

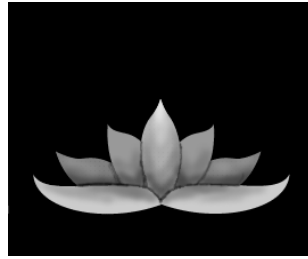
Dharma Friends

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

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**Happy Valentine's Day and
Happy Losar – the Tibetan New Year is February 25 - the year of the Earth Cow!**

The Dhammapada The teachings of the Buddha



Verse 11: Old Age

Translated from the Pali
by
**Acharya
Buddharakkhita**

Source: From *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*, translated from the Pali by Acharya Buddharakkhita, with an Introduction by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985). Transcribed from the print edition in 1996 by a volunteer under the auspices of the DharmaNet Transcription Project, with the kind permission of the BPS.

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146. When this world is ever ablaze, why this laughter, why this jubilation? Shrouded in darkness, will you not see the light?

147. Behold this body — a painted image, a mass of heaped up sores, infirm, full of hankering — of which nothing is lasting or stable!

148. Fully worn out is this body, a nest of disease, and fragile. This foul mass breaks up, for death is the end of life.

149. These dove-colored bones are like gourds that lie scattered about in autumn. Having seen them, how can one seek delight?

150. This city (body) is built of bones, plastered with flesh and blood; within are decay and death, pride and jealousy.

151. Even gorgeous royal chariots wear out, and indeed this body too wears out. But the Dhamma of the Good does not age; thus the Good make it known to the good.

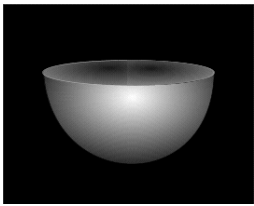
152. The man of little learning grows old like a bull. He grows only in bulk, but, his wisdom does not grow.

153. Through many a birth in samsara have I wandered in vain, seeking in the builder of this house (of life). Repeated birth is indeed suffering!

154. O house-builder, you are seen! You will not build this house again. For your rafters are broken and your ridgepole shattered. My mind has reached the Unconditioned; I have attained the destruction of craving.

155. Those who in youth have not led the holy life, or have failed to acquire wealth, languish like old cranes in the pond without fish.

156. Those who in youth have not lead the holy life, or have failed to acquire wealth, lie sighing over the past, like worn out arrows (shot from) a bow.



Some thoughts about this *Dhammapada* Verse: Old Age

I expect that you too roll your eyes and yet nod in agreement when someone says that worn out phrase: Growing old ain't for sissies – but it is better than the alternative. But if we stay aware of this process of aging, we can't help but to know that we are preparing for our body's death.

As we age, we are all finding out that each year has its ever-growing challenges. We are a little creakier, a little less active, a little less flexible, and a little bit more wrinkled. We know more of our friends who are dealing with cancers, many various illnesses, Alzheimer's disease, and other dementias. It is clear that the path that every other being throughout all time has followed to their death will soon be our path.

It is a very important spiritual step to allow ourselves to consider the reality of our aging and our death. There is no doubt whatsoever that our bodies will die. When we let ourselves fully realize that this precious body that we travel in is merely bones and pus, blood and tissue, we begin to let it go. It doesn't take much at all to end life in a body. Up against the great expanse of eternal time, our lives are but a moment in the big picture. It is useless to have any fantasy that we will live forever and that we can cling to this form. We all know this intellectually but very few truly live as though it will come to pass. So unless we use each of our days with the awareness that they are precious and might be our last, those days are wasted. For each of our days, as our **Dhammapada** verse says, there is nothing at all left of us except for the gifts of our good efforts or the bad karma of our bad actions. When you leave your body, you will have left behind acts and words of good that will ripple out to create continuous benefit for many. Every *thing* else will be unimportant. It will not benefit you or hurt you. Only all you did with your life will come with you as your karma – good or bad. That karma will manifest as the path, the opportunities and the obstacles, of your future.

The time to ponder our death is now, while we are fully conscious and aware of the choices that we are capable of making. If we are lucky, we get to see death coming, even if only for a few days, and we have time to prepare for what comes next. For many, death comes suddenly and as a surprise after a lifetime of feeling invincible. It is good to start contemplating death now and every day from now on so that we can stay conscious and not be caught in a state of shock and fear.

I am not saying to take life and death lightly. Our life is a miracle and a great gift. It takes only a tiny glitch and this life could end at any moment. It is important to protect our life and to take care of ourselves so that we will live long. Every living thing does all it can to avoid death. Even an ant runs to avoid your footstep. A wild animal races to escape a hunter's bullet. Most beings feel fear even at the thought of their death. But this attitude of preserving our precious life is especially important for those dedicated to their highest spiritual realization. We don't know what a future life will bring or if it will even come. Buddhist teachings say that your sense of self and certainly your wisdom self continues on in a

new form or a new life experience. If we are fully aware during the process of death, our awareness can guide us onto the path of our choosing. We don't know if we will ever again have the same opportunities for teachings and the wisdom that we have accumulated in this lifetime to know higher levels of consciousness and realization. You have established yourself on a path of growth and evolution and you want your time of death to be the continuing of your journey.

Life is precious but we are more than these bodies.

The clarity and awareness that we live in our life will be the clarity that we experience as we die.

If our present awareness is full of distracting thoughts, angry thoughts, fears and confusion, our process of death will be experienced in a similar state of distress. If, through meditation and every day practice, we live in peace and equanimity, then death too will be a time of great clarity. If, as many Buddhist traditions teach, we have readied ourselves for death with a specific dying meditation, then if we have developed focus and stability in our practice, we will be able to rest in that same state as we die. The teachings say that the time of death can be an enhanced opportunity for us to achieve enlightenment if we have not yet realized our highest consciousness during our lifetime. So life is precious because it allows us to realize all that we are, and death too is precious because it is during that moment of dying that we have an enhanced moment in which to achieve true enlightenment.

No matter what our tradition or practice, as we leave that pile of bones and sac of pus laying behind, we can exit with joyful awareness into whatever experience awaits us. We are Awareness taking that next step into All That Is. And every day of aging is a time of preparation and practice.



A MEDITATION

If you are one of the majorities of folks that feels a hint or a maybe a wave of anxiety when you think of your death, then this is a good meditation to start with. Later you can add meditations where you “practice” dying and others that allow you to relax into those very same subtle states of consciousness that you will pass through as you die. If it is your karma to have the opportunity to receive a specific meditation practice to do at the time of your death, I encourage you strongly to receive that teaching. But it is good to start by truly letting it sink into your awareness that you are going to die. Your death may come today. At that point, we want you to have the capacity to speak to yourself gently and reassuringly, and to say, “I’m dying. I’m okay.”

If you have not conditioned yourself to accept the moment of death with balance and equanimity, when it arrives you might freak out, releasing a flood of chemicals into your brain that induces panic. You will not be able to rest in meditative focus and stability and to stay fully aware of your process. The most beneficial thing, no matter whether you have had any specific teachings or not, is to stay AWARE and to look for all that looks welcoming and loving in whatever manner it appears to you. Head for that. Rest in that.

Our Beginning Meditation on Death – whether you are old or young....

- Wake up in the morning and gently appreciate that you woke up and did not die in your sleep. Be grateful
- Consider that you could die today. What do you want to accomplish today, given that you may not have a tomorrow?
- When you leave your home or your cell, consider that you may never be back. Leave everything as you would like it to be in case you never return.
- When you leave a friend and they say – See you tomorrow!--consider that you may never see them again. You can say (but don't be surprised at their response), “If I don't die first.” Let that possibility sink in. Are you okay with that relationship if that is the last contact you will ever have with them?
- When you go to bed at night, think: There is no guarantee I will wake up in the morning. Be grateful for your day and fall to sleep as though you are surrendering to your death. It is okay.
- Now, if anxiety comes with any of these exercises, just sit with the fear gently. Watch the fears ebb and flow. Soothe yourself by breathing gently and consciously, relaxing. Tell yourself you are okay.
- Some day you will use this meditation one last time and you will be glad that you are well-prepared.



From Your Letters

Our friend Omar did die shortly after our last issue came out. He was excited about Barack Obama becoming our next president and he made it to the early morning hours of inauguration day, January 20th. We will miss Omar and thank him for his great gifts and leadership. I think we should call our **Dharma Friends** program to educate everyone to be the best that they can be, ***Omar's Dream***.

*You follow desire, and you are not satisfied.
Again you follow desire, and again you are not satisfied.
Again you try, and again you are not satisfied.
-Lama Zopa Rinpoche, "Transforming Problems Into Happiness"*

From J.H. Dear Anna, Kristopher and Compassion Works for All board:

First, I hope and pray that this letter finds you well, blessed and at peace. Before you begin this letter, please note that it contains unflattering and critical comments regarding the March '08 issue of **D.F.** If you are not open to such criticism, there is no need for you to continue reading.

I would like to ask, who wrote the commentary within the main section of this issue? It is my sincerest hope that it was not Anna or anyone regularly associated with **D.F.**

Normally, I enjoy reading **D.F.** because of all the perceptive insights and inspirational nature of its material, along with the views of others as expressed in their letters. This issue, however, was not only offensive, but left me with a feeling of betrayal floating acidic in the pit of my stomach. I had the distant feeling that **D.F.** had lifted the mask of compassion, shrugged off its Buddhist garb and left me with a socially-conservative and politically-correct ideological diatribe that was devoid of Buddhist cognizance.

Perhaps I am the only one who felt that way, never the less, the feeling was strong enough to inspire this letter. Let me explain.

In Buddhism, the archetype (the chief model with which all else is compared) is the Buddha. A specific example with which to compare our development and current states of existence. What, may I ask, is the archetype of contemporary Western psychiatric standards? I ask because the article on psychiatric standards did not express Buddhist thought. Although an obvious attempt was made to correlate the philosophical similarities between the two modes of thought, this attempt came off as superficial at best. Buddhism and contemporary Western psychiatry are two distant thought processes at odds in more ways than one, and the attempt to propagate the latter in place of the former was misguided.

Allow me to quote directly from the article to illustrate.

I am told that in Buddhism we are either enlightened or we are not, and that our state of existence is revealed by comparing ourselves, as it were, to "The Holy Man".

I am told that the "ordinary and diagnostically healthy people" (I assume that they are judged so because of their favorable compatibility of some unknown archetype) are at odds with those who have "developed personality disorders".

It is then stressed that in Buddhism "even the most violent and cruel are, at their essence, a Buddha"... and that "all beings have the capacity to know their inner pure essence and All That Is", that every sentient being has within it love and compassion, as does the Buddha. This is what the hallmark of Buddhism is, an overriding wisdom and compassion beyond conscience control and understanding. Yet the article tells me that according to contemporary psychiatric standards you have individuals who have "developed personality disorders" so severe that, the author states, they cannot "be trusted to live within society because of their propensity to hurt others", they're "(un)trust(worthy) to live in society again" and "can learn to live their lives in a controlled environment"... to..."protect ourselves from them at all costs".

What troubles me so acutely is that not only are these views at odds with Buddhist teaching and spirit, but that the author uses these standards to justify (and actually encourage) forced incarceration of an individual against their will because they are not "normal".

Which leads me to ask: who would do the incarcerating? Would it be the "normal" people? The "ordinary and diagnostically healthy people"? According to the "Merck Manual", of course. Well, I'm afraid that even your author is not "ordinary and diagnostically healthy", because as is stated: "We all rest somewhere on a continuum of a deluded view of self and the true perception of sacred reality" and that "when we view reality through the perception of ego, an I, that is delusion." That a 'sociopath' "see(s) only through the distorted views of ego-self. Their reality is perceived and interpreted only through confusion and is all tainted by their self-serving survival needs"... and... "when one is so deranged that their need for... power and control over others is of such overarching importance in their lives, and they are so distorted in their self/other view, we may diagnose them as..." hmmm... what

do we put here? The authors name? No... indeed "...sociopath." After all, forced imprisonment of un'normal' people (as expressed above) is ... well...

But wait, "Those who are diagnosed as a personality disorder all have a rigid inner system of defense because of a very perverse view of reality that obscures a "normal" perception of ordinary reality" (normal being Merck, not Buddhist). The author believes that people who qualify, according to Merck, should be forcibly medicated and imprisoned until they become "ordinary and diagnostically healthy people". The author expressed the perverse and deranged desire to manipulate, medicate, incarcerate and otherwise "control" those who make us fearful or threaten our comfort level... and Anna says we must do this "at all costs". To do otherwise is "idiot compassion". What has happened to **Dharma Friends**? What happened to Anna that resulted in all of this reactionary, fearful, half-baked ideology? You quote:

"From contact comes feeling, from feeling comes reaction. This is what keeps us in the cycle of birth and death. Our reactions to our feelings are our passport to rebirth."

I want "**Dharma Friends**" back! Stop with the "Psychiatry, Incarceration, Medication and Manipulation" pro-status quo fear mongering gibberish!! I'll quote what you quote:

"The creatures that inhabit this earth - be they human beings or animals - are here to contribute, each in its own particular way, to the beauty and prosperity of the world." H.H. Dalai Lama

(unless we fear them - then they should be...well... I've repeated it already)

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

From J. S.: I have really LOVED the last two issues of **Dharma Friends** on Evil and Violence. I had been struggling with these issues. My question was, "If our True Nature is Basic Goodness, why is there so much hatred and violence happening on our planet?" My recent understanding that these come from our identification with the ego (form) which only thinks in black and white--us against them--has been really helpful. I also understand that, even if we develop a more enlightened perspective, the old responses are deeply conditioned, starting even before we are born (as you pointed out).

As you know, I am a recovering alcoholic-addict. I just had my 17th AA birthday yesterday--thank Goodness. I know that, because of the relief that alcohol and drugs provided, I was deeply conditioned to responding to my cravings by reaching for whatever substance was available at the time. Even though I have been sober for quite a while now, I still think of getting relief from stress by using alcohol and drugs. Without AA and my spiritual program, I'm sure I would continue to seek that false relief, even though it was no longer working for me. My point is that, I also know that, acting out in anger and violence provided a sense of temporary relief. The release of those pent up emotions felt good, temporarily. Of course, then there were consequences to face which didn't feel so good, but that didn't stop me from responding to stress by drinking, using, or acting out, sometimes violently.

I believe that only a spiritual program could have helped me. The AA program gave me that ONE SECOND between the craving, or pent up feelings, before I reacted. Having that one second to think has made all of the difference in the world. At first it was really hard not to engage in my usual response, but with time and continuing to practice the program, it has gotten much easier. I still have the compulsive thoughts, but, thank Goodness, I have not acted on my cravings for 17 years. Not reacting to my negative feelings is sometimes still quite difficult. My early environment was quite negative, so my negative reactions are deeply conditioned. I continue to ask the Universe for that ONE SECOND to stop my negative acting out.

Buddhism has really helped give me some "counter-conditioning". I have reached the point that, on a deep level, I know that I am Basically Good, and more recently, I have come to believe that everyone else is Basically Good as well. I've had difficulty believing either one of those since I was conditioned to believe that I was not OK, and no one else was OK either. I could believe what Buddhism said on a MENTAL level, but it has taken me quite awhile to actually FEEL that I'm OK, and everyone else is OK too. I had to understand that it is our identification with the ego that causes us to do negative things, even if on a spiritual level we are all OK.. Stopping identification with the ego is counter-intelligent. All of our senses give us the belief that the world of form is all that there is. Again, I believed in non-substantiality on a MENTAL level before I actually FELT it. I have finally reached the point where I can actually "rest in equanimity". What a wonderful feeling!

I really love the poem by Piergrassi in the last **Dharma Friends**. It goes along so well with the book by Tolle that I have loved. The Tolle book would be a good one to put on the **Dharma Friends** reading list. It has helped me so much. I have been reading and rereading the last section about the New Consciousness that is happening in the world. I have thought that a new consciousness was developing since the 1960s--the peace and love movement, but now I am beginning to feel it. I have been doing a lot of thinking about my role in the new consciousness. I believe I contributed to the new consciousness by working as a ...(professional), even if I had not reached the point that I felt OK. I did understand that (*others*) were Basically Good, and it was either their biological program that was out of whack, or their negative conditioning. I believe I acted with unconditional acceptance toward those I encountered, even if I hadn't reached the point where I felt OK. Now that I have retired, I am attempting to define a new role for myself. My new role may include going back to school ..., or I may do some volunteer work, or I may just do some creative work at home.

Tolle says that there are 3 ways to demonstrate Awakened Doing: acceptance, enjoyment, and enthusiasm. I feel I have made progress in the acceptance mode, but I still don't feel much enjoyment or enthusiasm.

I'm still struggling with my internal obstructive nature. Although I have had moments of being active and productive, my conditioned response is to do nothing.

I have seen how the Republicans have reacted to Obama's stimulus package, and I know that I have acted the same way toward anything productive. The Republicans know they do not have enough votes to actually stop Obama from passing his plan, but they are obstructing progress in getting the plan passed because they know they can.

I know that is how I learned to react toward my parents. I knew I would eventually have to do what they told me to do, but, because of my negative feelings, I did everything I could to procrastinate. I felt quite powerful when they became angry at my procrastination. "Look what I can do. I can make you angry." Since I had so very little sense of power that was one way I could get it. Now I know I am only obstructing myself, but it is hard to change a deeply conditioned response. I am working on it. I'm sure that Buddhism will help me deal with that as well.

Although this has been mostly a summary of the things I have been working on, it has helped me to recognize my progress. I have come a long ways! It has taken me much longer than I wanted it to take. I wanted it all to happen yesterday! But I can see that I have made progress. Thank you for your patience in listening to me. I believe it has helped me be more patient with myself.

*"No one knows what makes the soul wake up so happy!
Maybe a dawn breeze has blown the veil from the face of God." - Rumi*

A FEW THOUGHTS FROM ANNA about these two letters-

We appreciate every letter and every point of view in the letters that you all send to Dharma Friends. I see your letters as an opportunity to look at life through your eyes and to get to know each of you a little bit better. We also get to know ourselves in the mirror of each other's human experience. Criticism too allows us to see our own shadows through the eyes of others, and I appreciate that for me and us as well.

These two letters address two responses to what we have explored in past issues on violence. I think it is very important as you know from how often I address this issue. It is imperative for all in society to come to terms with a more educated understanding of what makes humans violent in order to more skillfully develop a compassionate and helpful criminal justice system.

Also, as we repeat often, essential to our work on following any spiritual path or human evolutionary path, within each being is a pure and true essence of love. What obscures the expression of this love is our own obstacles. The work for each of us is to become clear about what our own obstacles are and to work with them until we are able to lift and transcend them. Then, we ourselves are peaceful. When those obstacles skew our view, we cause suffering to ourselves and others from small ways to causing major violence. This is the essence of the path of healing that we are all about in our Dharma Friends community.

We, of all people, must not perpetuate the confusion that we are trying to clarify, so this is why I am emphasizing J.H.'s strong negative response and J.S.'s letter of appreciation. Let me see if I can bring this vast issue into focus with a little more clarity.

One issue that I expect adds to J.H.'s negative view of what I have said is that prisons are not places where one who cares about people's suffering wants them to be. If we were talking about placing people with problems where they would get compassionate healing care and help, being 'held' against their will might be a bit more palatable.

Secondly, J.H. mentions the importance of seeing the Buddha nature of all beings and treating them with compassion. This is true. The essence of every being is sacred and pure. Those of us who follow a practice of kindness want to treat everyone with love. At the same time, all of us who have pure essence also have obscurations until we are capable of living that inner purity in our everyday life. Our inner essence is sacred, and for Buddhists, that of a Buddha, but it may be quite some time before we act like Buddhas at all times. The truth is, we all cause suffering to ourselves and others until we fully realize our true nature. So in our ordinary human responses to life, we all must assess the obscurations that bring about suffering and our capacity to live compassion towards others. Our ego's self-serving nature is always in competition for that #1 position. But, the more we are in balance – feeling loved and happy, stress-free, physically and emotionally healthy – then the more we can hold a view of equanimity that clearly considers our needs and the needs of others. If one is a Buddha or a realized being, all of their words and actions are beneficial to others. While we are on a path to realization, we do the best we can to balance our needs and the needs of others.

For those of us who function in the everyday realm of ego self, there is much that can handicap and much that can enhance our capacity and that can help to create positive and that can almost compel negative action. This all needs to be considered as best we can in order to make choices that further us on that path to a more conscious and compassionate realization. We cannot say that because we have innate Buddha nature or a sacred nature that we can ignore the ordinary realms of existence. While on the path, most of us need all the help we can get to assess life situations and our ego-views with balance because we all see reality through the veils of our biochemistry, our brain capacity, our physical health, our upbringing and socialization, and our emotional health. To have a disability in any of these areas is not a fault. But to have any of these areas out of balance definitely distorts our perception of life events by our ego self. One who has achieved Buddhahood sees a sacred and pure reality and that view of reality transcends all physical and emotional conditions of our human form. There still may be obstacles to the physical body of an enlightened being when considered through an ordinary life view. I know those who live a sacred reality but who still have had cancer and heart problems. But – those obscurations do not distort their view or perception of sacred reality.

Here is an analogy. In your waking, every day functioning, you may need glasses in order to see because you are nearsighted. This is not a fault. But if you can't see, it is far better to accept this reality and do what is necessary to correct your disability before you go out and drive your car. It is inviting disaster to not assess the situation and to not do what is possible to correct the problem. If, however, you are asleep and dreaming, you are in a totally different state of consciousness. That issue of poor vision, while it is still present in your physical functioning, is transcended simply because we are experiencing a different reality. It does not matter in our dream if we are wearing our glasses or not. Similarly, if we have attained the consciousness of a Buddha or an enlightened being, all the obstacles of our mental or physical health are not issues in the same way, although still a part of our ordinary physical self.

So now, let's go back to our very important consideration about violence. For some, the imbalance or dysfunction that impedes one's perception of reality can cause them to be much more likely to be violent to others. To treat them with compassion is still our practice and an expression of our love for them, no matter what they have done. But to overlook their obstacles in a way that allows them to harm others is to be blind to the everyday levels of their reality. Just as we must do with every being everywhere and with all expressions of reality, we assess the skills and obstacles of self and others in order to enhance successful functioning in the world. When it is necessary to have some healing intervention, we all can look out for each other. Sometimes we can say, "Let's get you some help." Some people have such extreme dysfunction that it is necessary to protect others and to protect them from the terrible consequences – worldly and karmic – of violence. We must step in. Some people do need to be in a protected situation until they have the capacity to not cause harm. I do wish that that protected situation was an opportunity for healing but I know that that is unlikely in most prisons and even in many hospitals. That is one of the very broken situations within criminal justice in most of the world. But we must use the systems of intervention that we presently have while trying to make them better. Whether we use the Merck manual to assess mental illness, medications to calm a chaotic brain, or a prison cell to keep one out of harm's way, we are making the most of what we have until we can all contribute to making these interventions better.

The important part that we each must do while we grow to enlightenment is to listen to and evaluate the feedback we receive from others about ourselves, even though we may feel confronted or challenged. Ego can interpret loving words as fighting words if we are trying to protect our own wounds. To know that there is likely to be even a modicum of truth to another's opinion of us is worth evaluating. An overreaction is usually indicative that they hit the nail on the head!

Here are a few scenarios to get us thinking about these very difficult issues. It is important to do this work on ourselves because to dismiss the harm we might cause others in defense of ego's self-serving view is the biggest obstacle we have on our spiritual path.

Scenario #1: An aging person with Alzheimer's disease insists he is capable of driving a car even though he gets lost anywhere outside of his house. He gets angry when the keys are taken away and yells at family members saying that they are being mean to him. Is this violence? How? Who should intervene? When and how?

Scenario #2: Investment advisor Bernie Madoff had an illegal financial scheme that eventually was discovered. He was arrested. His actions left thousands destitute, including many seniors who have no capacity to regain their retirement funds. Among his clients were also numerous non-profit foundations that lost millions and they are no longer able to benefit the most disenfranchised people with their services. Madoff lived royally in New York high society and no one suspected his schemes. As mental health professionals now reflect on his behaviors, many say that it is likely that he has a psychopathic mental health disorder. Were his behaviors violent? Should someone have intervened? When and how?

Scenario #3: A teenage boy goes out with friends and they are drinking and doing street drugs. He has five friends in the car as they travel down the interstate at 90 miles per hour. Your son is one of the other boys in the car. Is this violence? Should someone have intervened? When and how?

Scenario #4: A few weeks ago, a chronically schizophrenic young man in Belgium who was well-known in his community as being ill, walked into a day care center with a knife. He killed many children and teachers and wounded many others. Is this violence? Should someone have intervened? When and how?

Scenario #5: If you are in prison, if you know someone who is, or if you worry about someone who is likely to be in prison in the future, please ask yourself: What unfolded (or is unfolding) to lead to that imprisonment. Even if the person is not guilty of a crime charged, still ask how these circumstances unfolded. Where is the violence in the situation? Who could or should have intervened prior to the imprisonment? When and how?

Of course, this last question is the most important among all of these five scenarios for many of you. What is the next step in order to give this person an environment that they can grow and heal in? What are their obscurations? What will help to lift those veils of obscurations so that they might realize their true and highest self? Ignoring obscurations and obstacles do not lift the veils. It perpetuates them.

And here is the next most important thing to ponder. How do we skillfully become the one who intervenes for others? If you love someone, especially a young boy who is now headed down that path of violence and destined to become one in the next generation of prisoners, I would wish for each and every one of us to be the one who helps to turn around the course of their lives before that reality comes to fruition. Stopping violence does not mean not loving and accepting another and seeing their true nature. Seeing their true nature is a part of their healing, but they need to have help assessing and halting the violence that they create as well.



From J.F.: Dear **Dharma Friends**, I hope all is well in your whirl! Thank you VERY MUCH for the literature you sent, as well as the Buddha picture and the newsletter. I've been wrestling with a situation lately that I'd like to get your thoughts on. In recent weeks, I've made a sincere effort to practice more compassion and generosity. As you may imagine, such characteristics are often taken advantage of in this environment, which has led me to back off of my original intentions to develop them. I've been incarcerated for a little over 21 years, and I only discovered the power of meditation in general in the past 3 years and Buddhism, in particular, about one year ago. Prior to that, I was your 'normal' hate-filled, angry, self-centered individual. I didn't give a tinker's damn about ANYONE - - including myself.

First, Siddha Yoga meditation and then Buddhism changed all that. Today, I try my best to live a Buddhist lifestyle in that I practice the Five Precepts and I meditate regularly. I recently read that one's progress along the Path can be measured by the depth of his compassion. It was this concept that led me to try harder to develop my own compassion. Unfortunately, as I mentioned, many people tend to take my kindness for weakness, which stirs the old angry monster who still resides deep within me and still wants to lash out.

One question I have is how am I supposed to practice loving-kindness and generosity in a world where such traits are not only scorned, but often actively ridiculed and taken advantage of? I try not to allow others' greed to negatively affect my own progress, but I refuse to be taken advantage of, and apparently, the only way to avoid it around this camp is to curtail my own generosity and compassion. Of course, I can still practice compassion by recognizing the 'rotten' karmic fruits the guilty parties must discharge at some future date, but is that all there is left for me? I'm sure you've heard this question before, so would you give me a little advice on how to deal with it?

Also, in my studies, I have read that when I give to others I should do so with no concept of 'giver' or 'receiver.' I should not have a sense of 'rescuing' someone. At the same time, I'm supposed to recognize where there is a need and fill it. How can these two concepts co-exist? I mean in recognizing someone has a need of something that I have the ability to provide, how do I avoid the giver/receiver concept? Please forgive me if my questions are silly, but they're not silly to me. I'm still new at all this kindness and compassion stuff, but I'm trying my best to learn. I feel that I have made a LOT of progress in my journey, although I still have a long way to go. TAKE CARE AND BE HAPPY !! Bless you all,

KRISTOPHER'S RESPONSE

Dear J.F., Wow! What a great letter. I'm not going to try and answer these questions very deep, but you'll see this letter in **Dharma Friends** and perhaps other readers will be able to give you some insight. However, I don't feel there is an easy answer. I have my 'causes' that I support and want to keep giving to, but then I work downtown and there are so many needy people downtown, lots of homelessness, etc. I think that the point is that we can only give as much of ourselves as we can. It wouldn't take much giving for me to end up in the same situation as the people I encounter downtown if I just gave and gave. Like in 'recovery,' I believe the best way to help people is to share my story; where I came from, what happened and what my life is like now. The best way for others to know who I am is by seeing that I really do practice what I preach. If I let go, my needs become less and less and so I need less help. I can love and care about all life. By seeing the miracle of life and recognizing how temporary it is, I embrace it right along with its suffering. That's me being compassionate. May you be abundantly blessed in all things.

"When you eventually see through the veils to how things really are, you will keep saying again and again, this is certainly not like we thought it was!" -Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi



From R.B. Hello -

This is my first time writing, although I have been reading and benefiting from your newsletter and all its content for about 7 months of so. I have been a practitioner of meditation of one kind or another for over 20 years. About 5 years ago I discovered Zen and have been sitting ever since. Just since my incarceration 3 ½ years, have I decided to delve into the Buddhist aspect of this way of life. This is the path up the mountain for me. It is the way I need and chose to live my life from now on. Always mindful, ever compassionate, unattached, empty.

This is not an easy way, inside or out, but it is the only way for true inner peace for me. I try the best I can to accept everyone, not just be tolerant, but to understand them. I wish to cause no more harm, and help others to put that way of acting out behind them. It is difficult to love some people and even harder to like a few, but with the help of everyone, from Buddha to the very individuals reading this, all IS possible. Thank you. Please keep up the dana, and peace to you all! Gassho.

*Just as all the oceans of the world have but one taste, the taste of salt.
So do all true teachings have but one taste, the taste of liberation.
"Love is that flame that once kindled burns everything, and only the mystery and the journey remain." -- Rumi*

Lessons From the Geese sent by MM

Fact: As each goose flaps its wings it creates an "uplift" for the birds that follow. By flying in a V-formation the whole flock adds 72% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

Lesson: People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling on the thrust of another.

Fact: When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

Lesson: If we have as much sense as a goose we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give out help to others.

Fact: When the lead goose tires, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies to the point position.

Lesson: It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. As with geese, people are interdependent on each other's skills, capabilities, and unique arrangements of gifts, talents, and resources.

Fact: The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

Lesson: We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is greater. The power of encouragement (to stand by one's heart or core values and encourage the heart and core values of others) is the quality of honking we seek.

Fact: When a goose gets sick, wounded, or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay until it dies or is able to fly again. Then, they launch out with another formation or catch up with their flock.

Lesson: If we had as much sense as geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we are strong.

Subscription information:

A note to those who are not in prison and receive a hard copy of Dharma Friends.

If you wish to continue a hard copy of Dharma Friends, please send a \$30 donation (or more) and we will keep your issues coming. If you can, our preference is that you switch to email copies because it saves us money. We are appreciative of every penny of everyone's donation and want you to be happy, so tell us your wishes. If you want to receive Dharma Friends via email, even if you send nothing, we will put you on our email list and keep you there forever until you say UNCLE. So, if you are on parole or are a free-world subscriber and can get your issue via email, email us and give us your email address.

Email: lbessette33@comcast.net

And for everyone else: I have gladly been offering this newsletter free of charge to those in prisons. I am so happy to have a vehicle for those who have little dharma support to feel united with others who identify with their life situation. It is truly important to remember that we are all mirrors of each other. We are all one with each other. And we can recognize that samsara is suffering for us all whether behind the bars of a prison or behind the bars of our own ego structure. For anyone who is not in prison and who would like to receive Dharma Friends, here is what to do. Make a \$30 or more donation and you will receive Dharma Friends for one year via email (so be sure to include your email address!), and your donation will be tax deductible. 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. If you cannot receive your copy via email we will send a paper copy but your tax deduction receipt will be for your amount less the \$30 for the product – your newsletter issues.**

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.

Here are some ways that you can help us. Keep us apprised of your address changes. Most of you have been very good at this and we hardly have any returned issues. 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. **WE WANT YOU TO KEEP GETTING DHARMA FRIENDS IF IT IS HELPFUL TO YOU!** If you have family or friends, tell them that you receive support from Dharma Friends and we would be very grateful for any donations that they might make. I know that most of you have very little money but we are enormously appreciative when some of you have made donations as well, and for the stamps many of you have sent.

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.

Thank you for all that you give to all of us.

Sent by George Kayer -- Add this to your resource list:

The list below was researched by George. *Dharma Friends* does not know any of these companies, but in the interest of caution for all, don't ever trust just anyone with your precious writings, art, or legal work. Investigate before you send anything off to someone to do work for you. Thanks to George, you can try these folks out that he suggests and stay away from those he has had bad experiences with.

DiSSE

Best New Prisoner Service Company For 2007

Leonard's Mom Enterprises
P.O. Box 5415,
Apache Junction, AZ 85278
Prompt, professional services and Wal-Mart prices. They offer: 100 page print-outs off the internet for Five bucks. Copies: 15¢ Email service: \$10 a month and up.

RUNNER UP

Christian's Custom Cards
P.M.B #10
13023 N.E. hwy 99 Suite #7
Vancouver, WA 98686
Offers 36 greeting cards: prints your personal message on/in the card. Also; signs card with your signature, mails cards, and sends you a confirmation all for \$3.50 a card.

Worst

Honestly folks, I've been ripped off by so many prisoner service companies in 2007 - I don't know where to begin

----- EPOCH OUTSOURCE

Linda K. Horne
P.O. Box 71544
Phoenix, AZ 85050

Under investigation by: United States Postal Inspection Service: Theft by mail fraud. If you have been ripped off by Linda or her D.B.A.'s please contact: inmate.shopping.directory@gmail.com or United States Postal Inspectors

----- CELL CONNECTION

P.O. Box 6474 Jackson, MI 49204
Under investigation by: Attorney General's Office, Consumer Protection Division.
Contact: Mike Cox P.O. Box 30213
Lansing, MI 48909

----- PrisonMailCall.com

Under investigation by: Attorney General's Office Texas and Tennessee

For your free listing in DiSSE:
reviews@DirectoryInmateShoppingServicesE-commerce.com listings are for businesses and inmate authors; no pen pal listings

SCAMS

Bunker, Lisa
Cell Connection
Comprehensive Legal Research
Epoch Outsource
EWORDS
Faax.org
Friends til' the end
Horne, Linda

Inmate Mail Pals

Inside Out
Pris-Art
Prison Mail Call
Prison Wizzard INC.
Ramirez, Columba
University Research Services
Out Of Business
Arizona Inmate Services
K&A Mail Order
Laws By Mail
Outside connections
Pampered Prisoner
Parolehelp4u.com
Perspectives
Prisoner Asst Directory
Saunders, Atlantis
S.W.E.R.V

Companies On Probation

Alive
Alternative Arts Alliance
Cellblock Mail
Epoch Publications
Extended Legal Research
Gifts Of Love
Heavenly Letters
Inmate Pen Pal Connection

Have You Been Scammed?
Free : Up to date list e-mail
inmate.shopping.directory@gmail.com

2007 Best Improved Companies

Insider Magazine
Chi-Ey INC. Photo Dept.
Prison Living Magazine

Best Foundation Project For 2007

The Prison Foundation and Jail Guitar Doors - Project in England is providing free guitars to prisoners in need. Have your prisons music director email: Joe Shade at : joeyshade@gmail.com

The address for Prison Foundation is:
1600 K. Street NW, suite 501 Washington D.C.
Phone 202-393-1511

From RAVE to RANT

HEAVENLY LETTERS
Tia Johnson: info@heavenlyletters.com
P.O. Box 851182 Westland, MI 48185
One of the best new Prisoner Services in 2006 has gone down hill fast in 2007. The owner Tia is a wonderful, honest woman. They got too many customers too fast. Poor management. I received my refund but she still has 100 of my original documents. Tia; Focus on what you do best and forget the rest.

*Body impermanent like spring mist;
mind insubstantial like empty sky;
thoughts unestablished like breezes in space.
Think about these three points over and over.
-Adept Godrakpa, "Hermit of Go Cliffs"*

Book of Knowledge – and in memory of Omar Muhammad, we'll rename this section

Omar's Dream

**Reach your worldly goals and gain effectiveness in bringing about change.
Help us find great books to recommend in short, crash courses to excellence in life skills.**

On this spiritual life journey, it is also good to be as skillful as possible in our worldly functioning. Do you have suggestions for books that you recommend for great crash courses in worldly skills? We'll try to examine them and then feature those that look like they could help us all to a path of worldly skillfulness. Here are areas we want to cover, but you can suggest others on other topics if you feel they would be helpful. English language, writing, grammar, computer skills, math skills, world history, an overview of world religions, arts history of the world, psychology and the brain, physiology, illness and healing, geography.

This month I want to recommend a book on writing, the vehicle to best express your ideas and to influence others: It is Stephen King's book, ON WRITING.

Many of you have spent many hours reading Stephen King's books because he is an engaging writer. In this book, he shares autobiographical information, but also a lot of the craft of creating and technically expressing one's thoughts. What I like is that it reveals that writing is an art and a great effort. One does not just sit down and write effectively. But it takes work and lots and lots of practice to be good at it. That work is your education and the process of examining your thoughts, beliefs, and how to express them to your reader. In this effort you find yourself. If you want to truly let others know you and to better know themselves through words, do learn to write. And reading about writing helps.

*Happiness and suffering come from your own mind, not from outside.
Your own mind is the cause of happiness; your own mind is the cause of suffering.
To obtain happiness and pacify suffering, you have to work within your own mind.
-Lama Zopa Rinpoche, "The Door To Satisfaction"*

From J.D.

Buddha's Door

Concentrated breathing - with no expectations
I'm ready and relaxed - for today's meditation
I close my eyes - and clear my mind
Looking for peace - and this is what I find

I find a door opened - with something inside
It's a set of wings - that open real wide
I give thanks to the Buddha - for what I am seeing
And dedicate this vision - to all sentient beings

So I put on the wings - I'm ready to fly
Free in my heart - as I soar through the sky
I fly over mountains - and over the trees
It's such a great feeling - as my mind is set free

At this moment I'm free - from the suffering in life
Free from the pain - that cuts like a knife
If you want this feeling - wander no more
Just turn the key - to the Buddha's door.



**Here is your Wish-Fulfilling Earth Cow for the new year 2136 which begins February 25
And
Remember that for Valentine's Day every sentient being is your beloved – none loved more than others**

*Compassion Works for All/ Dharma Friends
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Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708*

DONATION: RELIGIOUS MATERIAL
Webpage: www.dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com

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If your mind becomes firm like a rock and no longer shakes in a world where everything is shaking, your mind will be your greatest friend and suffering will not come your way. -Theragatha

Dharma Friends

February 2009 issue # 145

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Additional Pages for EMAIL VERSION of *Dharma Friends* –

A few events coming up for those in this part of the country –

#1 – Brent Peterson, one of our *Dharma Friends*, sends this on about the efforts to free our other *Friends*, Damien, Jessie, and Jason, commonly called *The West Memphis 3*, who are wrongly incarcerated in Arkansas prisons and, for Damien, on our death row. Committees and legal teams are working hard to introduce exculpatory evidence to the courts and we are at a crucial point. Everyone's help is needed. Here is the update and requests –

Dear Friends,

Efforts to free the West Memphis Three have reached an exciting turn--and we need your help! As you may already know, the most recent addition to the army of those seeking justice for the three is NYPD homicide detective turned private investigator Jay Salpeter. In order to root out missing information that has stymied this case for the last 15 years, Jay has set up a tip line (501-256-1775) to receive confidential information that may lead to the exoneration of Damien, Jason and Jessie. Last year, Jay's work on a Long Island murder case led to the release of another innocent man. (For more information, visit www.martytankleff.org.)

So what can you do? Saturday, Feb. 28, as big a group as we can gather will be leaving the west-side, upper-deck parking lot of Trio's restaurant (located in Pavilion in the Park on Cantrell) at 10 a.m. and making the trek to West Memphis. There, we will canvas shopping centers, go door to door and hand out fliers informing people about the tip line. We believe that someone somewhere knows something that can lead to the freedom of these three men--and that person is likely to be living in West Memphis right now.

Things to know: You will never be asked to go alone. We will divide the city into neighborhoods and canvas in groups. You don't even have to talk to anyone. The purpose of this trip is to distribute information, not to question residents. We will have a script prepared if you would like to be a person in your group that explains our mission that day.

The bigger the group, the more ground we can cover, and we desperately need your help with this crucial effort. Even if you can't make it to West Memphis, we will have fliers and stencils for T-shirts available soon via e-mail so you can print them and advertise the tip line wherever you are! Our hope is that all over this state, Feb. 28 will be a day of awareness and that the truth will come to light. Please let me know as soon as possible if you can join us or how else you might be able to help!

Best, Holly Ballard, Arkansas Take Action

#2 - And an upcoming Meditation retreat – a Buddhist teaching by Tibetan meditation Master Khentrul Lodrö Thayé at Katog Choling Retreat Center, the new Jasper dharma center

Jasper, Arkansas, Saturday and Sunday, February 21 & 22

Our minds are filled with myriad thoughts that move ceaselessly like waves on the surface of the ocean. We are in constant turmoil and our minds are obscured, like a sky enshrouded by clouds. Thus, we cannot develop inner peace and happiness. This is the main source of suffering. If we know how to meditate correctly, we will be able to unveil the secret of our mind and now and in the lives establish a basis for happiness.

During this short meditation retreat, Khentrul Lodrö T’hayé Rinpoche will give teachings on the basic techniques—one-pointed resting meditation (shamatha) and students will have the opportunity to meditate together as a group. There will also be time for questions and answers.

Starts 9am on Saturday and ends 5pm Sunday
Meals provided. Accommodations vary from dorm room to tenting.
Local hotel rooms and cabins also available.

Pre-registration required.
For information, registration, and directions contact Joan Riback at 707/696-4990 or joanriback@gmail.com.

Suggested donation of \$80-\$125. No one turned away for lack of funds.

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

MINDFUL MONEY by LINDA BESSETTE

Mindful Money allows us to be fully present and aware of our money issues. **Mindful Money** teaches us to be conscious and responsible stewards of our resources so that money is a healthy vehicle to reach life’s goals rather than our captor. **ENJOY!** --as Linda says to us each month as we receive our current *Dharma Friends* issue!

Linda has graciously offered to donate a portion of the proceeds of all books sold through *Dharma Friends* back to **Compassion Works for All.**

Email Linda (lbessette33@comcast.net) if you want a copy of **MINDFUL MONEY.**

Or send your check \$15 – plus \$5 handling fees, to:

Compassion Works for All, Mindful Money, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708

Also Remember 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 (above) and Mara can give you more information about prices, mailing, etc.

And anna's books –

Just As the Breeze Blows Through Moonlight, and Dharma Friends

and the **Healthy Living** pamphlet are on our **Compassion Works for All** web site – www.dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com for a free download – but donations are always appreciated! or you can order a hardcopy for \$15 plus shipping (\$5) at my email address: anna@aristotle.net



If you would like to host a **Compassion Works for All** fundraising lunch, 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.

