

Dharma Friends

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

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The DHAMMAPADA
The teachings of the Buddha



Verse 17: Anger

Spoken to Rohini in the Nyagrodha Park:

1. Abandon anger, abandon pride! Leave all obstacles far behind. Unattracted to what has name and form, you will not sink into sorrow.
2. Whoever holds his rising anger in check, as a driver controls his chariot, this is the one I call Charioteer – the others only grasp at the reins.

Spoken to the Upasaka Uttara in the Bamboo Grove:

3. Overcome anger with good nature; overcome evil with goodness, overcome greed with giving, and overcome lies with the truth.
4. Speak the truth; control your temper; give what you can when asked. By these three virtuous actions, you draw near to the gods.

Spoken in Saketa concerning the brahmin couple.

5. The powerful Munis harm no one; they control themselves always. They travel to the land of no rebirth where they are free from sorrow.

Spoken on Vulture Peak:

6. Awake and mindful day and night and always learning, those who strive to pass from sorrow gradually destroy their impurities.

Spoken to the Upasaka Atula:

7. Listen, Atula, here is a bit of ancient wisdom: They blame you for being silent; they blame you for talking too much. They blame you for watching what you say. No one in the world can go unblamed.
8. There never has been, nor will there ever be, nor does there now exist, a person who is always blamed or always praised.
9. But the one who is daily praised by the wise, the one who is blameless, is the one with ethics and integrity, the one with fine knowledge.
10. He is like a coin of the purest gold – who is fine enough to fault him? Even the gods sing his praises; even Brahma applauds him.

Spoken in the Bamboo Grove:

11. Gain mastery over your body; guard yourself from acting angrily. Keep yourself from sinful action; use your body well.
12. Gain mastery over your speech; guard yourself from speaking angrily. Keep yourself from speaking wrongly; use your speech well.
13. Gain mastery over your mind; guard yourself from angry thoughts. Keep your mind from mental baseness; use your mind well.
14. The steadfast are controlled in body and controlled in speech; the steadfast are controlled in

mind. This is perfect mastery.

Some thoughts about this *Dhammapada* verse:

A story of anger seems to be at the center of so many lives of despair. Often, with choices barely recognized, an instantaneous decision was made to act on anger and lives were brought to a halt. For all of us, simmering pain and anger may break through our defenses and reveal what has been carefully guarded for years. A moment of anger may undo lives of careful planning or of great hopes. An angry word or action may bring irreparable pain to those we love. Perhaps for many, the emotion of anger is the biggest challenge in their life. That is what I hear and what I read in so many of your letters almost every day.

And yet, teachers say to embrace the unfolding of every moment as wisdom perfection. We are asked to find transcendent joy in all of life, even in horrific events. Pretty tough stuff to do. This is when we see again that we can only be where we are in our capacity to follow great teachings and that we must always feel forgiving and compassionate towards ourselves. Then, little by little, we can grow into our ability to live at a level of more joy and equanimity, but we must begin by honoring how hard it is to be human. We can start by appreciating our anger as serving that self that struggles just to survive. If it weren't for our anger, we might not have been able to handle our life challenges. The level of our anger might well be proportional to what we had to conquer, and should we not had it to draw on, perhaps we would have suffered even more greatly.

During the past few months, we have been exploring the *Dhammapada* verses with a multi-dimensional model that tries to find a balance in practicing the teachings at the level of our honest competence while listening to more advanced teachings, knowing that seeds are being planted in our consciousness that we cannot yet live. Those seeds will gradually grow to expression as we strengthen our foundation. But if we try to tackle those tasks too far out of our reach and before they are effortless for us, we may actually strengthen an ego perception of reality rather than grow beyond it. If we feel like we "should" follow the teaching in order to be spiritual, or if we think it would fulfill some ideal image of our self, build our reputation or standing, then it is ego that is our motivation and our efforts will make our idea of self more solid. We would strengthen a constricted self rather than expand our perception into one of vast wisdom Self that holds All That Is in oneness. To wish to benefit all beings with great wisdom and compassion necessitates that we grow beyond the limited view of ego. Each of our *Dhammapada* verses helps us to recognize ego's attachments that hold us back from developing that capacity.



But judging ego or trying to annihilate ego does not help either. Ego is not bad. We have many manifestations of ego in a normal and healthy emotional/psychological repertoire. Ego is necessary for our survival and ego ensures that we can handle life tasks in order to live a long life. One of those natural responses to challenges that we must learn to utilize for survival is anger. Anger is self-serving. When our life is threatened directly or indirectly, anger motivates us to get what we need. When historically there were many competing for limited resources in a primitive tribal culture, we needed a surge of aggressive adrenaline to make sure no one took our food. We might have needed to fight to make sure that no one stole our

home, wife or child. When threatened in any way, anger propelled us into action. The motivation behind anger is fear of loss or threat to US. If our natural motivation was compassion, depending on the kindness of others to make sure we survived, it might be that we could have all looked out for each other. There is some evidence that in some early peoples, this was actually the case. It certainly is true of parents for their children. But even today, we see that there are many cases where anger is stronger than compassion and people suffer at the hands of others. Anger seems so deeply a part of our human nature that it must have served our survival needs in a way that was crucial. If we develop a healthy ego structure, in the same way as we want to develop a healthy body, we can gradually open beyond the developmentally primitive ideas of who we are to an expanded view of our self as a spiritual Self. This happens naturally but we only grow beyond ego as we are ready. First we must do our psychological work so that ego can relax its grip on our identity as all important. Anger is an emotion that is the antithesis of letting go into compassion because compassion makes others more important than us.

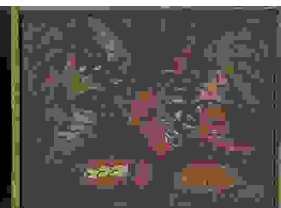
We grow beyond all of our more primitive instincts slowly if given a nurturing environment, but it also takes a lot of self-awareness and motivation to grow beyond the primitive instinct of anger because it is so powerful. As we mature, gradually we learn to have faith in our physical and psychological survival and with this faith, our response to perceived threats to self becomes less intense. We can hold a little larger picture of who we are. Our heart seems to open naturally as we relax our view of self. There is a little more room to hold others' needs as important to us too. Compassion arises when we focus on the needs of others. This is still a psychological growth step, but at some point we move from a self serving life to living life compassionately for others. We learn to practice impartiality where we hold all others in love and compassion equally. I think that this is when we truly enter a spiritual path.



This **Dhammapada** verse, *Anger*, lets us start to loosen the grip on self by noticing anger arising when ego shouts out, “ME! I NEED TO PROTECT ME FIRST!” These tasks asked of us in the **Dhammapada** may be early steps on a spiritual path, but for most of us, they are the most that we can manage in a lifetime. When we talk about where we are able to apply and live the teachings effortlessly, few can handle those given to us in this verse.

“Overcome anger with good nature; overcome evil with goodness, overcome greed with giving, and overcome lies with the truth.”

Speak the truth; control your temper; give what you can when asked. By these three virtuous actions, you draw near to the gods.”



Easy? I think we can comfortably add to these lines the frequently taught exhortation to always practice kindness towards others and to not say or do anything that would cause harm. It is impossible to not cause harm to others when anger is our root motivation. It is impossible to practice kindness when we feel anger. If we begin right here in these very basic teachings and work at this level, we are building a foundation for all of the higher teachings that build on the capacity to live a life of compassion. If we are still surging with anger and we try to do those higher practices that we might have received but we are not yet ready to live, then we

are building on an ego structure that denies who and where we really are. Anger is a wonderful place to start because it is a sure attention getter and hard to miss. The teachings say to “overcome” anger, and to do an action that is other than one motivated by anger, but what if anger is seething within us?

My experience as a psychotherapist is that we must pay at least some attention to anger at the psychological level before it is possible to “overcome” anger in our spiritual life. We do not want to act from anger nor take a teaching such as this one which asks us to practice kindness toward others and suppress our anger in a way that means we are being cruel to ourselves. Suppressed anger hurts us and that anger will always surface later. If anger is a big deal in our lives, we probably have to bring it into our awareness and gradually defuse it and reframe it before we can let it go. A gradually healing and even sacred process can happen by letting old anger come into our awareness. It is good to set aside quiet time for this healing and to find methods that stir those angry memories and bring them safely to the surface. Art, writing, poetry, talking to one we trust, music, meditation, remembering our dreams, all tap into those parts of our psyche that is not always accessible but holds our old pain locked away. It may be a bit scary sometimes when great traumas come back to us, but the most important thing to do is to not judge ourselves. We can love ourselves in whatever arises, just as we would love a tiny child no matter what they did or what happened to them. We can learn to just sit with this old anger and stay with the memory until the energy around it dissipates somewhat. We can try to feel it in our body, experience our emotions, watch our thoughts, and gradually we will begin to naturally release it. We can ask ourselves where in our body we are holding on to the anger and relax those muscles. When relaxing, we can focus on our emotional heart as though those old feelings can begin to flow up into awareness and then out from us. Let every breath breathe out the old pain. If it helps to write out a story or poem of resolution, to do a work of art that heals the pain, to write a song, or to have a fantasy, all are wonderful ways of release. The same memory may surface again and again and again but don’t worry and don’t rush. Little by little, if we are gentle with ourselves and practice letting go a little more each time, the anger will leave us. In that space where we held our anger, there will then be room for and a readiness for compassion because awareness and acceptance of our pain will allow us to truly understand those who have had similar pain and anger. When we are afraid of our own emotional pain, our anger, we push away those who remind us of it. We are likely to get angry at or to be judgmental of anyone who stirs up our own pain so we can’t feel kindness towards them. After we find resolution and release of our own pain, we can offer healing to those who have hidden that same pain within them. This is the psychological level of our work. When we have done enough of this healing, our heart can hold a lot more of the suffering of others and it is not scary to us any more. Then we can begin to do the spiritual work.



Now, with a heart that knows how to let go, we read a verse that says, “*Overcome anger with good nature; overcome evil with goodness, overcome greed with giving, and overcome lies with the truth.*” Here is a typical story for many of us. We practice meditation every day and we may be sitting blissfully in our meditation session when someone nearby starts talking loudly. Anger arises and we might want to yell, “Quiet! I’m sitting in blissful and compassionate meditation here!” Well, even to us novices, we know that that is a disconnect. Our task is to notice when anger arises. It is not to judge or to suppress the anger, but to recognize whatever arises, including anger. But, even something this obvious is often missed and we might spend the rest of our meditation time obsessing about how inconsiderate some people are and rehearsing what we will say to that obnoxious person when we finish our meditation session. Of course, in this scenario, ego is strengthening its position of being all-important and that our own ego needs come first. We can handle the situation in a more beneficial way. If we recognize that everything that arises is an opportunity for spiritual awareness and is a teaching on our path, we see ego just as it begins its drama. We watch his or her ranting and raving, listen to the thoughts, maybe even see a little connection between ego’s present angry drama and a multitude of times in childhood when ego’s needs were not respected. Then, in our meditative awareness, we say “AHHHH...” and breathe it all out. In the next moment, we again watch what arises. It may be that that in-breath is barely noticeable because there are so many angry thoughts still swirling in our brain. Again, we notice, and again, we breathe out with “Ahhhh...” and at every level, we let it all go.



We continue our meditation on overcoming anger when we get up off of our meditation cushion. While meditating, we have built a strong foundation for the recognition of anger in our daily life and we can take those tools with us. For example, we may meet someone in the hall and they do something disrespectful. Maybe they say something insulting. Because of our meditative tools of awareness, when angry feelings jump up into our throat and some steam comes out of our ears, the inner meditator is always watching. He or she simply notes - “anger”- just like in our meditation. We don’t react automatically by responding with anger. We just notice, breathe out, and let go. Now, as the **Dhammapada** verse says to *overcome anger*, we have that new option that we may not have had before. We have a choice about our action. “*Overcome anger with good nature; overcome evil with goodness, overcome greed with giving, and overcome lies*

with the truth.” Instead of acting from anger, we can let go of it and respond to our challenger with good nature or kindness. We know his heart hurts and that he is in pain, because we know how that feels too. We breathe out old anger and what naturally arises in our heart is compassion. From that place of compassion, we can truthfully say something helpful or give him a smile. We make a loving connection to our challenger and he might feel that and may heal a little bit.

Now - ego may be muttering in the background as you read this! Ego may be very suspicious of this way of relating to others and the world. Ego may still want to live by those old rules that s/he believed kept him or her safe. Even though you may not be 100% there yet and compassionate responses may not yet arise naturally, keep trying while you also notice ego’s resistance. When you have quiet time to write, draw, or think things out, ask ego what the fear is. Why does ego not want to act kindly towards the guy who was so disrespectful to you in the hall? What is the old wound that makes such a response feel dangerous? We will probably remember one or even many traumatic stories as a

little kid that gave us every right to feel threatened and afraid. Back then, it is likely that we had far fewer options and unless someone was there to support us through the trauma, there was no way we would have had the skill to react compassionately to an attacker. Just rest gently and watch the old memories come back. Love that part of you that got so hurt – and then let all of that go too.

As we learn to work with anger in this healing way, letting go of other emotions and attachments becomes easier too. Remember that all attachments, whether they feel wonderful or horrible, are held because ego's perception is that it will keep us safe - even when such an attachment may become an addiction that is gradually destroying us. All of our spiritual teachings are allowing us to let loose our grip on attachments and to relax our fears.

With this awareness of anger as ego's self serving tool, now it can be transformed into a Self-serving tool as well. Anger arises in a flash as dynamic intensity. It is that very intensity that can jolt us into AWARENESS and can become a weapon on our spiritual journey to cut through those layers of obscurations to experience the true nature of all that is. Those obscurations which were protecting ego can lift to librate anger's quality of ferocity to become the guardian of our gradually awakening consciousness. That same ferocity that can speak out in blazing compassion for all who suffer and need an advocate in the world. And it is that same capacity to "overcome" anger that begins our journey towards wisdom. We can "let go" when we concretize and solidify self in drama. We can just breathe out and see the Emptiness inherent in all we had clutched so dearly. We can open to enlightenment mind. As we practice overcoming anger with release and then practice compassionate action, we can develop our capacity to eventually watch all that arises without judgement and to rest effortlessly in an equanimity that offers love and peace to all beings.



A Meditation

One of the best foundations for meditation is ever-increasing self awareness so that we minimize surprises. Often we go through life in a fog and when things arise and catch our attention, we react without thought and then return to the fog. Sometimes we are totally blind to all that transpires and our reaction is inappropriate or out of proportion to the situation that is happening around us. This is particularly true with anger because it can wear so many disguises. We may react quite strongly to a very innocent event and not even know that others are left whirling, wondering what just

happened. Or, our anger may be buried in sarcasm, righteous scolding, intellectual lecturing, body language, or even a tone of voice that is cold when our words are kind. This keeps those around us distant from us, feeling disconnected, and maybe even frightened of us. Awareness of what stirs our anger and how it is expressed is key in all of our relationships, but most of all, it is a key to how we relate to life. Start watching to see how anger is stirred up in you, what seems to provoke it, and how you express it. Take it very seriously for awhile and take 100% responsibility for all the anger that arises. In this exercise, which I suggest you do it for the rest of your life, whenever anger arises consider that you are solely responsible for what has happened and you reacted with anger because you believe it is the best way to cope with that life event. When you spot such a drama, go in search for something similar that may have happened to you when you were truly helpless to handle it. That part of you may be 2 years old, or ten years old. Back then, some overwhelming event or a series of events occurred and you were in so much distress that you could not resolve the situation. That old event brought an adrenaline response that is still held within you as anger. When a similar situation happens today, that original anger comes quickly to the surface, either ready to explode or in its old, safe disguise. Usually the anger does not totally fit today's situations, but if we are in enough denial, we can bend things in our perception to make the anger justifiable. This always means that the people around us must bear the brunt of our anger as though they really are responsible for our pain, and this causes them suffering. This is not kind to us either because that anger within takes a heavy toll. It is a very important task to get that anger up into our conscious awareness so that we can let it go. Our constant meditation can be on cleansing our anger, and this will help in cleansing all the other obstacles that arise in our growth. It will benefit our health, our psyche, our relationships, and will allow us to open on our spiritual path.

An analytical/psychological/spiritual Letting Go and Healing Meditation

Step #1 - Notice when you feel anger in everyday situations and begin to keep a notebook or a list of those events.

Step #2 - Find the Patterns - Before you start your meditation or during another quiet time in your day, read through the list you are accumulating. Notice if there are patterns to your angry responses. An example might be that whenever anyone disappoints you by saying they will do something and then they don't, you feel angry. You might spend days being angry at them for not being responsible. Let yourself ponder the patterns that you might find in similar incidents. You might label the patterns, like: "Abandonment", "Betrayal", etc..

Step #3 - Let the Memories Come Back - In continuing our example, you might remember being a little boy sitting on the steps with your overnight bag packed, waiting for Dad to come pick you up for your weekend visitation with him. You waited and waited but he never came. You remember that most times when he said he was coming, he would never show up. You knew that if you told your Mom how angry and disappointed you were, she would get mad and start yelling about what a horrible person your dad was and that made you feel worse. So, you said nothing. That anger is still buried inside and every time someone leaves you abandoned and breaks their promise to you, the anger towards dad comes flooding in. Write all of that down and let those memories come back.

Step #4 - Feel the Memories Fully. Rest in the memories. Write or draw them, or find some way to go through those old stories that let you feel the anger that you could not allow yourself to feel when

you were young and vulnerable. Express that anger in written words, or if you can, speak the anger out loud with some aggression. Cry, if tears are there. Picture yourself as the child who was hurt and soothe him with the words that you wish someone would have said to you when you needed support and guidance in such a difficult time.

Step #5 - **Breathe the Pain Out.** At the end of each time of contemplation/meditation on this old pain, breathe gently with the idea that you are breathing into the pain and carrying it up and out of you with your breath. You are releasing the old pain and cleansing the wound. One session does not mean you will never feel it again, but each session will release a little bit more. Breathing out with awareness then becomes a very good tool in our lives whenever we feel pain from the past or in the present, when we need to release a difficult experience. We learn to breathe until we find balance and equanimity again. At the same time, we truly are releasing all that we have grasped hold of into the vastness of great compassion. In this way, there is transformation of anger and we transform our ordinary view into wisdom view. We become compassionate healing in action.

Step #6 - We **Rest Effortlessly** without attachment and without fear in equanimity. We rest in the wisdom of our essential awareness.



A FABULOUS OPPORTUNITY FROM TRICYCLE
CHANGE YOUR MIND DAY MEDITATION KIT

On June 4, 2005, Tricycle Foundation will hold Change Your Mind Day throughout the country. It is a free afternoon of meditation instruction. There is also a Change Your Mind Day meditation kit that allows inmates to hold a Change Your Mind Day inside prison, either alone or in groups. This kit contains a series of guided meditations by prominent meditation teachers, yoga instructions, supplemental and suggested readings, an audiocassette recording of the meditation instructions and an audiocassette of contemplative music. In addition, when requested, we include incense, Tibetan bells, and instructions for making a meditation cushion.

The beautifully designed kit, offered free to inmates and prison chaplains, is a resource that can be used all year long, either by itself or in conjunction with a meditation program already in place. The goal of the meditations is to better understand one's mind, to cultivate insight and peace, and to become calmer and more focused. If you would like to organize a Change Your Mind Day event in your facility, or if you would simply like to receive a kit, please fill out the enclosed form and send it to Tricycle and note on the envelope that it is for the Change Your Mind Day meditation kit. The kit will be mailed to you in the beginning of May, so please send for your kit right away. If there are items in the kit that you cannot receive as an individual, please talk to your chaplain for permission to receive the items or to see if the kit can be sent to him or to her so that everyone in your prison can benefit by it. Make sure your mail room supervisor knows that it is coming so that there will be no problems with delivery.

May all beings be well and happy. *The Tricycle Foundation Staff*

Yes, I would like to receive a free Tricycle **Change your Mind Day meditation kit**.

Please send me _____ kit(s)

Include _____ do not include _____ Tibetan bells.

Include _____ do not include _____ incense.

Include _____ do not include _____ instructions for making a meditation cushion.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

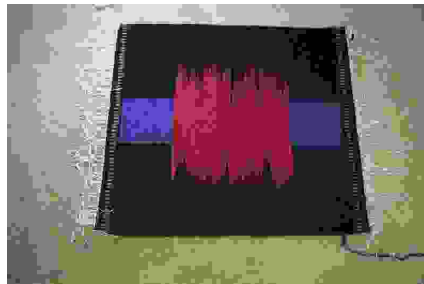
Please send the kit in care of _____ along with a letter stating the kit's contents and requesting permission to receive it.

MAIL TO: Tricycle - meditation kit; 92 Vandam ST. FL3, New York, NY. 100213-1174

FROM YOUR LETTERS



Dear Readers: In our commentary, we have been exploring anger from a psychological and spiritual perspective. Here are two offerings from Daniel Amen, MD, from his online columns about healing the brain. In these articles, we are looking at anger as it is affected by our physiology - brain injury, heredity, and our biochemistry. Sometimes it is hard to separate what is the result of our physical self or our psychological self but in either case, what we expose our brain to can make the emotional responses in our life better or worse. If we have a brain dysfunction that makes us more sensitive to stress, anger is a very frequent response when our capacity to cope crashes. Many times we do not realize the power of the many substances which hurt our brain and body and their long term effects. Damaging and stressful influences are all around us, and even sometimes we take what we think will help in the form of medications, and it compromises our functioning even more. Even if we have a damaged or dysfunctional brain, if we recognize our impairment, we can try to do things to heal and to compensate for our injuries. If we don't recognize our brain dysfunction, we badly misjudge others, events, and our capacities and often cause ourselves and others great harm. I hope that these two articles will be helpful. Do remember that meditation is one of the most effective things we can do to bring balance and healing to our brain, psyche, and body physically and emotionally.



BRAIN IN THE NEWS: The Real Reason Not To Use Drugs

The use of drug and alcohol abuse among teenagers continues to be an alarming problem in our junior high and high schools. In our local community recently a bright 16 year old boy died of a drug overdose. The impact on the school community and his family were obviously devastating.

I will dedicate this week's column to all of the drug education efforts and coordinators around the world. We have just released a new DVD titled, Which Brain Do You Want, which highlights our contribution. You can see a preview of it at www.amenclinic.com.

The Real Reason Not To Use Drugs

One day in the early spring of 1991 I attended a lecture at the hospital where I worked on brain SPECT imaging, a type of scan that looks at how the brain functions. It was so fascinating! Up to that point psychiatrists had no practical way to look at how the brain works, so most of our diagnoses were made based on patient symptoms and, quite frankly, a lot of educated guessing. SPECT scans showed the underlying physiology of our patients' problems so we could better tailor our treatment approaches to individual patient needs. With the use of the scans we had more success in treating difficult people. It also helped our patients have a better understanding of their problems, which in turn led them to have greater hope and be more willing to follow through with getting help.

The use of SPECT scans with people who had drug and alcohol problems was particularly helpful. Here are five things I have learned about substance abuse from brain SPECT imaging.

1. Alcohol and other drug abuse damages the brain.

From the first scan ordered on a patient with substance abuse problems, I saw very significant brain changes. A healthy scan shows full, even, symmetrical activity. Drug and alcohol abuse tended to cause overall decreased activity in the brain. These brains looked more aged, more shriveled, and more toxic than the brains of people who did not use drugs.

Heroin and heroin like drugs, called opiates, caused severe decreased activity, as did much alcohol. Methamphetamines and cocaine tended to cause what looked like multiple holes or mini-strokes in the brain. Marijuana caused decreased activity in the frontal and temporal lobe areas (areas involved with memory and motivation). All substance abuser brains did not look the same. Some people who have used drugs for a short time had horrible looking brains, while others, who used drugs for longer periods of time, had brains that did not look that bad. There must be genetic factors involved as well.

2. Alcohol and drug abuse disrupts development.

Younger brains are particularly vulnerable to the damaging effects of substance abuse. The brain continues to develop well into the late 20s, especially in the prefrontal cortex (in the front of the brain) responsible for decision-making. This is why a 25 year old usually has better decision-making ability than a 16 year old, and why 25 year olds pay less for auto insurance (better driving judgment). If a teenager or young adult starts using drugs or alcohol they disrupt the brain's natural development. So, if a person starts abusing substances at 16, they often stop maturing. If he or she is still using drugs at 20, likely, even though their chronological age is 20, they may be more emotionally still 16. We often see that young people with substances abuse issues have significant problems with judgment and maturity

from brain damage.

3. Alcohol and drug abuse is often a form of self medication (hot brains and cold brains).

One of the most powerful lessons we have learned from imaging is that many people who abuse substances are really trying to change their own brain chemistry.

Firstly, a word about what SPECT studies actually show us. We basically look for three things: areas of the brain that work well, areas of the brain that work too hard, and areas of the brain that do not work hard enough – good activity, too much or too little.

People with overactive brains, such as those with bipolar or manic-depressive disorder, anxiety disorders, certain forms of depression and obsessive compulsive disorder, tend to abuse substances that calm the brain down, such as marijuana, alcohol, or opiates. People with under-active brains, such as those who have attention deficit disorder, tend to abuse stimulating drugs such as methamphetamine or cocaine. The drugs or alcohol make them feel better, so they continue to use, even though it has many other problems. It is essential to treat the underlying problems in order for them to heal from the substance abuse. Brain injuries are involved in substance abuse in far greater numbers than most people realize.

4. Brain injuries are involved in substance abuse in far greater numbers than most people realize.

Another important lesson learned from imaging is that people who abuse substances have a very high incidence of brain trauma and virtually no one knows it, because most professionals do not look at the brain function in these patients. Brain injuries, especially those to the front part of the brain, decrease judgment and insight, and puts people at greater risk for problems, especially for abusing stimulant drugs. Unfortunately, many people forget that they have had significant brain injuries and do not report them or the professional discounts the injuries not serious enough (without ever looking at the brain).

Our studies have taught us that you can damage the brain, even when you never lose consciousness. The brain is very complicated: you have over 100 billion brain cells housed in a really hard skull. By looking at the brain with SPECT we have seen that even mild trauma can damage the brain. A head injury puts people at greater risk for substance abuse (poorer judgment and impulsivity), while substance abuse itself increases the risk of brain injuries (driving drunk or causing fights when paranoid on cocaine).

5. Brain SPECT studies can be very helpful in substance abuse education.

Showing pictures of brain scans can help people better understand the damage drugs and alcohol do to the brain. There is a significant segment of the community who will be deterred by such education.

Your brain is involved in everything you do. How you think, how you feel, and how you act is controlled by the moment by moment function of your brain. When your brain works right, you work right! When your brain is damaged, you have trouble being your best self.

From my research, it is clear that drug and alcohol abuse damages the brain and damages your ability to be your best self. The real reason not to use drugs is that they impair your ability to be you, the best you that you can be with a healthy brain.

One piece of good news: the brain has abilities to heal itself. Once people stop using drugs the brain may partially repair itself. So, if you are using, stop! The earlier you stop the greater the chance the brain can heal.

BRAIN IN THE NEWS: Red Lake Killings, Prozac, and the Brain

The brain is everywhere there is news about people, even very sad places like Red Lake High School.

No question, 16 year old Jeff Weise, the Red Lake High School shooter, was a troubled boy. And who wouldn't be given his background. He lost both of his parents before the age of 10. His father killed himself in a standoff with police 8 years ago. His mother, who according to Jeff's Internet postings, hit him often, yelled at him and told him his birth had been a mistake, was seriously injured in an alcohol related car crash in 1998. He moved between Red Lake Reservation and the Twin Cities, was in several different schools, held back, raised by relatives, struggled to keep up, teased by others over his appearance, and suffered from severe depression with suicidal ideas and actions. Recently he went to live with his grandmother. Jeff spent a lot of time on the Internet on hate sites, wrote about being the Native Nazi and used the name Todesengel, German for "Angel of Death."

On Monday March 21 Jeff murdered his grandfather, Sgt. Darryl (Dash) Lussier, and his companion Michelle Sigana, and then went to Red Lake High School and shot and killed 7 more people before turning the gun on himself.

One of the questions we should ask ourselves, is about the role antidepressants played in this disaster. According to his grandmother, Shelda Lussier, 54, Jeff saw a mental health professional at Red Lake Hospital on Feb. 21, the same day his prescription was refilled for 60 milligrams a day of Prozac, a raise in the dosage, which he had been taking since last summer. Studies have linked Prozac and similar antidepressants to a greater risk of suicidal thoughts and behavior in kids. In October, the Food and Drug Administration revised the drugs' packaging to warn health professionals that they should closely monitor young patients when an antidepressant is prescribed or the dose is changed.

Weise, in hundreds of postings attributed to him on the Internet over the past year or so, noted that he was on antidepressants, was going through therapy in Thief River Falls and had attempted suicide at least once by cutting his wrists. In a posting in January, Weise also wrote of his regret over not having ended his life and hinted that another attempt could be on the way. Friends of Weise said this week that he had tried to kill himself earlier this year.

What was shocking to the family was that he would kill his grandfather. According to family members he loved his grandfather, and his grandfather loved him. There had never been any serious differences or harsh words between them. They were surprised by all of this, but they were stunned he would shoot his grandfather.

In my practice and brain imaging research we have seen that Prozac and medications like it can make some people worse, even homicidal or suicidal. Eric Harris, one of the Columbine killers, was taking a chemical cousin of Prozac called Luvox, when the massacre occurred. Kip Kinkel, the Springfield, Oregon school shooter in 1998 had been prescribed Prozac before murdering his mother and father and shooting 24 people at Thurston High School. Jason Hoffman was taking Celexa and Effexor, antidepressants similar to Prozac, before he opened fire at Granite Hills High School near San Diego in 2001.

Antidepressants prescribed to the right people can save lives; given to the wrong people they can take lives. In our brain imaging research we have seen people who have left temporal lobe problems or who have a pattern we call the "ring of fire," which is too much overall activity in the brain, often do much worse on these types of medication and do better with anticonvulsants or novel antipsychotics.

Violent tendencies shows a number of different patterns on brain scans and having this information before prescribing medications can be extremely helpful. For example, during Kip Kinkel's trial he had a brain SPECT scan that showed marked decreased left temporal lobe activity and decreased prefrontal cortex activity. Left temporal lobe problems are often associated with dark, awful, evil thoughts and aggression. Low prefrontal cortex activity is associated with impulse control problems. Put these two findings together and a disaster is waiting to happen. From those findings Kinkel would have done better with a temporal lobe medication, such as antiseizure pills. The Prozac may have been involved in worsening his problems.

There is no question in my mind that violence has many factors, as in the case of Jeff Weise, including family issues, social stresses, and brain problems. Brain problems make people vulnerable to violence and one day soon, I pray, we will start looking at brains before we medicate them in the dark.

Our new radio show, Change Your Brain, Change Your Life, is receiving a more and more enthusiastic response. Once again, I answered questions again from all over the country. Tune in Saturdays at 8 – 9 AM (PST) on 1170 KCBQ in San Diego or 1300 KKOL in Seattle or on the web at www.kcbq.com or send me questions at changeyourbrain@amenclinic.com.

"Brain In The News" is offered as a free service to educate people on how the brain relates to our behavior. You can see over 300 color 3D brain SPECT images at www.brainplace.com. You can subscribe for free at www.amenclinic.com.

Daniel G. Amen, MD, Amen Clinics, Inc.

Buddha isn't found by searching.

Look at the characteristic of your mind.

-Adept Godrakpa, in *Hermit of Go Cliffs*

From Chokyi Lodro: The yard might not be the proper place to do meditation and the yoga asanas, however, the natural setting was best for me. Nowadays I refrain whereas to avoid trouble. Some prisoners want others to be just as miserable as they are. I think wisdom has taught me better.

Currently the living arrangements I'm in is one of the most unfortunate yet, but, as always I view it as just part of the learning process. I refuse to argue and I am not going to be violent unless I'm attacked. Then whatever happens just happens. No one is going to protect me except for myself! I learned this many years ago .. not the prisoncrats, not the courts, no one but Chokyi Lodro. The prisoner I live with is a black gang member who hates whites and he tries to disguise it, but a blind man could recognize the vibrations.

A "mistake" was made, a disciplinary case was written and served upon me, I did the necessarily pre-hearing investigation with a ranking official and at the hearing I explained the circumstances and presented my written statement and the documentary evidence (lay-in pass) I had been issued and I was found NOT GUILTY! That is almost IMPOSSIBLE in this prison system! I walk a righteous path (smile)... Peace, love and Happy Trails,

Chokyi Lodro's wrote this for us:

Right Understanding in Reference to Idol Worship

By writing this I hope to spread the right understanding. Recently I was confronted and aggressively questioned about my Buddhist faith and practice since at one time I openly meditated and did yoga asanas on the yard. The prisoner accused me of idol worship. I tried to

explain about that but to no avail. Then I didn't know the following valuable information that I've learned by studying a book, "*Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*".

In furtherance of better understanding, I submit that many people are under the false impression that Buddhists pray to idols as customary practice.

Those who practice idolatry commonly erect images of gods and goddesses for prayers, for seeking blessing and protection and for bestowing upon the supplicator's health, wealth, and prosperity.

However, it is my understanding that as a Buddhist what is usually practiced is that we pay homage and respect to the Buddha, and/or other great religious teachers who deserve honor. We shouldn't seek worldly favors from an image. Good practice is to try and gain inspiration from the noble personality.

I'm not the brightest bulb in the box, however, I do respect the great virtues and sanctity of any religious teacher as represented by the image. It is a meritorious act and blessing if a person pays honor and respect to the respectable teacher (guide).

As Buddhists we should believe that we ourselves are responsible for our own salvation and we can not depend on a third party. The Buddha was a teacher who has shown the right path for salvation, but it is up to the individual to lead a worthy life and purify the mind.

The Buddha image as a visual object has a beneficial impact on the mind and the recollection of his achievements provide joy, invigorates the mind and uplifts man from a state of restlessness, tension, and frustration.

If this fills anyone's heart and mind with the right understanding, then I've spread the Dharma as best I know how. That alone puts a smile on my face!!

Sometimes it is hard to walk the Buddhist path alone, however with diligent practice it is becoming easier.

Peace, joy and metta, Chokyi Lodro

Reality as it is becomes the right view of the meditator. Thinking of it as it is becomes the right thought. Awareness of it as it is becomes the right awareness. Concentration on it as it is becomes the right concentration. Actions of the body and speech are then aligned to reality as it is.

In this way the meditator develops and is fulfilled.

-Majjhima Nikaya From "Buddha Speaks,"
edited by Anne Bancroft

From G. S.: I've just recently read a couple issues of Dharma Friends. J. has let me borrow them to read but wanted them right back. I guess he wants to reread some of it like I wish to. I have been reading some other readings on death based on The Tibetan Book of The Dead. Your articles are interesting and I would love to have my own copies to refer back so so can you put me on your mailing list? Thank you!

I enjoy your meditation practices as well as the article on I M Special. That was a powerful article, how did you ever come up with the idea to address this much-needed issue the way you did. It was very clever.

Our Sangha is very small, only 5, and also we have only been meeting on a regular basis at the Chapel for six months. Its an interesting story how this all came about and I'd like to write about it and send it to you one of these days.

Myself, I became interested in Tibetan Buddhism the summer of '03, and until

just recently did I get some much needed materials that helped me understand many aspects of Buddhism. I guess that's why they call it a path, and not the spot! I consider myself to be an optimist and I have some patience, working on that, but I do get stuck in a couple areas. Such as the Self. Which you just wrote about. It makes so much sense to become egoless to become a better human being, however, with all the talk about the Self, and always looking at the Self, etc. Sometimes this becomes a little confusing, but I also do realize that 2500 years has went into perfecting these teachings so I know there right on, I'm the one who must adjust his thinking to get with the program. I know it will come in time, I just have to hang in there and don't give up. And that's what I'm trying to do, take it slow and easy and let the understanding come with my daily practice, readings, and experiences. Our group here is getting a couple magazines and we're working on getting some books, figuring out which ones to get is a chore, and very soon we will have a DVD player to watch videos from the KTC Meditation Center.

So things are coming to fruition for us, its been a worthwhile journey so far, one I'm hoping never fades away like the Christian background did years ago.

I'd like to share very briefly how I became interested in Buddhism back in '03. I was doing research for a college speech when I ran across OM MANI PADME HUM and an explanation in Louise Young's The Blue Planet. I was totally taken by these words and the explanation, I copied these 4 paragraphs down and read them over and over. In speech class I asked the teacher about this thing called a mantra and whether or

further his education and practice in the Buddhist religion. I have done some studies and I also keep a daily medication practice.

At the present time I am an inmate who is doing a 26 year sentence. I am looking at a mandatory release date of June 2009. But at the present time I am also a inmate who has accept Mahayana Buddhism as a way of life, and based upon my reading of the Sutras, I have adopted and taken the vow not to eat any animal products, for I have taken this vow not to kill very seriously, and I practice it in the most heartfelt and meaningful way.

Being in prison and being a Buddhist Inmate has placed many limitation upon having the materials to study, for so many of the prisons systems are so over crowded and very limited on there funds, for the money has to go to other places first. We are way down there on the bottom somewhere. So I have no other choice but to turn to others who will provide materials, be it newsletters, books, correspondence courses and etc to further my education as I take this journey within myself.

Even tho being in here has brought me so much, for I realize there are so many others out there that are also caught up in there own self made prison. I am aware of the "The Finger Bone Path" of Anguilimala, and I realize that any one can change and it is never too late to change. I also realize that all of the wrongs I have done in the past is something that I will either pay for in this life time or in one of my next lives. For I will have to feel the pain, the hurt and the suffering that I have caused others, for this is something I cannot run from.

"When we look at the world around us, we find that we are not thrown into chaos and randomness but are part of the great order, a grand symphony of life. Every molecule in our body was once a part of previous bodies-living or nonliving-and will be part of future bodies. In this sense, our body will not die but will live on, again and

again, because life lives on. We share not only life's molecules but also its basic principles of organization with the rest of the living world. And since our mind, too, is embodied, our concepts, and metaphors are embedded in the web of life together with our bodies and brains. We belong to the universe, we are at home in it, and this experience of belonging can make our lives profoundly meaningful."

----Fritjof Capra

From J.M.: I am a prisoner at the same unit where (*Dharm a Friend*) J.N. is assigned. In fact, we were cell mates, having ended Thursday of last week. But... that's okay! He and I share a lot of the same beliefs and the intellectual conversations we shared were a true blessing.

R. shared his *Dharm a Friends* newsletters with me, and we were able to discuss thoughts and ideas provoked by the reading. That was a big part of our conversations. Although R is still assigned to this unit, our paths may not cross for months at a time, so I am asking to be placed on the mailing list of the newsletter also, please.

Anna, I was raised in a strict Southern Baptist home under the ultra-protective guidance of a loving mother who ensured we, (me and my two sisters) attended church anytime the doors were open.

I always felt there was something askew in the fundamentalism of the main-stream Christian theology. The judgmental/loving-forgiveness juxtaposition for one.

And for this reason, when I became old enough to drive, I struck out on my own to see what other Christian doctrines were presented in the various denominations of churches around Austin, where I grew up.

Still... there was just something wrong to me. I can honestly say that there are other dominations that come closer to what I perceive the truth to be, yet at the core - the Holy Bible - I've found at least one of the mental catches which disturb my sense of right, in terms of absolute truths.

That being the bias presented blatantly as God's prerogative with regard to favor shown one individual, regardless of deeds; e.g. Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, etc. (Romans 9:14 - 18 for non-specific reference)

I find it difficult to bow down to a God who appears to show favoritism to one of His children over another. Being a parent myself, I could never do this with my two daughters! Why would I want to emulate a deity portrayed as such?

All this ramble to say ... perhaps truth is found elsewhere. I don't pretend to understand Buddhism in its entirety, yet I do want to pursue it.

If there is a chance that you, or another practicing Buddhist might be willing to correspond with me on/about the practice, that would be most helpful.

"Choose to feel good"

Choose to feel good and your actions become more effective.

Choose to feel good and you'll see opportunities that you otherwise would have missed.

Choose to feel good and you'll attract positive, helpful people into your life. Choose to feel good, and events will work in your favor.

Choose to feel good, and you'll find a reason to persist through the most difficult of challenges. Choose to feel good, and the problems will not be able to overwhelm your spirit.

Choose to feel good, and your creativity will flow. Choose to feel good, and your days will be purposefully productive.

When you choose to feel good, it costs you nothing and it causes no harm to anyone else. In fact, when you choose to feel good you create much more value for yourself and for those around you.

So whatever life may send your way, choose to feel good. The joy you give to life cannot fail to make it better.

Ralph Marston



"If [man]

thinks of the totality as constituted of independent fragments, then that is how his mind will tend to operate, but if he can include everything coherently and harmoniously in an overall whole that is undivided, unbroken, and without a border then his mind will tend to move in a similar way, and from this will flow an orderly action within the whole."

-- David Bohm, in Wholeness and the Implicate Order

From C.T.: I've been receiving *Dharm a Friends* for about a year now and I don't think I've ever written. I study the Siddha Yoga teachings among others and this past year and a half has been transformative for me. But every month when *Dharm a Friends* arrives I incorporate it into my reading. While I have never reflected on the fact it has become part of my sadhana and come to think of it, I've never read anything or gleaned any information that is contrary to any of the other paths of learning I subscribe to (including that path of 'unlearning')

Yet I have never taken the opportunity to write and thank you - and even in that I've felt okay about it. It's kind of like when someone is super-thirsty. When offered a long cool drink of water, they don't stop drinking to say thank you in between gulps. So while I may have been taking my subscription for granted, it's just that I've been so busy gulping and swimming in this oasis-like pool that I haven't come up for air long enough to become thoughtful and say thank you. Perhaps I've experienced a sort of "freedom from attachment" needing to write and say, "This is good. Keep it coming." Whatever the case, I've been profoundly benefitted. And now that I'm writing to notify you of my new address I

think it appropriate that I let you know.

For some reason, I didn't get an November issues. I don't know why. Normally I wouldn't comment on it. However, in the October issue you gave a death meditation. I'm not even able to

articulate it properly yet my mediation experiences have gone to a new level. I would be very interested in the information included in the Nov. issue. Also, my mother made the transition from this life one month ago today and so my thoughts and introspection on this topic have been abundant.



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 EBS, to: Ecumenical Buddhist Society, *Dharma Friends* subscriptions, Gans Place Carriage House, 1010 W. 3rd St., Little Rock, AR. 72201. 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.

IF YOU CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS, PLEASE LET US KNOW.

ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ATTENTION!

We all want to thank the incredible efforts and generosity of the students at Arkansas School for Math, Science and the Arts' Philosophy of Non-Violence class and their teacher, M. S., for TWO labor intensive fundraising efforts for *Dharma Friends*. They truly live their philosophy, and have helped in almost covering one month's publication of our newsletter! A great gift!! If you want to send any notes of appreciation, I will forward them on to the students!! Thank you, wonderful people.

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 EBS if you or someone you know would like to order one.

Pen Pal info - Anguilim ala Foundation

Okay, Friends. Many of you have written saying you do not have access to a teacher and that you would like to have someone to be a spiritual guide for you. We do have some members who are very kindly writing to a number of our Dharma Friends in this loving capacity. Here is another who wrote to me saying that he was interested in writing to those on death row who might want a little more support. I told him that along with those on death rows, we have others of you who might like to write as well. So, with much appreciation for his kindness, I introduce you to Adrian and urge you to write to him with your questions if you desire a spiritual friend. He says:

Hi Anna! Yes, by all means let it be known that I am available to write to anyone who needs the support. Pass my details on in whatever way you see fit. I have trained in the Chinese Ch'an school, but my mind is beyond the petty boundaries of definition - Metta. Best Wishes,

**Adrian Chan-Wyles Ph.D
20 Chelsea Gardens
Sutton
Surrey SM3 9TN UK**

"...When you want to enter a different aspect of Life, you wait for the point at which Particle becomes Wave. And just at that split second before the Particle is gone and the Wave takes over, you enter between, and you become Energy. At that point where the wave becomes Particle again, you enter between and you re-become who you were or you make a different choice. Which is also possible. I think it is that space in which healing occurs."

-- Paula Underwood Spensor, Oneida tradition.





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**May all be free from sorrow, and the causes of sorrow,
May all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is sorrowless.**

-----Buddhist prayer