



offers you

Dharma Friends

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

August 2011 issue # 175

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The Dhammapada The teachings of the Buddha



Chapter 15 - Happiness

197 - While in the midst of those who hate, to dwell free from hating is happiness indeed.

198 - While in the midst of those who are troubled, to dwell untroubled is happiness indeed.

199 - While in the midst of those who are greedy, to dwell free from greed is happiness indeed.

200 - We dwell happily, free from anxiety; like radiant beings in celestial realms we rejoice in delight.

201 - Victory leads to hatred, for the defeated suffer. The peaceful live happily, beyond victory and defeat.

202 - There is no fire like lust, no distress like hatred, no pain like the burden of attachment, no joy like the peace of liberation.

203 - Hunger is the greatest affliction, conditionality the greatest source of despair.

The wise, seeing this as it is, realize liberation, the greatest joy.

204 - A healthy mind is the greatest gain. Contentment is the greatest wealth. A trustworthy friend is the best of kin. Unconditional freedom is the highest bliss.

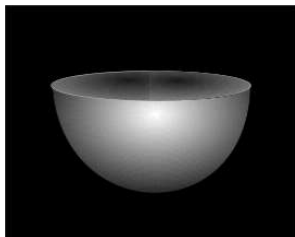
205 - Tasting the flavour of solitude and the nectar of peace, those who drink the joy that is the essence of reality abide free from fear of evil.

206 - It is always a pleasure not to have to encounter fools. It is always good to see noble beings and a delight to live with them.

207 - Tedious is the company of fools, always painful, like being surrounded by enemies; but to associate with the wise is like being at home.

208 - You should follow the ways of those who are steadfast, discerning, pure and aware, just as the moon follows the path of the stars

From a Dhammapada translation offered by The Forrest Sangha



A few thoughts about this **Dhammapada** verse: **Happiness**

We all want happiness. And we all know how to have it, according to ancient and even some pop-psychology teachings. The key? Accept and appreciate what we have NOW.

Don't cling to what is likely to leave us in the next moment or definitely before or as we die.

Don't long for what we don't have, especially if there is little chance to get it. Let go of our attachment towhatever we **think** will bring us happiness.

Happiness, in a nutshell, is accomplished by following all these teachings that we have heard again and again about not grasping at what we think will make us happy and not pushing away all that we think will cause us suffering. Instead, we say to ourselves, this is what **is**. This **is** is perfect. I am happy with exactly **what is**. This **Dhammapada** verse tells us that we must do this to find happiness - again and again - every time we forget.

Well, that's pretty easy.

And yet, we look around and we look within and we know that there are many – in fact billions - of beings everywhere, including ourselves, who do not accept what **is** as bliss. As a result, we and all those others do not live in happiness. When we know the key, why can't we all live it successfully? Why do world religions, philosophies, psychologies, and TV ads fill churches, temples, mosques, offices, books, auditoriums, and air waves with endless and differing versions of how to be happy, when the key is just in this simple process of not grasping at what we do not have? Even when grasping brings suffering to our death, we keep clinging. We keep wanting what we want, rather than what is.

Remember the story of the monkey trap? There is a process that jungle tribes have for catching wild monkeys. A small cage is built with bars wide enough to allow a monkey to reach in with their hand open. Inside, the hunter puts a banana. But once the monkey reaches in and grabs the banana and holds on to it, the monkey can't get his fist back out through the bars. A wide open hand can slip right out and off goes the monkey, free from capture. But if a monkey grabs the banana and won't let go, he sits there trying to get his hand and the banana out of the cage -- forever. While the monkey struggles, the hunters arrive and simply and easily capture the monkey, who still refuses to release that banana even when it means getting caught. Do we see ourselves in the mirror of this story?

All the teachings, all the philosophies, psychologies, and all the lures of media ads tell us the A-Z of grabbing bananas. They tell us what to grab hold of that will guarantee happiness. Very little tells us how to let go of grasping and to rest in total acceptance of what we have; what **is**, right now.

Granted, we all may have some pretty big obstacles in accepting what **is**. It is hard not to struggle for all those '*some things*' out there that capture our desires. Instead of being present with our own abundant good-fortune, many of us spend a lifetime wishing for what we don't have or we might be grasping tightly to all that we have that we fear is about to go away. As a result, our life is unhappy. We are angry because we feel cheated out of what we think will make us happy, or we feel robbed of what was **rightfully** ours and was lost. We all are likely to have those moments when we feel resentment simply watching the TV show that someone else has chosen rather than watching the one we wanted to see. Or perhaps, we suffer because we long to buy something we want to eat when we are already quite well fed and maybe even overweight. Even those with much can make themselves miserable by grasping at little things.

At the same time, miraculously, we all have the capacity to find perfection and happiness in the most challenging of circumstances. I know, and I bet you do, too, some people who live with life situations that appear to be unimaginably painful, and yet that person is generous instead of complaining. That person dying of cancer and living with great pain says they are grateful for the gift of each day. We know those who have lived horrific childhoods of trauma yet they dedicate their lives to helping other suffering kids. For many of you too, this present, the **is** that we are asked to accept, might be a body filled with pain and perhaps moving towards death. For some, what **is** is a brain that is out-of-balance and a biochemistry that initiates uncontrollable thoughts of anger, depression, or unbearable anxiety. For some, what **is** is a life in a war zone or abuse in our own home. For some, what **is** is hunger. Or it is the loss of our home, loved ones, and safety.

These are great challenges. Do not judge yourself when feelings arise of longing for relief of suffering. The process of accepting what **is** is a lifelong challenge to live in the NOW. Little by little, we grow into this challenge and purify our clinging and grasping. Eventually, we find that we can rest in the NOW. We do see the happiness and joy and maybe even the sacred in what **is**. It is not only saints and Buddhas who can do this great feat. They are all just folks like us. Perhaps some have had the blessings to be born with a broader view or to appreciate a more subtle sense of fulfillment, but if we look at the laws of karma, that too comes from planting seeds of non-attachment that have grown into this capacity to be fully present and happy in what is. Like our monkey with the banana, some let go more easily and quickly because they see that bigger picture. They know the results of attachment. They see the consequences of clinging. They know there are more bananas elsewhere.

What allows us to become the flexible monkey? First of all, reading teachings like this **Dhammapada** verse that gives us a bigger picture and tells us to be happy with what is here and now. This verse reminds us that everything we hold on to for our happiness will be gone at some point, so let go easily when the time comes. All that we hold on to will eventually bring us suffering. A new NOW continuously arises full of happiness and joy - and another NOW arises in the next moment - after we have let go of the last one. We are all clinging to rainbow soap bubbles that will pop - but always new ones will arise. We can just sit back and enjoy the display.



Happiness is one of those verses that is good to read every morning as a reminder as we face our day. We all forget and we all cling and we all long for what we do not have - but a simple reminder to let go and see all as those popping bubbles gives us a bigger view. We are each the monkey clinging to the banana in that cage -- and imprisoned by the clinging, not by the cage! All we need to do is let go, our hand slides out, and off we scamper.



A MEDITATION on Happiness

So many promises to guaranteed happiness!! Money, power, sex, relationships, success, health, a fabulous house, a hot car, children to care for us, a release from prison, chocolate...will bring us happiness. Hmmm ... all lies. NONE of these promises will bring happiness for longer than just a short time – if that. Sorry. We all just waste our lives searching for these paths to happiness.

But happiness does exist. You already have it within you. It is like the sun on a foggy day. You look out into the dense fog and if you didn't know better, you would think that there was no sun out there anywhere. When conditions change, the fog lifts and there is the sun. It has always been there but was not perceivable because it was obscured by the fog. When happiness, that rests within us always, is obscured by our thoughts of grasping at how we want our life to be, by fears, judgment, and pushing away all that we do not want, we create the fog that blocks the sunshine of our true heart. We block our innate happiness and joy.

The task is to create the inner circumstances that lift the fog. That means to stop the thinking and grasping at what we think we want. We rest in what *IS*. Then, when we lose that relaxed focus and start grasping again, as we most likely will, see it as the fog reappearing. Time to rest again in the vaster view of self and all that is. Once again, the fog lifts and effortlessly we recreate the circumstances where we may know the sunshine once again.



THE MEDITATION

We dwell happily, free from anxiety; like radiant beings in celestial realms we rejoice in delight.

Here is a way to 'practice' before we begin this meditation practice. If you have a window or a chance to look at the sky, spend a few minutes every time that you can, just gazing up at the sky, especially when you get to have a cloudy day.

I know that some of you do not have a window or any sky view, so please use your memory and imagination.

Begin by resting gently in the awareness that you see the sun in the vast sky and it is not going away, even if it is disappearing periodically behind the clouds. Rest there, gazing at it in the certainty that the sun is in the sky. As far as you can imagine, it will always be there. Watch and feel your profound connection to the sun and your clarity that it is there for our forever. As you watch, the clouds may gently roll in front of the sun, rest there awhile, and then at some point, they will float on and the sun is again revealed. Even if the sun is totally covered up, you know that the sun is still there behind the clouds. You have no doubts or fears. You just wait for its reappearance as you gently watch the clouds moving. There is no attachment to how and when the clouds will move. You just watch. Sometimes you see the sun and sometimes you don't. When the sun appears, let the light of the sun shine and fill you completely. When the sun is obscured, you just rest in what is and you still know that sunlight filling you.

That is our 'practice' teaching. Do this meditation with awareness when you can.

Now - the real 'practice'. As you sit on your meditation cushion, notice the 'clouds' of your life as they float before your true, deep sun in your heart. The light and radiance of your true self. As you do your meditation and gently focus on what arises, it is possible that some of those arisings are like storm clouds. Some might just be big and billowy and they block out the sun for a while. Some are flimsy little streaks of clouds, and some are almost rainbows mingled with clouds. They all merely float by and do not destroy or harm the sun in any way.

In life, our tendency is to attach to those clouds and forget the true and deep sun within. Our tendency may be to focus on the clouds so heavily we don't even remember that there is a sun back there somewhere. When life is really dramatic, our whole focus may be on the thunder, lightening, and fear that the sun will never appear again and life is catastrophic. We cling, we push away, we try to control and manage the flow of the clouds.

When you find yourself controlling the clouds of thoughts in your meditation, remember your meditation on the sky. Notice the clouds but let them float around the sky without grasping at them or pushing them away. Know with absolute certainty that they are just clouds and that the sun is still there. The sun, your happiness and peace, has gone no-where at all! Clouds will continue to arise and dissipate for the rest of our lives and always, the sun is still there and will always be there. It is never harmed by the clouds.

See the sun. Let the light of the sunshine fill you completely. Rest there as long as possible in the bright light.

The brightly shining mind is never absent but is colored by the thoughts and emotions that people put upon it. If you were to see the luminous freedom of this mind, you would cultivate it before any other, keeping it free from all attachments. - Anguttara Nikaya



FROM YOUR LETTERS

The reconstruction of time and space just for your convenience!

Our wonderful Kristopher, who answers all your letters, said that I confuse you by publishing **Dharma Friends** mid-month for the month that is! He is quite right. He

gets letters that ask, "Where is my May issue?" when it is May 10 and it has not yet arrived. You do not know that the May issue will not go out until May 15! Who would have thought? So we are going to restructure the universe to lessen your confusion. In September, I will put September and October issues together into one issue and, suspending the laws of the great calendar, we will have that become one issue and call it October. October **Dharma Friends** will go out to you on September 15. From then on, all issues will go out prior to the month that they are dedicated to. So don't go wondering what happened to your September issue!

Here is another push from Kristopher. He asks that I list holidays for various religious and some secular events each month and you will then know ahead of time when to celebrate. Of course, most you already know most holidays but we can be celebrating them together.

In fact, this month of August (now, however, August 15) we can celebrate the month of RAMADAN with our Muslim friends.

We missed letting you know that in Vajrayana Buddhism, we celebrated Chokhor Dhchen on August 3. But don't put August 3 down on your calendar for Chokhor Duchen 2012, as these Buddhist holidays are selected by the moon, rather than repeated on the same date each year. Chokhor Duchen commemorates the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, Buddha's first teaching, in Deer Park, where he shared the Four Noble Truths.

August 9 is a Jewish holiday - Tisha B'Av. The fast commemorated the destruction of both the First Temple and Second Temple in Jerusalem, which occurred about 656 years apart, but on the same Hebrew calendar date. Accordingly, the day has been called the "saddest day in Jewish history".

For Japanese, the 13, 14, and 15 of August is Obon, or Bon, a 3 day festival for honoring our departed loved ones.

And of course, there is Labor Day, that first Monday of September, the 5th

and a few more things to remind you of

#1 – The Mindful Money Book – is once again, kaput!! We have sent you all of our copies. We may hopefully do another printing but we will have to get the funding first. If you would like a free copy, we can put you on the list, but unfortunately, we have no guarantee of when they will come out

#2 - Jeff's Kids and your heartwarming letters: An Enormous THANK YOU to all who have written. Jeff is our friend who counsels kids in a Juvenile Detention Center. He thought that sharing your thoughts or stories about your journey to prison might benefit kids that are in the same situation that you might have been in once upon a time. Know how much your letters are all appreciated for your stories, your advice, and for being such a wonderful vehicle to reach broken hearts! The healing that is coming from these letters is extraordinary. **If you would like to write a letter to Jeff's Kids the address is CWFA, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708 and put JEFF'S KIDS on the envelope. Keep those letters coming. For those who have written to Jeff's Kids, thank you so much!**

#3 - Meditation Groups - Now, over 55 of you have written to share that you have a meditation group in your prison, the names of your groups and, often, a little bit about your group. This makes us very happy!! We are glad to send certificates to your group celebrating that we offer support and encouragement to all of you! Some of you have written to say that there are no others that you know who practice meditation in your prison and ask if you could please be considered as a group of one. Of course!! We know that in your group of one, we all gather together with you. Keep up all of your wonderful meditation sessions and support for one another. Know how much we appreciate you.



A few thoughts from some of our women readers

Amazingly, but not so much when you consider that the rate of incarcerated women to men is approximately 15 times higher for males than for woman, we have relatively few women on our **Dharma Friends** recipients list. Manal answers most of the letters from our women readers and she took some touching excerpts from the different letters that she has been reading. Here are a few to give you a flavor - and the wisdom - of what these writers are thinking and feeling.

"My feelings are hurt and I am angry right now, so it's better if we don't talk right now. I don't want to hurt you because I am hurting. It feels awkward but is fair to give me time to calm down before acting or speaking." (a wise approach to healing a traumatic event before acting on the next step...)

- "My question to you is how can I incorporate a spiritual approach towards getting out of prison. It is going to take more than what I can do. How do I receive this universal force within, to the point where there is no distinguishing from the force around me?"

- "My words have no date, no time. They are suspended in that other realm where my own words kiss beauty upon my heart. Making it bright with a harsh knowledge that comes from those who live; not once, but many times over. So my words become my beauty, become my heart, become my knowledge expressed into the physical."

- "I don't think life would be such a battle if I could find faith in something other than Just Me."

Night Light

Every Night
comes haunting sorrows
Wasted holidays
and lost tomorrows
Painted grey
my shades of pain
another Christmas
has been stolen away
Seeking starlight
dreams of bliss
Twisted
memories
yesterdays kiss...
... Yesterday's kiss

forget the hollows
patch the voids
bind the hurt
and remember the joys
Light my smile
warmed by tough
take me away for awhile
Can't see enough
can't reach the heavens
and the starlight slipped
Became reacquainted with reality
thought I would burn
Reached out a hand
and found my own.

From Larry Todd: Dear Kristopher, Greetings! I'm pretty busy right now as I'm copying "**The Teaching of Buddha**" by Bukkyo Kyokai by hand for a dying friend (with permission from the publisher.) It's a lot of work, but I am enjoying copying it because it helps me retain the knowledge better and gives me a chance to spread the Dharma. I'm also participating in a joint Tara meditation (daily) until March 5th with Sravasti Abbey in Spokane, WA. They offered me some guided meditations and materials which I felt was very thoughtful. I have a female friend I've known over 22 years and she is terminally ill suffering from stage 4 breast cancer. She writes regularly and I'm trying to help her cope the best I can. When I was a drug addict . . . she fed me. She's great.

I was able to get Shambhala Mountain Center in CO to consider giving her a scholarship for a four day retreat and workshop scheduled in August to help women suffering from cancer to cope and provide refuge. She (my friend) just had a mastectomy and has been suffering extreme physical pain, sickness from chemo, and fighting with insurer's over meds and health care costs. She has lost 20 pounds in 2 weeks. I was also able to work out round trip airfare to CO and back through another friend (Buddhist) and transport to the Mountain Center from the airport and back again.

I have been studying the practice of Tonglen in Kathleen McDonald's book, "**How to Meditate**" and I found it to be a great source for the generation of Bodhicitta. I am a polytheistic believer. I teach Wicca study group here at the prison on Fridays. I absolutely fell in love with Buddhism when I started applying its thought training techniques and meditations. I have made it a way of life and it's really helped me to target and focus in on problem areas in my life, to change my way of thinking and how I treat others . . . as well as to put myself under the microscope (behavior wise.) I got my GED and became a teacher's aide for literacy, adult basic education, and GED prep. I have enjoyed being able to help others. It's rewarding in its own way.

All my life, I've been a taker. Only thing I ever gave anyone was trouble. My behavior led me here consequentially, but here is where Buddha appeared to me and so it has been transformative. It's often times hard to cope with other inmates and officers. There's a mean mug around every corner and you can feel the hate people generate. When I get a newsletter from you that teaches me that the only way to end this cycle is by generating Bodhicitta . . . I put it to the test (which is the real challenge) and when I see this formula work . . . I understand the Truth and value in it and can have faith in it (take refuge.) I want you to know just how much I appreciate your good stewardship and the benefits I receive from it. They are real and lasting. In Wicca, we learn to recognize the finite and mundane world and the other half of it (its opposite) the infinite and spiritual. Since beginning my practice of Wicca and Buddhism . . . I quit smoking (5 years ago now), stopped taking drugs, got my GED with above average scores, and learned how to put others ahead of myself. I've also become mindful of what I eat and my body and even cleaned up my mouth.

Anything you can send me, I will share and help spread the Dharma. I will donate it to our group here, or to a friend who needs it. I realize how valuable resources can be. Again, thank you so much. Namaste! Bright blessings,



Loss of mindfulness is why people engage in useless pursuits, do not care for their own interests, and remain unalarmed in the presence of things which actually menace their welfare. - Buddha

A Letter from the Prison by R.C.

I'm not a number or statistic. I'm just like you! Do you want to be happy? Well, so did I! That is the disease that affects humanity. WANT. Why have we tried so hard to obtain what has been with us all along – LIFE. The time to change is NOW! It's already started by you reading this. As I write, I sit in prison, content, it's where I'm at. Why would I want to be somewhere else? What I'm not content with is the state I was in, the state most of society is continuing by ignoring our problems! We are all ALIVE – BREATHING – the same and yet each one of us has a personality – don't suppress it – it's who you are, the suppression is the want to be someone you're not. I'm here on Earth – just like you – the issue arises when we forget each other – stop looking to the past – the future – change is happening NOW – join it. There are many issue's to cover. I will be staying with the prison system. Come help me help you. The population here is full of destructive emotions, they seep into us as children and now seep out into the world through countless others we come into contact with – STOP INFECTING – there's a different way – peaceful, yet it takes the utmost attention, effort and hope. Stop hating life and see yourself in the people you greet. Help the prison system learn about PROACTIVENESS, SELF-SUSTAINABILITY, COMMUNITY and NATURE. By recognizing the good in life and giving our love, care and support to each other, it in turn multiplies and goes out into the world. By helping ourselves, through helping others, the Earth will become infinitely a happier place. It's not for the weak of heart or someone who's afraid. Are you ready for change? Are you through reading this and starting to LIVE?



From C.D.: *“The problem in our world is that we draw our family circle too small.”*

- *Mother Teresa*

Dear Kristopher, Much metta to you, my friend. The November, 2010 issue of Dharma Friends shed some light in my darkness. Attachment is a critical issue for me personally, but the verse discussing experiencing joy and sorrow, without being possessed by either, was very provocative for me. Anna's reference to the inner wisdom voice also summed up what I consider “God” to be too. The individual aspect of the collective element. Your “ego” illustrations previously and her leader of the

fools comment gave me an insight – isn't the egotistical desire to lead foolishness a root cause of most hatred / divisiveness in the world today? HMMMM. Compassion works for all, right? Much respect,

If we're looking for outer conditions to bring us contentment, we're looking in vain. - Ayya Khema, "Be An Island"

To Buddha by Lincoln Mann

Your advice is what I seek,
Your ideas are what make my mind peak,
I feel the middle path is for me,
For twenty-five centuries,
Your theories have made a great sweep,
Your ideas, on one continent, they could not keep,
My path is becoming somewhat clear,
An emergence is very near,
Goodwill and prosperity will not be beat,
If I have you and your theories to seek,
Being a smart-ass may not be for me,
But being a wise-man, will surely be a truly great feat.

By giving, merit grows, by restraint, hatreds checked. He who is skilled abandons evil things. As greed, hate and folly wane, Nibbanas gained. - Digha Nikaya

Subscription information: We have gladly been offering this newsletter free of charge to those in prisons. We are 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. Sent us an email and you may have your monthly issue free. EMAIL dharmafriends@comcast.net. If you want a paper copy, the fee is \$30 for one year. Mail a check or money order made out to **Compassion Works for All:** and send to **Compassion Works for All, Dharma Friends subscriptions, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, AR. 72217-7708**. This amount covers the subscription for you and a partial subscription for a prisoner. I also want to acknowledge the enormous generosity of many of those in prisons who have sent stamps and letters of support and appreciation. Far more important than anything material are the letters and notes that say that you are benefiting from being part of this sangha of **Dharma Friends**. I think that many feel less alone on their journey because we are connected beyond all time and space to each other.

PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOUR ADDRESS CHANGES.

Kristopher says that he is getting many requests for back issues. Some of these are because of mail room errors but some are because we are behind on current addresses. If you change your address, please send a note to LINDA to give us your new address and she can send your next issue to your new location. That saves us money and you from having to write for your back issues.

Thanks so much for your help!

SOME NEW OPTIONS: We are always trying to be mindful of \$\$\$ in order to keep publishing our newsletter, as we are always in search of additional funding. **Here are some ways that you can help us.**

If you are receiving **Dharma Friends** but do not read it or know someone else who does not read their issues, either donate them to your library, or write and tell us to take you off the **Dharma Friends** list. Now, some have written and said that others need them more than they do so take their name off. Don't be too generous!!

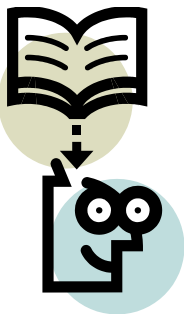
WE WANT YOU TO KEEP GETTING DHARMA FRIENDS IF IT IS HELPFUL TO YOU!

If you have family or friends who might like to receive **Dharma Friends** as well, they can just let us know and we will put them on the list. It is important for us to keep those in prisons connected to society, and most especially to their families and friends. We greatly value the opportunity to bring a loving community of support to those who are connected to people in prison as they are often made to feel uncomfortable by society. If those you love receive **Dharma Friends** too, think of the common growth that you would share and the bond that could develop. So, you might suggest **Dharma Friends** as something your friends and family might like to donate to and receive via email.

Anger or hatred is like a fisherman's hook. It is very important for us to ensure that we are not caught by it. - HH the Dalai Lama

Book of Knowledge - Omar's dream -

our friend Omar dreamed of a process of education so that all of us can become all that we can be



Do you get a daily newspaper? If it is possible, I suggest reading a newspaper every day. Read the news of what is going on around the world. If you don't know the city or country where an event is happening, look it up in an Atlas in your library. Become familiar with world issues because they affect us all.

But then read about national issues too. Learn about the political positions of different parties and why they support the positions that they take. Even if you can't vote, you can become well-educated about the politicians who control your destiny, and the programs that help or hurt your family. Don't just support those positions you learned from those around you, find your own beliefs and be able to defend them.

Thirdly, read about local news. Learn who your local representatives would be if you lived out in the free world again. What do they do to support your causes and beliefs - or not. What are local crime statistics? What is the poverty rate? How are the schools doing? What needs to be fixed? And How? Read ALL of the Letters to the Editor to know how folks think and feel. I am so pleased and proud of you folks in prisons when I see your letters in our local Letters to the Editor column. You are writing letters that are educating the people.

There should be a daily newspaper in your library. If not, ask if they would order a subscription for all of you to share!

From Daniel Costa: Dear *Dharma Friends*, Hi! It was so cool to once again get the latest *DF* newsletter (#171.). Not only was I blessed with it's enlightening "content" (as usual) but was also touched to see my last letter I sent to you likewise included! I hope it was a positive addition. Needless to say, I shared it with the participants in our Choices program, and they too were blessed and excited to see our program being shared.

I'm writing today to share with you and your readers my experience as a Christian who also practices the Buddha's Path of Enlightenment, suspecting that I'm not the only one. And because of the sense of "taboo" concerning the Buddha's teaching in the Christian Church as a whole, I thought it might be a blessing to other "searching" Christians, to share my own personal experience. So here I go!

First of all, being a Spiritual Aspirant who believes in the attribute of Holiness and Righteousness when it comes to the "character" of God. And likewise, being one who has seen first hand the inherent nature of man's disposition towards self-centeredness, even at the expense of any thought of God, I had no problem with believing in and receiving the Redemptive Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Believing that not only was Jesus Christ a wise and enlightened teacher, but also the Son of God, sent to "restore" fallen mankind with their creator, God. These truths I am convinced of! But when it came to a form of truth concerning just "how" I might be able to no longer live my life as a "cause" of pain and suffering to others, well, this I was hard-pressed to find taught in today's Christian Church. Not giving up the hope to make a difference when it came to all the pain and suffering in our world, I decided to begin studying the Buddha's Path of Enlightenment, even at the expense of losing the fellowship of many Christians in my Church! I must admit, at first this "cold shoulder" treatment bothered me, but the more I was willing to study the Buddha's Path, the more I saw taught the "selflessness" that Jesus shared! And more importantly, the more I "lived" the Buddha's Dharma, the more I saw my deep desire to no longer be a cause of pain and suffering in this world!

So, I share all this to say: If you are a Christian who is thinking about checking into the Buddha's Path of Enlightenment, but also finding yourself maybe a little hesitant due to some "flack" from other Christians who are still "stuck in the box", I wholeheartedly encourage you to follow your heart! For how can no longer being the "cause" of pain and suffering in this world be an "ungodly" thing? Sincerely,

From Cliff Smith: . . . A thought . . . *Let a pig and a boy have everything they want and you will get a good pig and a bad boy.*

From Antoine Beck: To all of you at *Dharma Friends*, Thank you for taking the time to write and make sure that I am receiving the newsletters and have gotten the welcome packet. Yes, I am not having any problems with the mail. It is so wonderful the way that you elaborate on the *Dhammapada* and you seem to connect so well with your readers. You surely hit home with me, and that is something that can make huge changes in the minds of your readers, newsletter by newsletter. Sometimes, it can be the very small deeds that inspire us to make the big steps towards Truth. Transitioning from negative to positive is a fight in itself, but accepting the reality that there is no negative side or positive side and finding that peace of mind that shows the path of clarity to those who seek it. Again, thank you for your time, patience, and insight. Your work is truly appreciated. Thank you,

p.s. *The Dhammapada*, verse 4 – *Flowers*, inspired me to write two poems:

Where's the Teacher by Antoine Beck

What life is, what life isn't,
In search of the Truth, it's only the beginning,
The root of our problems, attached to the past,
Honesty with Self, our guide on the Path,
Stillness of mind, evolution of thought,
One who knows it all, psychologically distraught,
Stuck in our ways, stubborn to change,
Only to suffer a lifetime of pain,
Focus on the positive, and keep the mind steady,
The Teacher will appear, when the student is ready.

Inner Peace by Antoine Beck

Into my own, the coming of age,
inner treasures of my mind,
Life is a book and everyday is a page,
A lesson learned if you can find,
One's true purpose, so choose to embrace,
Illusions of desire can lead astray,
Open eyes can see the Path,
A closed mind is lost in space,
Life is love, compassion and patience,
If you give, you shall receive,
So be at peace within the mind,
And find that Truth will surpass all things.



From C. M: Dear Kristopher and hello again. I wrote a short note a week or so ago, hopefully I can write more and more clearly this time. Thank you again for the kind postcard. I have it taped on my wall next to my bed with a couple other pictures and a poem by Mother Teresa. This is where I sit to meditate. My

name is C.E.L.M., though I'm much more prefer to be called Ruin by my close friends and associates, though I have to put my legal name on the envelope to mail this letter. The CWFA and SYDA foundations have kindly and generously taken the time and money to write to me and send me lessons, thank you. I thank you with an appreciation that can only come from knowing loneliness and despair as I have, sincerely I think you for reaching out to a suffering world to offer solace in clarity that can come from an enlightened perspective through illumination of the existence which flows from within each of us. I have learned much in the last two years since I was arrested. Since I'd felt like I had killed my life, my mind had snapped but broken the facade it built up against my true being through the anguish I felt deep within. I became conscious of what I'd never been conscious of before, though I'd lived it as a child. There are surely other ways that I could have been healed? But the fire does indeed purify the gold. It's just pathetic that the world we live in has gotten to this point where it's too often the only way we can find the essence, the truth. This is just a small bit of who I am. Please feel free to ask me anything, only in honesty and truth can we really learn anything.

I ascribe myself to not knowing any particular religion, but I find myself growing more spiritual (if that is the right word to use). Beyond the many impurities in corruption that had seeped into the religions of ancient times in modern day - what then is (was) the point of any religion anyway? I guess religion should've been a path or map to finding one's own peace; to serve as a beacon to the lost and to strengthen the weak and easily confused, and to multiply the blessings of peace and others that are likewise enlightened. To find the peace and to wait patiently instead of feeding the frenzy or distraction from death. That we are infinite creatures but existence is not. That reality, whether awake or sleeping, is still only a figment of our imagination. That nothing really matters at all, so it gives us the absolute freedom to focus on finding peace - even happiness -through living can grow in life rather than against it.

I don't know a lot about Buddhism. I very much like what I've read so far in the SYDA lessons. I agree 100% with every single thing. Maybe not for the same exact reasons but essentially so, I can't really explain it without coming across as crazy, but all of the books I've been receiving and reading have been enlightening me in the way of the SYDA lessons. I delve deeply into religion and philosophy, sciences and such also. I could tell you about all of the different books I've been reading these last two years, but I will save that for another time. I see all religions as symbolic, parable teachings about life, reality and existence. Am I far from correct? Is there really a big monkey or giant blue eight armed person flying around in the sky or space? No. But religions such as this have been relied upon since the dawn of man to relay symbolically to the next generation how to live inside and with others. Like the Norse mythology, paganism, Greek and Roman gods, etc even the Biblical religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) are symbolically just one God and one act of God, and a demigod (Jesus) and avatars (the prophets, etc). The structure is all the same.

By this point you might be shaking your head but please don't pity me as a hopeless atheist. Though I don't believe in a big giant ghost sitting on a cloud pointing his finger and making things move like a great conductor, now I understand deeply the truth behind the idea. I believe I've come closer to the essence of existence by taking it all into a whole from inside ourselves and out, that the entirety is one whole; nothing can be separate, beyond, behind or a part. There's no direction as such but that everything, all existence is interconnected and functions like the inside of a clock yet there's no purpose such as the clock being to tell time. Life, existence, just is and is infinitely and without boundary or limit or definition. There's no end because there was no beginning. Existence extends forever after us but also flows infinitely before us. The humans' failure to comprehend intuitively this simple truth, because of the ignorance and fear of the society he's born into, causes the deviation; causes the suffering. The enlightenment of becoming one is only because we become lost from the essence of our being somehow, when we were never supposed to feel or think ourselves separate in the first place. Nature wasn't intended for the selfishness infected in us. Nature is only a perspective of a side of all existence. There is infinitely much more of that than I will likely never be able to glimpse but I smile while I'm writing this because I AM.

My new friend, am I too complicated in hoping for such simplicity? It seems that though I know the ocean I cannot help but be moved by the waves. We end; how can this be? Is this what I've needed, the loving kindness of others who have found things that are not yet brilliant to my being? I am in a building full of humans, guards and officers, who are blind, confused, lost, empty and suffering. I tried to help when I can. But I feel like an alien, so alone, because the darkness of mind that everyone lives in is to normal. There is much that I don't know still, because I am still hungry. I figure, if I've learned all that I can then I'd finally feel satisfied. I don't think Life Works that way though. There must be a lesson to be learned why hunger is the primary instinct and humans, regardless of how much one does to make it disappear, it never goes away. Curious.

So my dear Kristopher, in this brief letter, I hope that I have accurately expressed my heartfelt desire to share your friendship. I promise every person I write or speak with that I will respond sincerely. I am going through some tough times but I will survive. There isn't a lot of hope in this world, but I don't think it's all really hopeless - within the most desolate wasteland one can still find beauty. Ruin

Our very nature is Buddha, and apart from this nature there is no other Buddha. - The Sutra of Hui Neng

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From Mark Blain: Peace Was Won !

With an eager heart and a will on fire
I sought to win my great desire
“Peace will be mine,” I cried
But life grew bitter in the endless strive.

My heart was weary, my pride wounded deep
To heaven I cried, “God give me peace”
The shimmering stars glittered no reply
So I said to God, “I must die.”

Broken at last, I bowed my head
forgetting all my- self and said
“Whatever comes, God's will be done”
And at that moment, peace was won.

A man in the Navy deployed in WWII, during the height of the Pacific Conflict, wrote these words just before being killed. He gave the poem to my Dad, who made it back alive. He allowed me to read it when I was very young, and I've never forgotten them. It's strange how they (the words) now have great meaning for me, even though they were penned during a very different context and conflict (my conflict was with my-self, now there's only BREATHING.)

You really have to know your own fundamental mind before you can stop and rest. If you know your mind and arrive at the fundamental, that is like space merging with space. - Ta-tu



Dharma Friends

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Our friend, the Rev. Susan Sims Smith is going to India and wants you to come along! Check this out.

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If you students of the Way wish to become Buddhas, you need study no doctrines whatever, but learn only how to avoid seeking for and attaching yourselves to anything. - Huang Po, Zen Teaching of Huang Po



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- Carl Jung

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart."

- Helen Keller

"The beauties of the highest heavens and the marvels of the most sublime realms are all within the heart; this is where the perfectly open and aware spirit concentrates."

- The Secret of the Golden Flower: The Classic Chinese Book of Life

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