



offers you **Dharma Friends**

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

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The Dhammapada
The teachings of the Buddha



Verse 11: Old Age

Spoken in the Jetavana Grove:

1. Why is there laughter, why merriment, when this world is on fire? When you are living in darkness, why don't you look for light?
2. This body is a painted image, subject to disease, decay and death, activated by thoughts that come and go. What joy can there be for him who sees that his white bones will be cast away like gourds in the autumn?

Spoken in the Jetavana Grove to Rupananda:

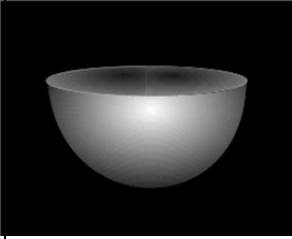
3. Around the bones is built a house, plastered over with flesh and blood, in which we swell with pride and pretense, old age and death. Even the chariot of a king loses its glitter in the course of time; so too the body loses its health and strength. But goodness does not grow old with the passage of time.

Spoken in the Jetavana Grove concerning Laludaya:

4. A man who does not learn from life grows old like an ox: his body grows, but not his wisdom.
5. I have gone through many rounds of birth and death, looking in vain for the builder of this body. Heavy indeed is birth and death again and again! But now I have seen you, housebuilder, you shall not build this house again. Its beams are broken; its dome is shattered: self-will is extinguished; nirvana is attained.

Spoken at Rsipatana:

6. Those who have not practiced spiritual disciplines in their youth pine away like old cranes in a lake without fish. Like worn-out bows they lie in old age, sighing over the past.



A few thoughts from anna on this **Dhammapada** verse: **Old Age**

Here is a short and very summarized version of the often told story of Shakyamuni Buddha's early life. As a young and protected prince, he began to have hints that the ordinary people of the countryside were not living lives like all the happy, healthy, beautiful people that lived within the palace walls. His father, the King, had wanted to shield Siddhartha, (as was his name prior to becoming the enlightened Shakyamuni Buddha), from the horrors of life. When the prince was born, a prophet had predicted that little Siddhartha would become a great king or a holy man among the people. The King wanted his son to carry on in his tradition as a warrior king so he tried to protect the boy from anything that would lead to his becoming a holy man. Thus, he created a perfect world within the castle. But one day, Siddhartha secretly asked his servant about the bigger world. He was told that yes, indeed. Outside the gates, all was not quite so perfect. The prince wanted to see what the real world was like for himself, so he convinced his servant to help him sneak into the village. On his first trip, he was very disturbed to see a man who was ill. He was weak and suffering, lying by the side of the road. He asked his servant if anyone, even him, could become ill. Yes, he was told. Almost everyone gets ill at some point in life.

Plagued by thoughts of the lives of those in the ordinary world, Siddhartha snuck out again to visit the village. This time he noticed how some of the people were frail, hobbling with a cane, and gray headed. He asked if these were sick people too? No, his servant friend told him. They were aging people who were coming close to death.

"Does aging happen to everyone?" Siddhartha asked. "Even me?"

" Yes," he was told. "Everyone gets old and eventually dies."

He escaped twice more from the palace into the village. On one excursion, he saw a man who had died. The family carried his corpse through the streets to his cremation. His family members were crying and grieving at their loss. Then, on the next visit, after much pondering of these great misfortunes that befall all beings, Siddhartha came across an answer to set all these great concerns somewhat at rest. He saw a holy man that exuded peace and equanimity. Again, he asked his servant friend about this most unusual man and was told that he practiced the holy teachings. The ascetic had found transcendence beyond suffering. Siddhartha knew then that he too must follow such a path and attain this great state of awakening so that he could help all suffering beings. Shortly thereafter, he kissed his wife and tiny, newborn son goodbye while they slept and he left the palace forever. He went into the forest to join the meditators and to study with the holy teachers. Of course, there was not yet a study of "Buddhism" because he had not yet achieved any meditative insight. The teachings of the time were ancient Hindu practices. After five years of intense practice and study where he almost died many times, he achieved that state of meditative realization called enlightenment. Later, he gave the teachings we now follow.

But, the story of Siddhartha is helpful to read because it is our story too. We all face the very difficult issues of illness, aging, dying, and death. These things are hard challenges! Life is hard. How many of you out there have some aging issues? Our verse, *Old Age*, is what he taught us about aging.

And here's the task. For all of these life challenges, we can also be appreciative that they bring us face-to-face with 'growth opportunities'. These, and all of our life challenges, can motivate us to follow our own unique path to transcendence. We too can escape from a fantasy that life should be easy and all will be well. Old age and all of our sufferings are the teachings that open us to a view that we are more than our struggles with life. All of these challenges are our pathways to know our spiritual essence in whatever tradition that we follow.

Why is that? Our greatest pain to our ego, our view through ordinary self, comes when we are at risk of losing what we are most attached to. It is very sobering and helpful to stay very aware of what we fear losing. Only when that possibility is undeniable, do we do the real work. Aging gives us a daily meditation on losing our most precious possession - our body. We often take pride in how we look when we are handsome and youthful. We might flaunt our narcissistic glory while living a life of great health, beauty, strength and vitality. But there is a day that comes creeping along quite swiftly when we look up and we have lost our youthful form and our strength. We have to come to terms with this upcoming loss of our body whenever we look in the mirror, or wake up with aches and pains, or feel old and feeble, lose our memory, and so much more. We know that death is racing towards us. We all travel this path of old age no matter how much we try to deny it, unless we die early and suddenly.

Our verse reminds us: "***Those who have not practiced spiritual disciplines in their youth pine away like old cranes in a lake without fish. Like worn-out bows they lie in old age, sighing over the past.***"

But, like Siddhartha, we gain enormously if we use our youth finding a path beyond our attachments and we use this lifetime as the path for our awakening. If we do practice a spiritual discipline that brings us wisdom, old age is one of our greatest teachings. Instead of bemoaning aging, it can become our best reminder that death is truly coming and we need to be ready. This is a very important teaching. It is a reminder to practice, practice, practice. In this practice, we find who we are beyond our body and awaken to All that we are, even after we die and leave this body.

Secondly, it is a teaching because we prepare for our death. The time of our death becomes a meditation where we learn to have a peaceful transition out of this body and on to whatever comes next. For those who believe that the time of death is an opportunity to enter into the most subtle and sacred states of awareness while fully awake, then life is a time of preparation. We can practice in each meditation session and each night as we go to sleep as a rehearsal for dying. We 'practice' during these times of transition of going deeper in our meditative awareness and as we fall deeper into sleep states. We leave our body behind during these transitions too, but we come back again after our session or after our night of rest. When we die, that body stays there inert as we go on.

What is helpful as we go through our days experiencing our aging? Every day, all along the way, we get to ask ourselves - Who am I if I am not my body? Who am I after this body turns to dust and I go on to whatever comes next. Like Siddhartha, we can use life as our meditation practice along with deep meditative states of awareness. The awakening of enlightened or transcendent states of consciousness is possible for each of us. It is not an easy task, but living life is not easy either for anyone. We should use the opportunity of this journey to achieve our highest possible realized self so as not to waste this long lifetime that passes all too swiftly.



A MEDITATION on Old Age Who Am I if I am not my body???

The answer in your heart is your best guide! Stay aware as best you can
Your meditation time can be 10 minutes or an hour, but better to start with shorter times that you enjoy than to make it a grueling ordeal that you never want to do again! Find what works best for you. Now, dedicate what you accomplished to your ever-growing equanimity and to help others with the peace that you are finding.

NOW, let's add a few meditation thoughts about Old Age.

After you have had a few minutes of silently watching your breath, add a contemplation: ***I am growing old. One day, I will die.*** This is not meant to be depressing or to set you up for an early death. It is the truth. You will die someday and every day brings us closer to our death, whenever that might be. Notice the signs that you are aging. A wrinkle here or a gray hair there, or perhaps you are really becoming quite fragile. Do not panic. Just sit in meditation and let the feelings sink in. Make peace with this awareness. Become comfortable with "not knowing" when, but knowing that that day of death will come.

Notice your breathing. Notice your stress throughout your body. Relax and let go of stress and worries, as best you can. You may close your eyes or leave them open.

Take a moment to dedicate the next few minutes of meditation time to benefit yourself in achieving your highest realization and to benefit all beings. Now, just breathe. Breathe in as you slowly watch your lungs expand, your belly rise, and then slowly exhale. Just watch and just breathe. If it helps to stay more focused on your breath by counting each in-breath, count your breaths to 5. Then count again to 5. Staying focused to the count of 5 breaths is actually pretty hard at first, so don't worry about not going higher. Count 5 breaths and then start again.

As you keep your focus on your breath, it may well be that thoughts will come flooding in to distract you. While distracted, you might start wiggling, or without noticing, you may go off on a tangent of thoughts until 10 minutes later you realize you were day-dreaming or having an imaginary dialogue with someone. No Problem. Just start again with a focus on your breath. Each time it gets easier and you can stay focused longer. Just breathe.

Housekeeping:

#1 – The Mindful Money Book – If you would like a free copy of Linda's book, Mindful Money to help you get an excellent education in finances in this concise course, write to us (address on the back page) and put on your envelope- ATTN: Linda. For the **Money Book.**

#2 - If you have a Meditation Group that would like to receive our love, prayers and support, write and give us your group name, the name of your institution, and the participants' names, if you wish. We will send your group a Compassion Works for All/Dharma Friends CERTIFICATE affirming that you are a part of our sangha too. We will be sending prayers out daily to all of you (of course we do that to all of you already...) Write for your group certificate and put *Attn. Linda - Meditation group* on the envelope.

#3 - Jeff's Kids and your heartwarming letters: 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!

#4 - From Chelle: I want to extend a big THANK YOU, to those of you that have sent in your thoughts and ideas regarding the development of a post-release program. While this project is in its very early stages, the letters I've received will serve as an important building block in the future for developing such a program. I want to encourage all of you to continue sharing with me, those thoughts and ideas about how such a program could work, how you think a support person or group could best help you and others upon release. When you write in, be sure to put on the envelope "**Chelle's REACH project**". Once again, THANKS so much for participating and being a part of developing this program!

From Your Letters



Let your actions be like clouds going by; the clouds going by are mindless. Let your stillness be as the valley spirit; the valley spirit is undying. When action accompanies stillness and stillness combines with action, then the duality of action and stillness no longer arises. Pei-chien

From M.B.: My Dharma Friends, Hello . . . before I begin, I first owe my gratitude . . . **THANK YOU !!!** I say **THANK YOU** from the bottom of my heart, for simply becoming a piece of my life, a light penetrating the darkness, when I need people who really care, tools, and direction . . . the most . . . our paths crossed for a reason . . . I owe more thanks than my words express, because as the air inside these walls becomes suffocating and unbearable . . . Dharma Friends, your compassion and meditation practices provided by you . . . becomes a breath of fresh air inside these hard times, to help me feel strengthened to get through one day's battles, and be ready for tomorrow . . . Dharma Friends is motivation . . . society sees a mistake, locks us up, then turns their backs on us, to see we are still people . . . my heart is heavy and the ache in my chest seems to be a building pain within the confinements of my chest . . . people like me, but me personally, have heart and honor . . . unnoticeable by the world because they are blind to the people behind the concrete enclosing them . . .

I received and read the latest issue of the newsletter yesterday !!! I studied and meditated, submersed myself into deep thought . . . it's amazing how you understand the need for love and compassion worldly, as well as the evil hovering around . . . evil has influenced me all my life . . . I had choices, but chose wrong, my mind was conflicted and I failed miserably at being a father, son and man . . . at night I sometimes lay in my rack and commit my mind and heart to become bitter as a person, I've always been taught men are with no emotions, but I'm definitely not a tough inmate, I pull my blankets over my head and then tears somehow escape my eyes . . . why? Because I was lost to evil, to all the wrong things and blind like society is now to my potential . . . but change is happening, has been for a long while and Dharma Friends has become a tool in which inspires me to continue . . .



From A.B.: A SENIOR CITIZEN JOKE -

A little silver-haired lady calls her neighbor and says, "Please come over here and help me. I have a killer jigsaw puzzle, and I can't figure out how to get started."

Her neighbor asks, "What is it supposed to be when it's finished?"

The little silver haired lady says, "According to the picture on the box, it's a rooster."

Her neighbor decides to go over and help with the puzzle. She lets him in and shows him where she has the puzzle spread all over the table.

He studies the pieces for a moment, then looks at the box, then turns to her and says, "First of all, no matter what we do, we're not going to be able to assemble these pieces into anything resembling a rooster."

He takes her hand and says, "Secondly, I want you to relax. Let's have a nice cup of tea," and then he said with a deep sigh, "Let's put all the Corn Flakes back in the box."

By renouncing samsara, we renounce our habitual grasping, unhappy minds. And by renouncing samsara, we embrace our potential for enlightenment. - Lama Zopa Rinpoche, "Transforming Problems Into Happiness"

From M.A.: Dear folks at Dharma Friends, I just wanted to let you know that I am very grateful to get my first newsletter. I really appreciated it and was very pleasantly surprised at your prompt response. I also loved seeing your friendly pictures on the front page of the welcome packet. I cannot express enough my appreciation for the teachings of the Buddha. A few nights ago, I was sitting on my bunk, enjoying my evening meditation and sticking up like a sore thumb in the sea of beds. As sometimes happens, one of the other inmates walked by and shouted out to heckle me: "If he had been doing that on the outside, he wouldn't be in here !"

I almost lost my composure and almost burst out laughing. He was so right !!! Thankfully, now I am training myself to sit with all my crazy emotions and calmly observe them rise and fall. I do not have to be dominated by my lust or any other thing, emotion, thought, circumstance, or whatever. It is impermanent (anicca) and another symptom of dukkha and it is not myself (anatta) - - it does not have to control anything. I do not need to fight or feed it, just gently observe it.

I just finished reading Pema Chodron's Start where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living and it really reenforced this idea of using your defects as opportunities to grow. This impressed me so much that I distilled it into a gatha to chant when I start getting tangled in life:

"Don't express or repress,
Simply rest. Feel the Breath.
In and out. Deep and slow.
Feelings come. Feelings go."

I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Real love is not based on attachment, but on altruism. In this case, your compassion will remain as a humane response to suffering as long as beings continue to suffer. - His Holiness the Dalai Lama

From Gary Hallford: Greetings! Those who have read Dharma Friends for some time will recognize my name. Whether they agree with my interpretation of the Dharma in immaterial; we all make an assessment based upon our own personal background[s]. When I write, I try to incorporate not only the religious and philosophical aspects of prison life, but one of political awareness and unwillingness to surrender personal morality to State repression. Often, I've felt like a lone cry in the wilderness of ignorance, but every now and then, a glimmer of hope is emitted from someone I'll probably never meet . . .

In Issue # 162, **R.F.** Contributed a poignant essay from which I have gathered both peace and confidence in knowing I'm not alone. His quotations from both His Holiness, the Karmapa, and His holiness the Dalai Lama, give further credence to both my work, and my struggle to empower others to **SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER.**

Furthermore, I, too, am a "Combat Paralegal," and choose not to waste my time and effort in fruitless pursuits to benefit only one person; instead, I focus on challenging the repressive actions that only feed recidivism. To find another who seeks only "the Truth," is refreshing and brings hope for the future.

Another thing of note is the different paths we follow: While R.F. Purports to follow Tibetan Shambala practice, I lean more toward the Zen-Taoist principles. As noted in previous editions, I tend to consider myself a "**Guerrilla Buddhist**," eschewing ritual, and seeking only to provide assistance to those who need; guidance for those who ask; and compassion for those who exist. It ain't

perfect, but it beats doin' nothing. Regardless of the title of the practice, our general goals are similar enough to consider each other as "allies" . . .

R.F., please accept this acknowledgment of your pro-active empathy, and continue your struggle[s] with Dharma-mind behind your every action. Much like they say in the 12 step programs, you need only to focus on getting through today. Having future strategy is beneficial, but continue to focus on the present. Having the wisdom to properly challenge inane policies, often creates a personal threat; having the courage to press onwards, shows great dedication and compassion for all beings. **Bravo!** May peace and justice coexist,

By charity, goodness, restraint, and self-control men and woman alike can store up a well-hidden treasure -- a treasure which cannot be given to others and which robbers cannot steal. A wise person should do good -- that is the treasure which will not leave one. - "Khuddhaka Patha"



this photo is by Don Neems

From J. F.: Dear **Dharma Friends**, I have a few questions about Buddhism that I'm hoping you may be able to answer, or at least clarify, for me if you could. I've read a few different books on basic Buddhist teachings, although I'm somewhat confused as to which "school" or tradition of Buddhism I should be focusing on.

1. What are the major differences between the Mahayana, Theravada, and the Vajrayana traditions?

From anna - all of these answers are greatly abbreviated and there are long books written to explain better than I, but here are the thumbnail explanations to get you started. You read of the 'baskets' of three Buddhist traditions which are the Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. These are the primary traditions out of which teachings are offered. Theravadin is a lineage that evolved from the Hinayana tradition. The Hinayana is the foundational teachings of Buddhism that is in some way incorporated into all other Buddhist teachings. It is out of the Hinayana that we take our basic refuge vows that begin our path of Buddhist study and practice. These are the earliest teachings that were transcribed from the verbal lineage teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha about 150 years after his death. Mahayana teachings incorporate the refuge vows and then add a vow and a commitment to achieve the state of enlightenment in order to benefit all beings everywhere and until all beings are themselves liberated from pain. The Mahayana is built upon the Hinayana and is not better or worse, but it adds this dimension of the Bodhisattva vow to benefit others. The next unfolding in the teachings adds the Vajrayana which is often called tantric Buddhism. Hinayana and Mahayana teachings are incorporated into the Vajrayana but new aspects of teachings are added. The tantric deity practices help us to transform our ordinary view of reality into one that is more subtle and sacred. At this tantrayana or Vajrayana level, one needs to be working with a teacher who will give the empowerments for these specific practices and teachings. There are dimensions of teachings beyond the Vajrayana, but at this level of teachings which are so subtle, one works directly in a one-to-one relationship with a teacher to make sure these meditation practices are not misunderstood. It is said that the Buddha gave all these teachings simultaneously and the hearer understood what was said at the level where the words were meaningful to them.

2. How do I know which one to study and practice?

*anna continues - it is likely that just as you have found your way to your own spiritual path, whether Buddhist study and practice or another tradition, your good karma has also brought the teachings to you that are the right ones for you in your own evolution. Consider that within you is your own wisdom guide that is inseparable from the Buddha and from your perfect teachers (even if you have never met them in person). That inner wisdom tells you what is right for you - or not right. Trust **you** always and first. Now, if ego gets into the mix and says - "I want the very highest and most impressive teachings so everyone will think I am ENLIGHTENED and a great teacher! - be suspicious that that is NOT your inner wisdom voice. When, however, a book lands in your hands or a teacher comes to your unit and when you read or hear their words, tears come to your eyes and your heart opens, then you are very likely being told to study and practice that which is appearing before you.*

3. Does it matter?

so yes, -- it does matter but there is not so much planning or intellectual decision making that can or needs to be done. Trust that what is right for you will come to you and it will feel right.

4. What are the obligations/requirements of the lay practitioner, as opposed to monks?

...if you feel that you want to make a commitment to the path of Buddhism, and if there is a Buddhist teacher who is ordained to give vows in the tradition that you are drawn to, then they will also give you the obligations and requirements that come with the vows that you choose to take. Usually, the first step on the path is to take your refuge vows in your tradition. The vows are: I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma (the sacred teachings), and I take refuge in the sangha (Buddhist community).

If there is no teacher who can give you refuge, you can take refuge in your own private ceremony. Set up a sacred space as you can, have an embodiment of the Buddha (a picture or a statue or even a flower or something sacred to you), a holy teaching of some kind like a book or practice text, and an offering like a bowl of water, a food offering, or something that to you symbolizes a gift to all Buddhas and all practitioners. In your own way, read those refuge vows that I just shared with you and make a deep commitment to follow the path until you are enlightened. I would add that your vow can be to always practice kindness and to do no harm to any being at any time as much as possible.

5. Are there any initiation ceremonies or rituals that I'm required to attend and/or participate in in order to become a Buddhist? ...

...see above....

6. And finally, what must I do in order to begin meditation practice?

*... meditate... do a few minutes every day and let your meditation time grow longer as you are ready. Start with a basic practice of being mindful of your breath. The other practice is to live your life practicing kindness. It takes years and years of a basic practice of stabilizing our minds before we can move on to more subtle practices. But if a teacher comes along that you feel drawn to, listen to all they say and practice the teachings that they give you. Do our meditation in **Dharma Friends** too as they feel right to you. This is a long practice path but do it every day and you will see yourself having more and more awareness of your true nature.*

I sincerely thank you and appreciate your time and trouble in helping me. May you be happy and healthy and blessed – your friend,



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.



Can You Imagine? By Cliff Smith

Can you imagine – living in a place or an environment where absolutely no one cares about you?

Can you imagine – living in a place where you're merely a number?

Can you imagine – growing old and gray all by yourself without one single friend or companion?

Can you imagine – time going by and no one even remembers you existed?

Can you imagine – Christmas, Thanksgiving and New Years passing without any one even bothering to mention your name during the holiday?

Can you imagine – Living miserably until you are 70, 80 or even 90 years old when all of your family has long been dead?

I don't want to imagine any of this either -

Trust has nothing to do with moral courage. It occurs when we have nowhere else to turn, when we reach the end of our need to control. - Rodney Smith, "Lessons From the Dying"

Personal Insight on Karma By Christopher Lone

If I could just start by saying I wish all of you, and your families, from suffering at once. My praise to each of you who I strive to cherish more than a wish-fulfilling jewel.

Karma is not a duel.

Normally when we are first introduced to the Dharma, we gain an understanding of good Karma vs bad Karma and that is reasonable. This is fine at that beginning point for we have yet to understand what is actually positive. In fact, everything that leads towards enlightenment is positive. Subsequently, when our minds are clear in understanding experience:

All Karma is positive.

This has been a hard one for me to grasp. I'm guessing that's why it's been the most powerful of the realizations I've been able to grasp.

So, I'm walking down the hallway. I'm six days over my minimum. I've been paroled and I'm just waiting for a bed date. I get into a confrontation with an officer. The officer writes me up for, among other things, threatening a C/O. My parole is lost. I've done 270 days disciplinary and now a few days shy of 60 administrative custody. Negative Karma right? Wrong !!!

In fact, I am pleased for this wonderful opportunity I have been given! So much extra time to refine my practice. Plus, how else would I have gotten this chance to share this experience. Possibly assisting someone else in their path (which is my ultimate goal).

Finally, I have to make this clear. Often, when I read messages by my leader Lama Zopa Rinpoche, I notice he refers to negative and positive Karma. What I have stated above is not in an attempt to disqualify my Lama's dictum. (although we must remember to challenge everything and never to accept what is said or read, until it becomes true to you) Once I was able to recognize Karma as non-duality, I had to investigate how my teacher could be correct in what he teaches. Essentially, he is not correct. However, the concept of negative vs positive Karma, and that of just plain Karma arise out of two different teachings, or ways of

practice. Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaches us out of the Lamrim (Tibetan: gradual path). In the gradual path to enlightenment, it is much easier to notice things from the viewpoint of our normal minds. Slowly, gradually, we recognize the true nature of things, especially Karma. It is in the teachings of Tantra (Sanskrit – Buddhism's esoteric teachings, part of the Mahayana) where we are explained to the tree nature of all things. Then through extreme and extensive practice (chanting and visualizations) these views begin to become our own.

All thanks and praise to those who have assisted me in anyway to or through the Dharma. Everything I and will gain to the Pogas. May any and all merit I gain or am in assistance to be given without reserve to those beings who are still suffering because they have yet to experience the Dharma. Refuse to rest until you've expired! May you all find Nirvana now!

To learn more about Karma, Dharma, Lam rim or Tantra, - Christopher then gives an address for his fabulous teacher, Robina Courtin (but *anna edits with this insert* - please read the many books by Ven. Robina Courtin of The Liberation Prison Project. We are hesitant to include her address as shared by our friend Christopher because she would be swamped with letters from our 4000+ readers. But her books are wonderful and true dharma. Check your prison library or chaplain's office for copies. If there are none, write to us and we will send your chaplain more information.)

Overcome your uncertainties and free yourself from dwelling on sorrow. If you delight in existence, you will become a guide to those who need you, revealing the path to many. - Sutta Nipata



Brian Farmer: - If you ever find yourself without any faith or without any hope, you will see, that even without any faith and without any hope, you can breathe in, but may not know if you will ever breathe out. Then, you can breathe out, but may not know if you will ever breathe in again. In this “unknowing” you shall meet with God – the God who is not there, but is the breath that is breathing. As you gaze into this Being that is emotion, this emptiness that is electric, you will fall into the essence of this God who is within you.

From Daniel Costa: Dear **Dharma Friends**, Hi! I'm an inmate at the Deuel Vocational Institution Prison, located in Tracy, CA. I'm currently serving a four year sentence for Robbery, and have two years left. For the last 14 months, I've been practicing the disciplines of Buddhism, living the Dharma, and experiencing a tremendous amount of healing. I've been blessed to be able to facilitate a “unique” Addiction / Recovery program called Choices.

What makes the Choices program so “unique” is that I was given the freedom to structure it according to the *Four-fold Path* consisting of: “The *Nature* of suffering,” “The *Source* of suffering,” “The *End* of suffering,” and Eight disciplines of Enlightenment. And I teach the *Four-fold Path* in the context of leading the Addict towards *Enlightenment* when it comes to *understanding* not just *what* ones triggers are, but more importantly, *why* they are triggers! Triggers being the *people, places, and things* that influence an Addict to use. It is my *experience* as a recovering Addict that, just knowing *what* ones triggers are is not enough when seeking the *freedom and an end to suffering* that an addiction brings. This being the case, relapse is a possibility due to the fact that one can never be completely sure that one can stay clear of all triggers. However, if one was to learn and practice the Buddha's Four-fold Path to Enlightenment, *discovering* the reasons *why* one has triggers, and *how*, through the disciplined practice of the Four-fold Path, one can be *set free* from their addictions, never having to experience that pain and suffering again. This, indeed, would be more than welcomed!

Let me say that the interest in our Addiction / Recovery Program has been overwhelming! We currently have 25 participants! Besides the Program, we are also in the process of getting a Vipassana Meditation workshop started soon. I share all this to say that I was so encouraged when I got a hold of your January, 2011 issue of the **Dharma Friends** newsletter! I loved all the teachings and plan to glean from it for our Program. We would love your thoughts and prayers, and also would like to get put on your mailing list! Please do send any other items you might think could help our “unique” Addiction/ Recovery Program. I can't wait to hear from you, and please feel free to share this good news of how the teachings of the Buddha are infiltrating the Substance Abuse Programs here in California! We are the first, but we are confident that the success of our program will lead to others like it in the Department of Corrections here in California! Sincerely, Daniel



by K. Muldrew

Chelle wanted me to share this little piece with you ...

people are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered...

forgive them anyway.

if you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives...

be kind anyway.

if you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies...

succeed anyway.

if you are honest and sincere people may deceive you...

be honest and sincere anyway.

what you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight...

create anyway.

if you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous...

be happy anyway.

the good you do today, will often be forgotten...

do good anyway.

give the best you have, and it will never be enough...

give your best anyway.

in the final analysis, it's between you and God... it was never between you and them anyway.

and a note from J. M: I would like to get the certificate for my group here, we call ourselves the Trenton Incarcerated Veterans. Because it's made up on about 8-10 guys who served in the military, but now find themselves behind bars. Receiving the **Dharma Friends** newsletter is great and I truly appreciate the fact that people in the 'free' world haven't forgotten about those who are in prison. When I learned how to properly meditate and used my breathing methods correctly, it really took away a lot of my daily stress in here. I do find it very difficult locating books to learn more about the teachings of the Buddha. If you know of any place that offers books to inmates, please let me know. Many of the guys and staff in here think that we're crazy to be meditating in here, but they're the ones truly missing out. Thank you for all of your help and thoughts. many blessings. Peace and Love, J.M.

CONQUERING FEAR BY LIVING AS AN EXAMPLE by Gary Hallford

Across the vast landscape of the Gulag Americanus, certain preconceived notions of what being a convict means, often implies a divergence from the ethical norms you would prefer to abide by. Whether it be the prevalence of gang activity; racial hatred; institutional drug abuse; or a myriad of other devising factors, the typical prisoner is placed in a "no win" situation. Either accept the perverse lifestyle thrust upon them; seclude yourself from almost all activities; or, choose to act as a de-facto leader by living by the Dharma.

Of the three noted options, I have chosen the third. While it has not always been pleasant, there are certain observable changes in the behavior of others, which may have been caused by their observation of someone who chooses kindness over hatred, and refrains from following examples of ignorance. For example, most prisoners tend to associate only with members of their own race or ethnic group. In so doing, they breed distrust and neglect the opportunity to have a conversation with someone who has a far different background. If you are White and from a rural locality, are you going to understand a Black from an urban ghetto? If your

only “experience: with other races comes from the movies (“Boys in the 'hood”; “La Bamba”; “Midnight Cowboy”; “Wall Street”; “Red Rock West”; etc . . .), how accurate can your views be?

In this particular abattoir, rather than wait for specific people to sit with, I go ahead and join whoever happens to be there. This confuses those who are willing to live within some arbitrary bubble, and further confuses them when I can engage almost anyone in a productive conversation (football and basketball are not the center of the universe; nor are drugs, alcohol, or music . . .). If you can engage in a conversation without fear, you have established an example for the person you are speaking with, as well as everyone who may see the interaction. It only requires patience, courage, resilience, and a belief in peace. Try it today, and encourage others to do the same . . .

Compassion Works for All/ Dharma Friends
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You cannot find Buddha nature by vivisection. Reality cannot be caught by thinking or feeling mind. Moment after moment to watch your breathing, to watch your posture, is true nature. There is no secret beyond this point. - Shunryu Suzuki, "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind"



Pride and indifference shroud this heart, too, as the sun is obscured by the piled-up clouds; supercilious thoughts root out all modesty of mind, and sorrow saps the strongest will. - Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King

Dharma Friends

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Additional Pages for EMAIL VERSION of Dharma Friends

You cannot find Buddha nature by vivisection. Reality cannot be caught by thinking or feeling mind. Moment after moment to watch your breathing, to watch your posture, is true nature. There is no secret beyond this point. - Shunryu Suzuki, "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind"

At Compassion Works for All - We have BOOKS FOR SALE:

We now have more of Linda Bessette's Mindful Money book – order here by emailing Linda.

Mara Leveritt's books!

The Boys on the Tracks: Death, Denial, and a Mother's
Crusade to Bring Her Son's Killers to Justice

And

Devil's Knot: The True Story of the West Memphis Three



Email Linda (lbessette33@comcast.net) and she can give you more information about prices, mailing, etc. for all books.

And anna's books –

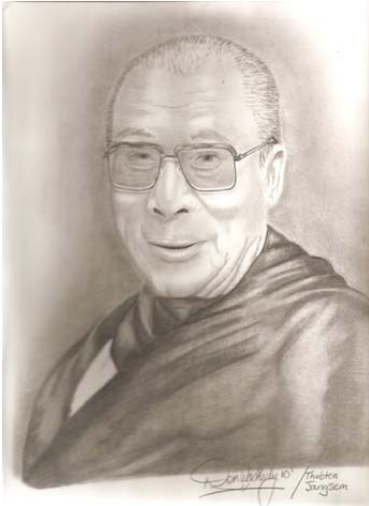
Just As the Breeze Blows Through Moonlight, and Dharma Friends and the Healthy Living pamphlet are on our old Compassion Works for All web site – www.dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com for a free download – but donations are always appreciated! Or you can order a hardcopy book for \$15 plus shipping (\$5) at my email address: anna@aristotle.net

and a new book by our friend, Kathleen Welton:

The Little Book of Gratitude Quotes

go to inspire@littlequotebooks.com to order. An example: ***God gave you a gift of 86,400 seconds today. Have you used one to say "thank you?"*** - William Arthur Ward

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA IN ARKANSAS...



I am sure that many of you know by now that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is coming to Fayetteville, Arkansas, to speak on May 11, 2011. I've lifted the information below from our Ecumenical Buddhist Society web page - www.ebslr.org

this drawing is by one of our Dharma Friends members, Don Wackerly

Dalai Lama Coming to University of Arkansas in Fayetteville on May 11, 2011

Where: Bud Walton Arena, University of Arkansas

The Dalai Lama will offer a public talk as part of the university's Distinguished Lecture Series. The Dalai Lama's visit is in response to invitations from professor Sidney Burris, director of the honors program in the J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences, and Geshe Dorjee, a Tibetan monk and instructor in Fulbright College. The two met with the Dalai Lama during their most recent trip to India in summer 2009. Past distinguished lecturers have included Benazir Bhutto, Ehud Barak, Robert Redford and Martin Luther King III.

To get the most up-to-date information on His Holiness' visit, visit: <http://dalailama.uark.edu>.

Dr. Sidney Burris runs a blog and will have information on the visit as well as educational pieces all year long to prepare people before the Dalai Lama arrives. The blog is on TIBETSPACE (<http://readwrite.typepad.com/artibet>). Once on TIBETSPACE, readers can sign up for email notifications when a new posting appears. Simply, click on "Subscribe to this blog's feed" and then click on the reader of your choice on "Get TIBETSPACE delivered by email", if you prefer to get it that way.

Dalai Lama Visit to Feature Panel Discussion With Sister Helen Prejean and Vincent Harding

Free student tickets available March 1.

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. – His Holiness the Dalai Lama will appear in two forums when he visits the University of Arkansas May 11.

1. He will take part in a morning panel discussion on "Turning Swords into Ploughshares: The Many Paths of Non-Violence", from 9:30 to 11 a.m.

2. He will deliver his keynote address, "Non-Violence in the New Century: The Way Forward" from 1:30 to 3 p.m.

Both events will be in Bud Walton Arena.

- Free student tickets will be available March 1 and can be reserved by going online to dalailama.uark.edu.
- Tickets for faculty and staff will go on sale March 7.
- For the general public, on March 15.
- Tickets for the morning panel discussion will be \$15 for regular seating or \$18 for floor and prime seating.
- Tickets for the afternoon lecture will be \$15 for regular seating and \$22 for floor and prime seating.
- Tickets for both events will be \$25 for regular seating or \$30 for floor and prime seating.

To order tickets, call the Walton Arts Center box office, (479) 443-5600, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, or order online at <http://waltonartscenter.org>.

and at the Ecumenical Buddhist Center in Little Rock,
Arkansas, a special lama with a special teaching

(for more information go to ebslr.org)



Anam Thubten Rinpoche Retreat
April 29 - May 1
Awakening Retreat

During the retreat, Anam Thubten invites everyone to practice silence and self-inquiry. He will emphasize awakening to the inner truth right now in which all things are already enlightened. The only requirement is to be there. The retreat is suitable for beginners and experienced meditators.

Public Talk: Spiritual Discourse

Date & Time: Friday, April 29, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Location: St. Michael's Episcopal Church at
12415 Cantrell Road, Little Rock

Donation: \$10.00 - \$15.00

Retreat: Awakening Retreat

Saturday, April 30.....10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. and
3:00 - 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 1.....10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. and
3:00 - 5:30 p.m.

Location: The retreat will be at the Ecumenical Buddhist Society, located at 1015 West 2nd Street in downtown Little Rock near the corner of 2nd Street and Chester.

Cost:

Saturday, April 30—\$75.00 Sunday, May 1—\$75.00

Both days—\$120.00

Registration: Pre-registration for the weekend retreat is encouraged to assure a space. The registration form for the weekend retreat is on page 3. For retreat or scholarship information, please contact Charlotte Besch at 501-664-1167 or at cabesch@midsouth.ualr.edu.

Anam Thubten Rinpoche:

Anam Thubten grew up and received traditional Buddhist training from various teachers at an early age. He is a direct disciple of Lama Tsurlo, a lifetime hermit and yogi. Anam Thubten teaches and conducts meditation retreats internationally. He is the author of the book, *No Self, No Problem*. He has been a guiding teacher at EBS for over 15 years. For more information on Rinpoche's teachings contact the Dharmata Foundation at www.dharmata.org.

And here is a wonderful essay from Rinpoche -

The Spiritual Fix by Anam Thubten Rinpoche

There is a tendency in many of us to think that spiritual practice is going to fix all of our problems. We carry these unexamined, infantile hopes and fantasies. This has to do with the fact that our relationship with spirituality is often dominated by unconscious forces. It is not the squeaky clean business we hoped it to be. It is a tricky, painful, exhilarating, and ecstatic voyage. What could be more complex than that? As long as we are building defense mechanisms, transformation will be exiled to the realm of improbability. And these defense mechanisms, wearing a spiritual mask now, comprise layers of denial, each one more subtle than the other. It is like finding a new cradle where we can be infantile again and have no responsibility for ourselves. But this cradle is not well made. Sooner or later we will encounter its limitations. When we become involved in a spiritual path, we see that it isn't going to fix all of our problems. As time goes by we begin to see that life's problems are not getting easier. There is no magic wand, so it is very common to lose that initial love that we had with our spiritual practice. Spirituality is not about fixing all of our problems and the earlier we find out about this, the less disappointment we are going to face. We have to let go of all of these fantasies. The earlier we let go of them the better it is. If we hang on to them, we often run into disappointment and that can sometimes create a huge obstacle to inner awakening.

It can completely draw us away from the path. So we have to remember this and maintain the perspective that our spiritual path is not really a remedy or antidote that is going to fix all of our problems. It is not going to remove all of our unwanted conditions. On the contrary, sometimes it seems that the world becomes even more challenging when we are on the path because the spiritual path wakes us up. It requires losing all of our investment in illusion. Growth can be painful. There is a saying, "Be careful what you wish for." We have to be careful what we wish for because sometimes if we pray for liberation, especially if we pray for liberation right now, then the world can be very wrathful and very challenging. When the world presents difficulties and obstacles to us it means that now, fortunately, we have the opportunity to pass through all of our reactions, all of our habits, all of our thought patterns, all of our karmic behaviors. We can rise above all of these illusory conditions and maintain the mind of the Buddha, blissful awareness.

Therefore, if we are determined to discover awakening at any cost, then we must also expect and be prepared for the fact that we may run into challenges and difficulties. They include experiences of doubt, anger, irrational emotion, depression, and so forth. Even Buddha encountered a great challenge before his awakening. He had a vision that he was being attacked, ambushed by the forces of Mara, just before his total enlightenment. It was the defining moment where he had to choose between triumph and utter defeat. As spiritual seekers we don't have to invite challenges but we do have to celebrate challenges when they visit us. I am not saying that we have to go around looking for trouble. That is not our assignment. But when troubles arise we must know how to surrender to them and accept them. We even have to be jubilant in a crisis and think, "Oh, this is such an extraordinary, golden opportunity to practice how to accept what I don't like. If I am able to accept this condition at this moment in my life, then I will be able to transcend all of my fear, all of my insecurities. This is a blessing in disguise." We have to almost prostrate to the challenges when they visit us without invitation. When they are actually knocking at our door, we have to be thankful to them. In that sense, as spiritual seekers, we have to take our whole life as our practice, as our path. Life is our path. From the moment we wake up in the morning until the time we go to sleep at night, our whole life is filled with opportunities for cultivating acceptance, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, awareness, and mindfulness.

and a fabulous class offered by our friend Cheryl Woodard at EBS--

Essential Concepts, Themes, & Practices on the Buddhist Path

May 2 - June 13

7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Cheryl Woodard, a long time practitioner, is facilitating a 7-week class about cultivating awareness and compassion in our daily lives, which is open to people with no prior knowledge of Buddhism or meditation as well as the experienced practitioner.

Instructional talks given by the Buddhist teacher, Pema Chodren, as well as readings from her book, *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, will be presented. Each class will include meditation instruction and practice, plus discussion.

Classes are on Monday evenings from 7:00-8:30 p.m. in the EBS meditation hall.

Classes are free, and donations to EBS are welcome.

Monday, May 2: Buddha's 3-Pronged Approach to Spirituality concerning hearing, contemplating, and meditating

Monday, May 9: Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places concerning Buddha's insight about suffering and its cause

Monday, May 16: Learning to Stay concerning the basic meditation practice that is common to all Buddhist traditions

Monday, May 23: Happiness is Always Available concerning the fruits of sitting meditation

Monday, May 30: Compassion as a Tool for Insight concerning Tonglen meditation that cultivates fearlessness and peace

Monday, June 6: Real-World Strategies concerning service and other tools for remembering

Monday, June 13: Buddha as the Physician

Book: *Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 Teachings* by Pema Chodren. Buy the book in advance, if possible. Copies will be on sale at the EBS bookstore at a good price.

Registration: To register in advance or if you need information about the class, please contact Cheryl Woodard by email at cheryl@publishingbiz.com or by phone during the evenings at 501-661-9009.

Join us at www.JustUsFriends.org.

Check us out and help spread the news by emailing the site to your friends!

Along with informative and inspirational articles –

there are many videos in our video archive to lend a little support in difficult life issues.

If you would like to host a Compassion Works for All fundraising lunch or coffee,

Please let us know and we will plan details with you!!

This is a friendly and informative way to raise money for our efforts.

You invite those who you think would appreciate the philanthropic opportunity.

We will supply the food and I will gladly give a talk to your guests.

You may forward any past Dharma Friends newsletters, or this newsletter, on to anyone who you believe would benefit from them. If someone has sent this Dharma Friends issue to you as a gift and you would like to join us each month, please email anna@aristotle.net for more information about Compassion Works for All, our Dharma Friends newsletter, and our prison outreach program. You may receive Dharma Friends by email for a \$30 tax-deductible donation. If you would prefer a hard copy, the subscription fee is also \$30, but unfortunately it is not tax deductible because you receive a paper publication for your donation.

