity.

I am yours in the Dharma should you choose to join me you can reach me through this address as follows. Buddhism is a path of greatness. Being gay means happiness. Being a homosexual is merely a word. In the words of Master Seung Sahn, "Good" and "evil" have no

self nature. "Holy" and unholy" are empty words. Before the door is the Land of Light and sound. Spring comes; and the grass grows by itself."  
Namaste, Kwan BI

*and he offers -*

Suffering + Attachment X Desire

E = MC2

"If you want to make your karma clear, then from moment to moment keep a correct situation, correct relationship to your situation, and correct function. In that way you can change your karma.

When your center is not strong, outside conditions and outside situations will always control you. That is simply your karma controlling you...

Zen Master Seung Sahn

*They are happy indeed who own nothing at all; those with highest knowledge own nothing at all. see how people who own things are afflicted, bound to others by their obligations.* ---Udana 2.6

**From G.C.:** I've been trying to survive through all this chaos that been going on. I have got 2 ½ years left on my sentence. Is eggs a meat product or not?

I've hear that the Pope died. Have they appointed a new Pope Yet? If so who is it? Knowledge come easily. Knowledge come from the head. Wisdom come from the heart. And understanding come from the communication of both. With time we all should gather some form of understanding with ourselves as well as our surrounding whether it be a person or thing. Everybody see what you appear to be, but only few can see what you really are. The strength of the effort is the measure of the results.

"We clasp the hands of those who go before us,

and the hands of those who come after us;

we enter the little circle of each other's arms,

and the larger circle of lovers  
whose hands are joined in a dance,  
and the larger circle of all creatures,  
passing in and out of life,  
who move also in a dance,  
to a music so subtle and vast  
that no one hears it except in fragments."

From Wendell Berry, "**Healing**"

**From WC:** I have wanted to write you for some time now, but till now have always procrastinated. I have a question concerning the relationship of the ego to the process of developing a spiritual self. I hope you might find some time in your busy schedule to answer. First however, let me thank you for all the issues of *Dharm a Friends* that you have sent. I enjoy reading them and look forward to each issue.

As background information to my question, let me tell you a little about myself. I am on death row for killing my ex-girlfriend. In 1978, I had the experience of a girlfriend breaking up with me. I disintegrated emotionally and subsequently killed that girlfriend. I was studying at the University of .... I did a year and a half of jail time and was released. I spent 2 months in a psychiatric hospital. I was diagnosed as having a severe borderline personality disorder. I came back to the USA and finished my studies in philosophy and intellectual history at ... University in .. In 1980 I sought help from a psychotherapist at the ...Psychoanalytic Institute. After 6 sessions, the therapist recommended that I voluntarily commit myself to a psychiatric hospital in Maryland that treated severe borderlines. This therapist said I could not be successfully treated in the outpatient setting. He also said that he feared I would decompensate under the stress of a future break-up with a woman and would kill again. I was afraid of going back into a hospital and as a result stopped seeing that therapist. My family doctor

recommended a psychiatrist whose primary focus was on medicating. I saw this psychiatrist for 3 years then stopped. In the meantime, I graduated from graduate school and law school, got married, then divorced, lived in New York City and then in (...a southern state) During all these years I had relationships with women which were unstable. In 1990, I finally began reading the literature on the borderline personality disorder (Millon, Gunderson, Kernberg, Geldsfern et al) and read a book by James Masterson, MD, which seemed to describe people whose symptoms were identical to mine (abandonment depression, moodiness, infantile defense mechanisms, unstable sense of self, etc). In the mid 90's, I went through a relationship where I actually considered murdering the woman who was on the verge of leaving me. It didn't happen though. Then, in 96-97 I began an intense affair with a woman from South America. It was very tempestuous and she finally left me in June of 1997. One month later, after a period of intense depression and decompensation, I murdered her. Three months later I was caught and in 2001 was convicted and sentenced to death.

My question is about the psychological self, or more specifically, the ego. As a psychotherapist, you are knowledgeable of the borderline disorder. In the literature I've read, the general consensus seems to be that borderline patients don't develop integrated egos. The borderline's sense of self is characterized by marked instability, unlike the sense of self held by someone who is merely suffering from neurosis. I'm sure you're familiar with the borderline psychopathology. Most of the clinicians I've read say the borderline is difficult to treat because of the specific deficits in ego functioning. The borderline ego is infantile, unstable, labile and given to primitive defense mechanisms. The mental health experts who examined me in 2000-2001 all testified that I had this disorder and the dependent personality disorder.

Now I come to the crux of my problem. Given that I have an unintegrated, unstable ego, one that is resistant to even the best of psychodynamic therapy, how can I, as a prisoner with no access to psychotherapeutic help, ever manage to develop a healthy functioning ego

which is (and here I make an assumption which might be unfounded) a prerequisite to having a spiritual self? In issue #81, you talked about ego and the spiritual self, but you seemed to refer to healthy, functioning ego. What happens with the borderline personality's unstable ego? It can't even function like a normal healthy ego; so can it ever mature into a spiritual self? Do borderlines have a spiritual self? Can a borderline such as myself, ever hope to undertake a spiritual journey when I have such a hard time dealing with my daily ego functioning? I retreat into fantasies, I rationalize a lot ("I don't want to meditate because I'm not a Buddhist, just a fellow traveler"), I live in the world of a borderline (moodiness, self-deprecation, etc) – how can I ever reach the level of healthy ego functioning? I've always been interested intellectually in Buddhism — its history, the emergence of so many variants of the original core teachings, etc) but I fear my intellectualism is just another retreat from the reality of having to confront the task of dealing with my self.

I hope that your experience as a psychotherapist and a Buddhist will enable you to have some insight into my dilemma. I'm not spiritual. I'm an atheist. But I have found something inside me that resonates with the Buddhist message. I would be grateful if you could respond to my concerns in this letter.

Again, many thanks for all the issues of *Dharma Friends*.



*Dear W,*

Thanks so much for your letter and for being so kind as to share so much of your story. You have gone through so much and I applaud you for trying to find your deeper answers. Your questions are good ones and I hope that I did not present some of my thoughts in ways that might have been discouraging to you. So let me try to do a better job and share a few more thoughts.

First of all, as a Buddhist, I believe that every one is in essence the one pure source. There is no source or inner self nature that must be created but it is there within us always. Unlike a God or spirituality where some entity is sought and other than self, it is only our own misperception that separates us from the awareness of our true nature. We all tend to cover over this true inner Self with layers of concretized ideas of what is, including ideas of who we are as conceptualized by that which we are calling ego self. So here - I am lumping ideas of self into the self-concept of ego, which is a bit different than a truly clinical definition of ego. Now, hopefully cleaning up some things I may not have said clearly enough in the article you read, I think that when people have had an easier flow from healthy early infant neurological and physiological development, a healthy physical and emotional childhood, a healthy self image, and enough love and encouragement to find confidence and success in young adulthood, and then perhaps with some past karmic propensity, these (very rare) individuals will probably have a pretty healthy psychological ego-self. As they progress through the ego's developmental tasks, they MIGHT move naturally on to gradually opening to spiritual development for healthy growth. Very few people make this progression and for most, much of their motivation is due to pain and suffering. But with or without the blessings of a perfect life, and with or without the benefit of a strong and healthy ego, the task is still the same for all of us. It is to lift the obscurations to one's direct experience of their deepest essence. And this is possible for everyone and anyone - but is still quite rare because it is too scary for most folks to let go of their ideas of reality and self whatever they may be. The main things to be extra aware of when you know that

you have been given a diagnosis that indicates your ego structure may be a bit fragile, is to know how you might be vulnerable when your conventional view of reality might lift. A solid sense of self is a helpful foundation but there is wisdom in the task that we each receive and benefits for us on our path. If you meditate, you will notice what thoughts come as you enter more subtle states of reality. Your thoughts may become grandiose, you might feel anxiety, old pain may come back, you might feel fear of losing your 'self', or other feelings. Everyone has some of all of that to different degrees. Your self awareness is your greatest gift and you can offer yourself kindness and supportive words. If you go slowly and take some time to do meditation every day, to watch what arises, and then to gently reassure and support yourself with love, then little by little all that is in the realm of the intellect and the realm of ego will lift. You will be healing all that contributed to some of the suffering you have carried with you in your life, but also you will be growing spiritually and realizing that you are more than all of that or even any of that.

So yes, you can heal and mature into a spiritual self and a self that has a lot to offer to others. Please keep trying but remember that the most important word is kindness.

I will be happy to hear from you any time so feel free to write and let me know how you do. So many blessings to you,



*It is often thought that the Buddha's doctrine teaches us that suffering will disappear if one has meditated long enough, or if one sees everything differently. It is not that at all. Suffering isn't going to go away; the one who suffers is going to go away.*

-Ayya Khema, "When the Iron Eagle Flies"

**From WPA:** I just got my (April) Dharma Friends Newsletter tonight and I thought I'd write and give my opinion on the anger issue you talked about. Being in prison with convictions for murder and aggravated armed robbery should qualify me as an expert on anger issues, to say the least. I spent years as an angry teen, and I'm not just talking about normal anger, but an evil deadly anger that could appear instantly, without any motivation or reason at all. Once I recognized the anger existed and wasn't "normal", I made every effort to learn to control this anger and I have awesome self discipline and that worked real well for years. By "worked" I'm not saying I wasn't angry but that I refused to act out on it and still to this day have not acted out on it. But, there came a time in my meditations (about 5 years ago) that I kept thinking on what everyone had preached to me my whole life, "That it's okay to be angry, but it's not okay to act out on it." As I meditated on this over time I realized that bridled anger is like a bridled stallion, and at some time, sooner or later, this stallion, that is anger, will either grow too strong and break away, or quit fearing the bit that restrains him, or could jerk the reins clean out of your hands and reek havoc before you can grab the reins back up, etc. . . The lesson I finally learned is that the lifelong advice was wrong. It's not okay to be angry and it's also not okay to act out on it if you are angry too. So, how to do away with anger. Give away the horse. So yea, life's slower cause I'm walking now, but walking is far easier than a recalcitrant horse to be sure. When someone comes up to you with a piece of doggy doo in his hand, and he tries to give it to you, you wouldn't accept it, you'd let him keep it, and you'd refuse this "gift" and it would still belong to him. Do this with anger too. When someone comes to you with anger, you can take their anger and make it yours, or you can refuse and let him keep it for himself. And you can refuse your own anger as well. Meditation is solely responsible for doing entirely away with my anger. Was it easy? No. Diligent practice and a mind set that truly

believes that being angry, even when you control it, is not, not, not okay. So, after all this, my anger went from a bridled wild stallion to a harnessed baby duck! (How do you like the visuals on that one? :) )

Thanks for your time and I do sooo enjoy your newsletter.

### CHECK OUT NEIL'S INFO!

From Neil at Naljor Creations: Dharma Teaching Altar Cards for Prisoners – We have three precious dharma teachings presented on beautiful altar-size cards for easy study and inspiration. Teachings include: Eight Verses for Training the Mind, The Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path, and The Four Immeasurables. The cards are free. Mail your request with three first class stamps for mailing if possible. We also offer an excellent 28-page Resource Directory for Prisoners. Mail your request with four first class stamps.

*Naljor Prison Dharma Service,*  
PO Box 7417  
Boulder Co 80306-7417

**Subscription info:** 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: 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 benefitting 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.**

### BOOKS

Let folks know about our two books by me (anna) that support our **Dharma Friends** newsletter

1. **Dharma Friends: No One Abandoned, No One Forgotten, No One Discarded**
2. **Just As The Breeze Blows Through Moonlight**

Each book is softcover, costs \$23 and there is a \$4 mailing charge. Write to us at **Dharma Friends, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708** if you or someone you know would like to order one.

And one of our **Dharma Friends, Damien Echols**, has a new book just being released: **Almost Home: My**

**Life Story.** It can be ordered on line from Amazon (\$15.95) or you can send the amount plus postage (total \$20.00) to our **Dharma Friends** address - **PO Box 7708, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708** - and I will make sure a copy comes to you. **Please note if it must come directly from a bookstore.**

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My grandson is touring China and spent a week at the Shao Lin monastery learning Kung Fu. This is his instructor doing an impressive pose as they tour nearby Buddha statues and caves.





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*To disregard oneself, this is the best dharma. This is the best service to Buddha's religion. Practicing meditation for life is the best gift to those sentient beings without protection.*

**-"Hundred Thousand Songs: Selections From Milarepa, Poet-Saint of Tibet"**