

Dharma Friends

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

September 2005

issue #104

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The DHAMMAPADA The teachings of the Buddha



Verse 22: Hell

The Downward Course

Spoken in the Jetavana Grove concerning Sundari:

1. He who says what is not true, he who denies what he has done, both choose the downward course. After death these two become partners in falsehood.

Spoken in the Bamboo Grove:

2. Those who put on the saffron robe but remain ill mannered and undisciplined are dragged down by their evil deeds. It is better for an undisciplined monk to swallow a red-hot ball of iron than to live on the charity of the devout.

Spoken in the Jetavana Grove:

3. Adultery leads to loss of merit, loss of sleep, condemnation, and increasing suffering. On this downward course, what pleasure can there be for the frightened lying in the arms of the frightened, both going in fear of punishment? Therefore do not commit adultery.

Spoken in the Jetavana Grove:

4. As a blade of kusha grass can cut the finger when it is wrongly held, asceticism practiced without discrimination can send one on the downward course.
5. An act performed carelessly, a vow not kept, a code of chastity not strictly observed: these things bring little reward. If anything is worth doing, do it with all your heart. A half-hearted ascetic covers himself with more and more dust.

Spoken to the young girl in the Jetavana Grove:

6. Refrain from evil deeds, which cause suffering later. Perform good deeds, which can cause no suffering. Guard yourself well, both within and without, like a well-defended fort. Don't waste a moment, for wasted moments send you on the downward course.

Spoken concerning the naked ascetics:

7. Those who are ashamed of deeds they should not be ashamed of, and not ashamed of deeds they should be ashamed of, follow false doctrines on the downward course.
8. Those who fear what they ought not to fear and do not fear what they ought to fear, follow false doctrines on the downward course.
9. Those who see wrong where there is none, and do not see wrong where there is, follow false doctrines on the downward course.
10. But those who see wrong where there is wrong, and see no wrong where there is none, follow true doctrines on the upward course.



Some thoughts about this Dhammapada verse:

HELL

Heavy duty dictates! Some traditions, including some Buddhist traditions, talk of a Hell that seems to be a place that one goes to after death because one has broken some of these “rules” that are pretty similar in all religions. Others believe Hell is here and now. Or Hell is one of the many dimensions that we might manifest in any given moment. Our unfolding consciousness might find itself in hell one moment because of our view of reality and in heaven the next when we remember a view that is more subtle, loving, or vast.

Let me share a story that some of you who are long time readers have heard before. It is a “joke” about the difference between heaven and hell. I think that it captures the essence of hell and maybe even says a whole lot more about the spiritual journey.



HEAVEN OR HELL?

There was a man who died and went to the gates where it would be decided if he would go into heaven or hell. When he arrived, he was told he could have a tour and then he would be shown his final destination. He was first taken to a door that opened into an enormous and elegant room. The room was filled with tables all set for a great feast. Food was piled high on the plates. Every imaginable delicious food was set out waiting for the diners.

“Wow!” the man exclaimed. “This must be heaven! It is everything one can imagine.”

“Hmmm,” said the guide. “You might want to wait a bit to know for sure.”

In walked the residents of the realm looking frail and skeletal. It was obvious that they were starving. When they saw the food they began to run to the tables. It was then that our tourist noticed that they all had long broom handles tied to their arms so that they stuck straight out at their sides. When the people sat down to devour their feast, none could get the food to their mouths. With their hands full of delicious food they struggled and struggled to eat it and began screaming and crying in frustration. They were so hungry and the food that would fill them up was right before them but they could not eat it!

The man stood there in dismay, watching this horrific scene. He turned to his guide and said, “I can’t stand this any more. It is just too terrible. Even though it looked like heaven, I know now that this must be hell. Will you allow me to see heaven?”

They walked out, shutting that door behind them. In the other direction they came to an identical door. Again, they went through that door to find a huge room, beautifully decorated, and filled with tables all set for a feast. Again, food was piled high on the plates and every delicious thing imaginable was set out on the tables. At first our visitor thought this was a trick and then he smiled, expecting that heaven would be the place where the guests had their hands free and could actually eat the food before them! But, when the door opened, he saw that those who entered had broom handles tied to their arms as well. Their arms too were standing out straight to their sides. He hid his face from the horror that he knew was to come. Then he peeked out to see the people sit at the tables.

Instead, what happened was that each diner picked up their spoon and filled it with something delicious and fed it to the neighbors sitting on each side of them. Everyone was happily enjoying the feast. All were being fed with the help of those around them. Amazingly, they all were healthy, happy, and well fed.

“This,” said the guide, “is heaven.”



Perhaps our message of the story as it relates to hell is: When the focus is on our self and on fulfilling our own needs without concern for others, we are on the path to a hell realm of existence. The spiritual journey that brings the realization of our innate nature, our highest state of awareness, is when our focus is on others and making sure that we live to benefit them. This practice of kindness

to others purifies our own ego grasping and awakens us to compassion and to wisdom. Along the way, our perfect wisdom mind ensures that we get what we need, even if sometimes we don't recognize the benefit that exists for us in each perfect moment. If, in every "now", we do what is beneficial for others, ego need not fear for itself. But when ego is filled with fears for one's own suffering, then that fear blocks our view to see anything beyond our own grasping, including a true view of reality.

Here is an interesting sociological study by Zamble and Quinsey (1997). The examiners were trying to find what prevented recidivism for those who had served time in prison. When subjects were asked if they had thought about committing crimes but decided not to, a very high percentage said yes, they had. When asked what had motivated them to not commit their contemplated crime some said it was their fear of getting caught, some said they were afraid to go back to prison and some gave other reasons. But *none* said that they were concerned about what effect their actions would have on the victims of their crime. I think that that is hell when we live with so little awareness of and compassion for others.

Any act, large or small, that is not mindful of our effects on others and is meant to benefit only oneself is a step on that downward path. If our motivation is to benefit others, to love all beings as much as possible and to never cause pain, one is living in open hearted compassion and joyful celebration. That is heaven or purity. We can hardly manage to do that if we only hold ego's view of reality, that ordinary view of focusing only on all that we need and want.

But most of us are sometimes only a little bit able to leave ego's view and sometimes more so. Until we are truly there, we can "practice" as though we are Buddhas. Of course, we always need to remain mindful not to harm ourselves either in this difficult process. This **Dhammapada** verse gives us a list of rules just as the ten commandments and the teachings of most spiritual traditions give people instructions of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. In Buddhism, we would say that one of the most important teachings is to never kill or even harm another being for any reason. To hold this as our primary motivation in all that we do would pretty much take care of everything else on all of the lists and provide all the reminders we need to stay on an upward rather than a downward path.



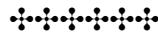
A Meditation

Here's another story. It is an historical one but I can't remember the name of the Zen teacher that it is actually about. Maybe one of you knows and can tell us.



During a great and horrific war, the borders were closed and only those with special passes could travel into the war zone. Usually those with passes were military leaders or political negotiators. One day a monk arrived at the train station and asked to board the train that would take him into the heart of the fighting. The guard at the station was quite surprised. He was doubtful that the monk would have a pass, but he asked him anyway if he had been given official permission. The monk showed him no papers and said that he had not been sent by any government but still wanted to board the train. When the guard refused to allow him to pass, the monk went quietly to a nearby table and poured himself a cup of tea. He sat and drank his tea and continued to sit peacefully long after the tea cup was empty.

When the train arrived, the station guard allowed the monk to board so that he might travel on into the war zone.



If you are smiling in understanding, I expect that you are like that monk. Many of you, in prison and out, are living in a hell realm or war zone and, in your own way, are spreading healing and gentleness as a messenger of peace. You may not be credentialed in any official way but what you carry in your heart ripples out through the hells around you and brings a change to others' hearts. If we know peace and compassion for their suffering, we can hold that highest view of what *is* for others until they recognize it. It may be only a glimpse but it is a perception that another will feel and will not be forgotten. Others can hopefully awaken to their own inner truth and wisdom through us. It may manifest differently or as another tradition, but the essence is the same. In this way, each of us has the capacity to turn hell into heaven for us and for others. But first, we must be courageous enough to enter hell. Often we do not think we have the choice and that we just kind of happen to end up there. We may not recognize that we were called upon to be the bodhisattva who leads others out and that we said, "I'll go!" I expect that if you are reading this, at some level you have made this choice. Like the monk, we first have the motivation to make the journey and then we just show up. Then we must BE peace in order to awaken peace and healing for all. By transcending the ordinary view of each moment and seeing beyond self-interest, we have the capacity to awaken others to the pure nature of what *is*.

Our Meditation this month is to transform each moment from one in Hell to one in Heaven

Life is not the past and not the future, but is this very moment and this moment only. If we remember that this moment is great wisdom and great compassion, when we know great joy and our inseparability from all beings and their true essence, then we share with all others our knowing of the moment as heaven - great bliss.

If we perceive this moment as a moment in hell, then that is what it is. A moment in hell is when ego perceives fear and suffering. Emotional pain often causes us to leave the awareness of vast perception for a focus on self and self-serving, and a disregard for others. This is our first step on the descent into Hell. Of course, these times of self focus are most of our ordinary moments until we have walked quite a way on our spiritual path. With the tools of meditation, we gain equanimity, a calm mind, and the capacity to recognize a flow of moment to moment awareness. We develop self

awareness to know that we have a choice between heaven and hell. When we know that there is a choice, then we can prepare for those times of forgetting and develop a plan of action. We can develop a meditation catalyst that will jolt us to go beyond ego's addiction to the dramas of life. At first we can use it in our meditation times and then gradually in every day life when we see the signs of ego grasping. It may be a mantra. It may be a prayer like, *May All Beings Be Happy*. Perhaps you might say and visualize, *Let Me Be Peace*. It may be to see a certain sacred image. You might summon an image before you that brings benefit to others. You might see space fill with light or love or to see a holy being blessing everyone. Find the catalyst that inspires you. Eventually there will be no need for words or images because even the forgetting will be the reminder to remember.

When you are sitting quietly in meditation and your mind strays to a self-grasping thought, now you have a well-rehearsed tool that you may quickly bring into your awareness. This image or these words awaken you and you are great compassion. Rest there. Then, almost guaranteed, you will be meditating again in equanimity with this image and, without warning, ego will sneak in again with another self-serving scenario. Your thoughts might wander after it for a few minutes or for the rest of the day... but again, when you remember, return to your wisdom image or sacred words and rest there as long as you can.

Later, after your meditation, you might get up and listen to the radio. The news talks about the war in Iraq. That is hell. Or you might even look out of your cell and there is a 'war' going on between some guy and a security guard ten feet away from you. That is hell. The more we get caught up in believing in the horror of any moment, the more we enter into the hell realm. When we remember our visualization, our prayer, our mantra, or our peaceful image, we can rest there. We can bring transformation to the hell realm by remembering our capacity to see the wisdom and great compassion in the moment. When we are motivated by compassion, we will contribute to healing and peace. When we are compassion, we invite all beings to awaken. Even sitting and drinking a cup of tea can bring an end to hell and transform all reality into heaven.



FROM YOUR LETTERS

We want to thank the Fred Darragh Foundation. For the second year in a row they have provided a substantial amount of the yearly funding for Dharm a Friends. We are deeply touched by their support of our efforts. Mr. Darragh was a champion for the humane and ethical treatment of all beings everywhere and lived his beliefs throughout his long life. The Darragh Foundation continues to support such principles in their funding allocations and we could not have fulfilled all your requests for free subscriptions without them. Think of Fred

Darragh and his great kindness and those on the Darragh Foundation Board as you read each issue.

We send our blessings and prayers to all of you who live in the disaster areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.

From Dr. Daniel Amen's on-line column on the brain:

IS YOUR WORK KILLING YOU?

The brain is everywhere there is news about people, especially at work.

A range of jobs, from farming to teaching, may be potential risk factors for degenerative brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, new research findings suggest. In a study of more than 2.6 million U.S. death records, researchers found that a variety of jobs were associated with an increased risk of death from several forms of brain degeneration, namely Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, early-onset dementia and motor neuron disease. Many of the associations had been seen in earlier research and could potentially be explained by on-the-job exposures to the chemicals that farmers, welders and hairdressers routinely use or inhale. Other findings, however, such as the elevated disease risks among teachers, clergy and bank tellers, are not easily explained, according to the researchers, led by Robert M. Park of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Cincinnati, Ohio.

In their analysis, Park and his colleagues found that the bank tellers, clergy, aircraft mechanics and hairdressers had highest odds of dying from Alzheimer's disease. For Parkinson's disease, the highest risks were among biological scientists, teachers, clergy members and other religious workers.

The risk of death from presenile dementia -- a form of dementia that arises before the age of 65 -- was greatest among dentists, graders and sorters in industries other than agriculture and, again, clergy.

Veterinarians, hairdressers and graders and sorters had the highest risks of dying from motor neuron disease, the most common form of which is amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease -- an invariably fatal degeneration of the central nervous system that causes muscle wasting and paralysis.

The findings, based on death records from 22 states for the years 1992 to 1998, are published in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine.

Of all deaths for those years, just over 4 percent were attributed, at least in part, to a neurodegenerative disease.

These diseases are marked by progressive, irreversible damage to cells of the central nervous system. It's thought that genes influence susceptibility to the conditions, but growing evidence also points to environmental factors, including some on-the-job exposures.

For example, farmers exposed to pesticides have been shown in some studies to have a higher-than-average risk of Parkinson's disease, as have welders exposed to fumes containing the mineral manganese. Both of these occupations were associated with Parkinson's in the current study as well.

Hairdressers were at increased risk of death from Alzheimer's disease, presenile dementia and motor neuron disease. These findings, Parker and his colleagues note, suggest a role for hair dyes, solvents or other chemicals used in salons.

Other job-disease relationships, including the higher risks for several neurodegenerative conditions among teachers and clergy, "are difficult to interpret," according to Park.

One possibility, he and his colleagues note in the report, is that people in professional jobs have lower risks of common, lifestyle-related diseases like heart disease, which makes them more likely than others to die of a neurodegenerative disorder.

As for dentists, dental assistants and veterinarians, there may be a role for certain occupational exposures, the researchers speculate. In the case of dentistry, that could include exposure to mercury or synthetic substances used in dental work. The finding on vets, they add, could signal a role for some yet-unidentified chemical or biological substance.

Our radio show, Change Your Brain, Change Your Life, continues to receive an enthusiastic response. 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.

To Your Brain Health,
Daniel
Daniel G. Amen, MD

And a few thoughts from anna on the life - and death - that our brain creates for us:

The miracle is that most of us have brains and bodies that are pretty healthy when we are born and throughout our life. With this blessing, our chances of successfully reaching our highest potential and being happy are pretty good. But brain challenges may begin when we are still in the womb. Those whose mothers were depressed or traumatized, under-nourished, who smoked or drank or did drugs, who had diabetes, or were exposed to pollutants have some extra challenges to overcome. Those whose fathers did drugs or were exposed to toxins may have had challenges as well. Those who had a family history of biochemical imbalance in their brains or a genetic predisposition to other major illness came into the world with vulnerabilities but not necessarily a certainty that such disabilities will manifest. Some of us may have had a difficult time in the womb due to illness or chromosomal malformation, or a difficult time at birth, most especially oxygen deprivation. Due to our own unique circumstances, we may or may not have had parents that fed us healthy food and raised us in a non-toxic environment where there was no smoke, no lead paint, no poisons or poison gases, no chemicals (like farm fertilizers), no molds, and kept us in sanitary conditions. Hopefully, they protected us from emotional trauma and, to the best of their ability, from illness and injury - especially head injuries.

If we successfully navigated most of these hurdles and made it to our teen years, we then had more autonomy in our decision making. Hopefully we took over the responsibility to keep ourselves healthy. Unfortunately, if we had any damage to our brain function from any of the long list of potentially harmful influences above, we might have been handicapped in making good decisions. Those who need the most protection to ameliorate or undo challenges to their brain and body are often the least able to live a healing and self-protective life style. Perhaps out of awareness, many who have imbalance in their brains try to alleviate the symptoms of damage or illness by brain-altering substances, activities or environments that harm them even more. This can escalate and effect everything in our lives so that we hardly know where to begin to find a healthy homeostasis and to begin healing.

I share Dr. Amen's article about professions and the influence that they may have on our brain and possible disease to illustrate how all-pervasive any imbalance can be. Note that most of these professions that he lists require high-functioning people who have worked successfully for many years at their particular job before the activity or environment took a destructive toll. There are those who succumb to a dysfunctional lifestyle of drugs, alcohol, smoking, prostitution, and/or the effects of head injury, illness, poverty, biochemical imbalance, and other handicaps and are likely to feel the consequences of an unhealthy body and brain at a younger age.

So many of our everyday decisions made one at a time throughout our days cause our reactions to life events. It is very important to stay aware of whatever it is that challenges our survival and it is never too early to try to introduce healthy life changes! Bodies and brains are amazingly resilient. Even if we can't entirely undo the effects of physically and emotionally toxic environments, injury, disease, imbalance, illness, or bad decisions about we put into our bodies, we can make changes that might, at least, allow healing to start.

We can say with great assurance that meditation helps to ameliorate the negative responses to traumas and the health issues we face. But for many, it is an up-hill battle to meditate and to live a healthy lifestyle until we stop creating the conditions that invite our various physical and brain illnesses that could bring constant challenge or death. A note though - there are many who have taken good care of themselves who have developed horrible illnesses and I do not want to imply that everyone has created or caused their condition.

Dr. Amen's article is powerful. If workers vulnerable to the challenges of their job had known to protect themselves in some way, perhaps they would not have suffered brain illnesses. We should all take a close look at what we expose ourselves to every day. We should look at what we put into our bodies, including what we breathe in. We should examine what we listen to or look at. We should study our typical day and evaluate how much stress we are under and how many risks we commonly take. If our body is compromised by illness, injury or stress, then our brain can't function at its optimum capacity. If our brain can't function, we won't make good decisions. Quickly, we can see how lives can then spin out of control and become more and more dysfunctional and distressed.

ABSOLUTELY YES!

MEDITATE ✨ drink lots of water ✨ Eat fruit and vegetables, healthy oils and grains ✨ Get plenty of sleep ✨ EXERCISE ✨ Do a form of energy balancing and stretching like Tai Chi ✨ Write or talk about your stressful life issues ✨ If you take medication for an illness, TAKE IT RESPONSIBLY ✨ Let your body help to guide you as to what is healthy for you ✨ Listen to your heart tell you what is the purpose of your life ✨ Examine your addictions and deal with them ✨ Look for beauty and joy everywhere ✨ Practice GRATEFULNESS ✨ Practice KINDNESS ✨ Open your heart to LOVE no matter how scary ✨

ABSOLUTELY No!

NO DRUGS ✨✨ NO SMOKING ✨✨ Moderate alcohol use ✨ Examine your anger ✨ Do not indulge your negative views and self-serving nature ✨ Limit your intake of sugar, caffeine, unhealthy fats, salt, and junk food ✨ If possible, do not go to or stay in loud, chaotic, dangerous, and environmentally unhealthy places (like prisons!) ✨ Leave unhealthy relationships that are abusive to you ✨ *Do not provoke dangerous situations into becoming more dangerous ones!* ✨

An Interesting Perspective to Consider!

"A caterpillar crunches its way through its ecosystem, cutting a swath of destruction by eating as much as hundreds of times its weight in a day, until it is too bloated to continue and hangs itself up, its skin then hardening into a chrysalis. Inside this chrysalis, deep in the caterpillar's body, tiny things biologists call 'imaginal disks' begin to form. Not recognizing the newcomers, the caterpillar's immune system snuffs them as they arise. But they keep coming faster and faster,

then linking up with each other. Eventually the caterpillar's immune system fails from the stress and the disks become imaginal cells that build the butterfly by feeding on the soupy meltdown of the caterpillar's body. It took a long time for biologists to understand the reason for the immune system attack on the incipient butterfly cells, but eventually they discovered that the butterfly has its own unique genome, carried by the caterpillar, inherited from long ago in evolution, yet not part of it as such. If we see ourselves as imaginal discs working to build the butterfly of a better world, we will understand that we are launching a new genome to replace that of the current unsustainable system. We will also see how important it is to link with each other in the effort, to recognize how many different kinds of imaginal cells it will take to build a butterfly with all its capabilities and colors."

-Elisabet Sahtouris as shared to her by Norie Huddle

Pause to reflect upon how this living systems metaphor applies to the world in which we live...

Thought for the Day... from <http://WisdomAtWork.com> by Joel and Michelle Levey

Here is a response to a letter from T. who asked us how to find a spiritual path:

Dear T,

So good to hear from you and to get caught up a bit, but sorry it is a time of some disappointment. So much of your letter is on a topic that might be helpful to others so I will put some thoughts into *Dharm a Friends* as soon as I can.

First, know that others can give you their opinions as to a right path but the true "right answer" lies within you.

Secondly, you already know from all of your studies and readings that the great wisdom teachings of the world all say essentially the same message but the words are often shared differently in part because of the cultures that spawn their teachers.

Third, wisdom is truly present in the basic tenants of each religious tradition, but as men and women try to express the words and teachings, they may get filtered to some degree through the intellect and ego of the teacher. There are truly great teachers in many traditions who have gone beyond ego. I would say that if the words at the wisdom level of the teachings touch your heart in significant ways but when you hear those same words interpreted through a teacher and they leave you confused or disappointed, perhaps you should study and practice those teachings from the original sources until you find a teacher and in the way that your heart feels is the most truthful.

Fourth, if your intellect or ego is trying to analyze all the information that you have in order to make sense of what to do, my advice is to just meditate and pray and not try to figure out what to do next. Stay as true to the teachings that touch your heart as possible and be patient. The answers will come and your next step will appear gently and lovingly. A guide will be there to open doors but you can't force it. When the time is right and if you practice all that is true, you will know how to proceed.

So - know that I am thinking of you and sending you lots of blessings and support.
Slowly and gently.....

Men are afraid to forget their minds, fearing to fall through the Void with nothing to stay their fall. They do not know that the Void is not really void, but the realm of the real Dharma. -Huang Po, "Zen Teaching of Huang Po"

From T.B.:

I've received my second issue of **Dharma Friends**. So far I've received issues #94 and 95. They are excellent. Thank you.

This path is a joy and the wisdom of the Buddha's teachings ... perseveres. I used to think that it was difficult to study alone, to practice without having others to practice with, or that were also in the path. But with issues like **Dharma Friends** it makes me feel more connected to a common thread. The articles are informative and teach the Dharma. And that is exactly what I've been needing.

Thank you. In the Triple Gem

When you are completely clear, there is no subjective distortion; when you are completely pure, there is true perception. But even if you are thus through and through, this is still now the transcendental key. When the wind and waves have died out, the ocean of mind is as is; when you get to the bottom of the ocean of mind, for the first time you see the black pearl. -Tzu-te

From L.D.:

Dharm a Friends has given me much help and inspiration on my relatively recent walk along the Buddhist path. I have read many books and publications and yours is one of my favorites. It's always nice to get views from different angles. Helps to bring it all into focus and obtain a clearer picture. And Dharm a Friends is easy to read and understand without the need of an interpreter, which I found with some Buddha's teachings. So thank you for making the Dharma accessible to all of us in prisons everywhere who otherwise may not have such an excellent opportunity to walk in the footsteps of the Buddha. ----- I do have a great reverence for all beings and wish to be of service if/when I am able.

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

From T.R.:

Greetings:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the wonderful service you provide to incarcerated individual such as myself. I have enjoyed every issue of Dharm a Friends I've received thus far, and look forward to the next. I would also like to thank you for the Tarthang Tulku book you sent to me. I can't wait to read it.

I also have many Dharma questions such as: what is emptiness? Can you describe non-duality and how it can be realized? What can you tell me of conditional arising? What is meant by dependent origination? Are these last two questions the same thing? What should I be looking for in

my daily meditation to confirm their existence? What are the mystical implications of Buddhism? (If any).

I realize that in order to fully understand these concepts I must determine their meanings for myself. But any assistance you may provide in this regard is most welcome.

Thank you for your time. Namaste.

Dharm a friends – I sent an answer to **TR** but wondered if you would like to ponder and maybe research his questions from your various lineages and religious traditions and share your thoughts.

"For one human being to love another; that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation."- Rainer Maria Rilke

From C.P.:

Things are going pretty well with me. I'm not depressed, despite depressing circumstances. There are battles ever going on between me and the system. Oh, how I really -- really try to get some of these fellows to pick up the pen and push their own fight... To pick a "cause" and change it. I just want to better this community, that's all. Plus it is so hard to sit by and do nothing when wrong persists. *Lividicus 25:11:Thalt shalt not therefore oppress one another.* Then when I see the oppressed get downtrodden even more, all I can't help but do is scream!

Anyways, you already know that little thing about me -- I wish I could pour it in the head of all these guys.

..... Exercise and meditation are still part of my daily routine. Seems to keep me in good spirits. That reminds me, I saw this in the (newspaper) - an article on lying. It said something about the brain that opened my eyes. That there are two sections split between thinking (contemplating) and the emotions. That when we react out of emotions, we are not using the section for thinking. That these are two distinct sections helps me to understand myself better. Maybe I can picture or envision these two separate sections in time to catch myself from dangerous emotions. I may need to "fast" from emotions in order to draw attention to this area, for I've been praying to be able to think before I speak. For real. If you have any more information on the brain sections concerning contemplating versus emotional reacting please pass it on my way.

Thank you for caring and for being such a good inspiration to me.

Inner refuge is refuge in ourselves, in our ultimate potential. When we recognize and nourish this potential, we have found the real meaning of refuge. -Kathleen McDonald, "How to Meditate"

From A.N.:

Well, I have many things to tell you. First of all let me tell you that I am fine. As long as there's health and hope there's a chance to make it. I am still strong in my faith. I think Buddhism is the way that fits my life. I always say that in this world we have different paths and religions that help to fulfill the many types of minds that we encounter in this life. All paths lead to the same goal, if we apply them well.

Also, let me tell you that I am taking courses looking forward to becoming a minister of the Pure Land school. It is amazing how beautiful the Dharma can be. In a near future if I study hard I may be a minister. That is my hope. One of the things that I learned is to fortify the foundation of our Bodhi-mind. It has a lot to do with the blissful tripod, meaning that the critical points in Buddhism in this Dharma ending age are faith, vows, and practice. Of these three conditions, faith is the priority. If this is missing, the mind of vows and sincere practice cannot develop. Also, it is very important to understand the law of cause and effect, being that is a reality that we can see in our daily experiences. Understanding this can help us to appreciate the meaning of the Dharma. We all possess Buddha nature. So why are we so separated from the Buddha? Perhaps the lack of our wisdom? Or our heavy Karma? The truth is that can be many aspects for a cultivator to stop enlightenment. But cultivation by itself is not enough. We as practitioners must have strong faith and vows. Reciting the Buddha's name in a sincere way, practicing in accord with the Buddha's teachings. The reason that keeps us so far away from enlightenment lies in the practitioner not in the method, of course. We are not perfect beings. We all have our own flaws and mistakes. But these are very valuable experiences from which we can learn a lot. We have the opportunity every day to develop compassion and feel the suffering of other sentient beings as if it was ours. Making an attempt to end it and like this obtaining Bodhi- mind, realizing that every single sentient being that lives on this earth was in a moment related to us in one way or another, and that is why we must recognize that their suffering is our suffering as well. I understand that we all had doubts at certain points of our lives about our practice. By nature humans tend to doubt and enquire. That is why it is very important to study and learn the true significance of the Dharma. Like this. We might be able to harmonize theory and practice so as not to engender doubt and to keep the Bodhi-mind of the cultivators from retrogressing.

Well, Anna, I just wanted to share some of my conclusions. Certainly, I highly recommend to all our brothers in *Dharma Friends* to study the Dharma, experience, analyze, inquire and apply that knowledge for the welfare of sentient beings. Always having in mind that their blessings are our blessings as well, even if we don't directly benefit from them. Always being happy of your brothers' fortune and also feel their misfortunes too. Anna also, I want to thank you for sending the *Dharma Friends*. Sincerely, it has been a great and excellent support in my practice. At this moment, I'm getting ready to leave this place. In one year and seven months I will be a free man again. If there's health and life then I may be blessed. Also, I want to thank you, because you helped me to connect with the most beautiful human being I ever met in my whole life. She has been my penpal and friend for three years now and we give mutual spiritual support to each other to go through this lake of samsara. Anna, you help this dream come true. Remember? When I wrote you saying that I was a lonely Mexican. Well, now, I thank you for being such a wonderful human and a lovable example for many of us. You taught us to believe that life is not over within the walls of person. And definitely is not over after getting out. Everything is in us, and I know for me will not be easy, but neither impossible. It will be 10 years since the time I got in this experience. It was hard. But prison is a mind-created concept. I like to see this as a retirement from normal life. Some people choose caves, are hermits, or choose deserts. Well I chose prison, and that's the way it is. Yes, I am counting my blessings, even though I am one year and a half away, because, I know firsthand how beautiful and helpful the teachings of the Buddha can be. And I've seen the changes in my life through all this time.

I am looking forward on my outdate to let you know about it and let you know the moment that I become a minister. I still have a lot to learn but you can bet your hard earned money it will be to help the most sentient beings that I can.

In this Dharma ending age, we must put all our effort to preserve the teachings, living by example and enjoying life one day at a time as if it was our last day, because life is beautiful at the zenith, downwards, North, South, East, and west. It is always beautiful.

Always smile

When desires go, joy comes. The follower of Buddha finds this truth. -The Buddha

From D. J.:

I want to thank you for your encouraging words as well as your response. It made a guy feel really good. I just have a lot of growing to do and questions that never seem to get answered. Life is precious but very complicated. I just feel in a lot of pain, because I was 16 when I got locked up. And now I'm 26. So a lot of times, I feel like I'm a lost soul searching for freedom, and life is something I can't find in here. So I am searching for answers and I can try to be the best person I can, but it's hard when you live in a cynical world and you try to dare to be different. Then things become a hard fight and struggle, but I'm glad for this opportunity to write and correspond and read the words of others and get knowledge and beautiful words that touch my heart. Because without such things like that, I would be totally lost.... I just got to find a way to lift my spirits because this place has destroyed it a little, but I have to do it the right way. Thanks.

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 D. R.:

Dear Anna and *Dharma Friends*,

Thank you so much for the *Dharma Friends* newsletter and two books you sent me. They really mean a lot to me and really help me with understanding in my walk for Buddhahood. Thank you so much!!

I spend 23 hours a day locked down and have been like this for the past 13 years, and most likely it'll never change. There's nobody here who can help me in my walk, so you and Dharma friends are my lifeline.

So thank you! Sincerely

The Dalai Lama encourages us:

"Never give up

no matter what is going on.

Never give up.

Develop the heart.

Too much energy in your country
is spent developing the mind instead of the heart.

Develop the heart.

Be compassionate.

Not just to your friends, but to everyone.

Be compassionate.

Work for peace in your heart and in the world.

Work for peace, and I say again,

Never give up, no matter what is happening.

No matter what is going on around you.

Never give up!"

An inspiring reminder from Nobel Laureate and leader, the Dalai Lama, who for 50 years now has ceaselessly and compassionately worked to support his people and preserve his culture amidst the Chinese invasion and holocaust in his homeland of Tibet.

~ ~ ~

From A.H.:

Dear Anna / *Dharma Friends*,

Hello, my name is A and I am an inmate at the women's correctional community center here in Kailua, Hawaii.

I have recently been trying to study Buddhism and so happened to come across your *Dharma Friends* subscriptions and am totally excited about it. I'm really having a difficult time understanding all involved in Buddhism. I would like to learn more about the beliefs in meditation of Buddhism.

I try to meditate but seem to not get the full focus that I'm looking for. I'm needing so much more inner peace and faith and am at a loss.

Please help me to find my inner peace! I've been feeling lost and empty knowing that there is so much more to me.

And although I have been in prison for three years and three months I've experienced so much negative energies around me. I've seen how hard and tarnished some of the women become. But I made a promise to myself that I would not let the system harden my heart. I have still so much empathy and compassion for all. But I fear my heart will become broken. I think that I'm too sensitive to my environment and find myself getting into deep depressions.

I want to feel whole again and not take so much too personally. My loneliness is starting to get the best of me.

I am searching for a belief that will be true, that will let me know there's a much higher power watching over me. This can't just be it!

Please help me!

Feeling lost,

Negligence produces a lot of dirt. As in a house, so in the mind, only a very little dirt collects in a day or two, but if it goes on for many years, it will grow into a vast heap of refuse. -Commentary to Sutta Nipata

From M. M.:

I would like a subscription to your newsletter *Dharm a Friends*. I am an inmate on lockdown in A. in a super maximum security unit. All day and all-night it might be some "crazy" on the tier screaming inanities and profanities or perpetuating the environmental madness in some kind of way. I've often felt myself getting caught up in the madness. Believe me, it is contagious. It was taking a subtle but definite toll on me until a fellow brother/kindred spirit on the cell block shared some of the divine knowledge of a few of your newsletters. They quickly became my anchor in the storm. Well, they just moved my brother off the cell block today, and I ain't wasting no time in seeing if I can fill the void -- and I would greatly appreciate it if you added me to your list.

Love and blessings,

We also often add to our pain and suffering by being overly sensitive, over-reacting to minor things, and sometimes taking things too personally.-His Holiness the Dalai Lama

From L.K.:

Hello, Anna /*Dharm a Friends* and To Whom It May Concern;

(On mindful meditation).

My name is L.K.. I am a Buddhist on the Hinayana path of the Tibetan tradition. My Buddhist name is Gewa Yarpel (Increasing Virtue).

I am currently in the Colorado Department of Corrections prison system serving a five-year sentence.

I belong to the Shambhala Colorado Prison Community, and I hope that you will publish my mindful meditation letter, because I feel that my body is locked up in prison but my mind is free to roam. This will give me the opportunity to listen to my inner voice. I will try and understand what

meditation is all about staying open to any new possibilities willing to share this experience in the hopes of benefitting others.

As I breathe deeply, thoughts enter my mind. I'm free to fly away. I stop to smell the roses as I make my way to the top of the mountain walking slowly enjoying every moment of this journey.

I'm told that meditation is simply the heart of wisdom and it is located at the center of the universe. It comes to those who dare to listen without expectations or demands.

As I reach the top of the mountain I look down below, and I see the ocean waves moving toward the shore. I listen to my breath, totally aware of where I was moments ago as reality makes me once again understand that my body is locked up in prison and my mind is free to roam.

Prison is not any place that I care to be. Meditation is wonderful. It helps me soar above and go beyond the prison walls that hold me back.

Happiness is a state of mind, so happy is where I choose to live and will because prison is not a nice place. Some people call it hell.

PS. Hopefully this letter will help those who are in prison if they realize that the body is locked up but the mind is free to roam then peace of mind will come naturally.

When the ear hears, observe the mind. Does it get caught up and make a story out of the sound? Is it disturbed? You can know this, stay with it, be aware. At times you may want to escape from the sounds, but that is not the way out. You must escape through awareness. - Ajahn Chah, "Still Forest Pool"

From J“13” F:

Yesterday I got a five page letter from my daughter, whom I've not heard from in like nearly four years. She said that she loved me, but I was “ a Heartless Monster”. I was really happy to hear from her, regardless of what she thinks I am. She will be graduating high school this year and she wants to go to college. I wish I knew something to help her or point her in a positive direction. In any event, I am well and my children are also well. I am thankful and very happy about that in itself.

"Where there is no love, put love and you will find love." St. John of the Cross

From D. P.:

I've been enduring some payback from karma.

When I was a kid life was a bit rough. I'm not complaining. I was often beaten by my parents so severely that I couldn't leave the house until the welts faded from my face and arms. I was lucky to have been born a male.

My sisters were molested by my father. I didn't learn of that until I was 15 or so. I wanted to make my father pay for what he did to them. He moved away, thus denying me the opportunity to settle the score.

The anger only served to get me locked up. I spent the majority of my teen years doing time. I used every waking moment of the time to torture the sex offenders that I found. I put several of them into the hospital. I had no mercy for any of them. No compassion. Only hate and rage.

I am now 33 years old. I'm 3 1/2 years into a 43 year sentence. I was convicted of a variety of sex crimes. None of them ever happened. I don't expect anyone to believe that though. My "victim" has even confessed that she was only lying, because she was mad at me.

I figure that I'm only getting what I deserve. That knowledge eases the burden some. I'll not write of my torturers. You needn't know of them. I am sorry for all the pain I inflicted on my fellow inmates. It wasn't my place to judge them. I can see that clearly now. Better late than never?

What is meant by nonduality, Mahatmi? It means that light and shade, long and short, black and white, can only be experienced in relation to each other; light is not independent of shade, nor black of white. There are no opposites, only relationships. In the same way, nirvana and the ordinary world of suffering are not two things but related to each other. There is no nirvana except where the world of suffering is; there is no world of suffering apart from nirvana. For existence is not mutually exclusive. -Lankavatara Sutra

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.

Send to Liberation Prison Project, PO Box 31527, San Francisco, CA. 94131

(Please note that our June and July issues had the wrong address for these cards)

Subscription information: I have gladly been offering this newsletter free of charge to those in prisons. I am so happy to have a vehicle for those who have little dharma support to feel united with others who identify with their life situation. It is truly important to remember that we are all mirrors of each other. We are all one with each other. And we can recognize that samsara is suffering for us all whether behind the bars of a prison or behind the bars of our own ego structure. For anyone who is not in prison and who would like to subscribe to Dharma Friends, here is what to do. The fee is \$15 for six months or \$30 for one year. Mail a check or money order made out to Dharma Friends: and send to Dharma Friends subscriptions, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, AR. 72217-7708. This amount covers the subscription for you and also for one and a half free subscriptions for prisoners. I also want to acknowledge the enormous generosity of many of those in prisons who have sent stamps and letters of support and appreciation. Far more important than anything material are the letters and notes that say that you are 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.

A note from anna about those letters that you haven't received from me! Many of you have sent letters requesting a response and many of you have wondered why I have been unable to come to

your prison for my usual meditation group meetings, so I wanted to let you know that I have not died yet. Since mid-July I have been visited with an abundance of those “wisdom opportunities” that we are always talking about! There has been a veritable non-stop parade of them and I have been unable to do anything except to handle the squeakiest ones. In our shared delirium, my beleaguered husband said one morning as we tried to sort through these challenges, “The squeaky worm gets the wheel!” That’s the state of life here for a while and soon, I hope to get some of the pieces put back together.

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 **Damian Echols Defense Fund - PO Box 1216, Little Rock, Arkansas 72203-1216**. Please note if it must come directly from a bookstore.*

"Kindness"

from “*Words under the Words*”, by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
what you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know

how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken will stare out the window forever.
Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.
Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out in to the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere

like a shadow or a friend.

Compassion Works for All
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The whole world we travel with our thoughts, finding nowhere anyone as precious as one's own self. Since each and every person is so precious to themselves, let the self-respecting harm no other being. -Samyutta Nikaya