

COMPASSION WORKS FOR ALL

# Dharma Friends

For people in real and imagined prisons | Issue 232 | May 2021



## THE GIFT OF NON-MEDITATION

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FROM YOU,  
THE READERS

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## Responses To The Last Newsletter

### From **The Director**



A few years ago a friend gave me a very nice leather-bound journal. I was on my way to Malawi in southeast Africa for two weeks and he said he hoped I would use the journal to chronicle my experiences.

It was such a kind gesture, and on the first night in the capital city of Lilongwe, I took the journal out of my backpack and considered what to write. But something about the feel of this fancy, expensive journal made me think I should write something profound, something worthy of such a gift. So I sat there with the pen in my hand, trying desperately to come up with words of wisdom for the first page. Each time a thought arose, I'd quickly dismiss it as too shallow or boring or lacking insight.

Eventually I put the pen and still-blank journal back in my bag and went to sleep. Over the course of the next two weeks I never wrote a single word because nothing seemed worthy of the leather-bound journal.

Isn't that ridiculous?

I find that I do something similar when it comes to meditation. In my office I have a very nice cushion with two beautifully woven pillows. I try to meditate in this spot every day, but some days I feel a little distracted or not exactly "in the mood" to meditate, and my wonderful meditation spot feels too good for my simple, flawed practice. So I do nothing.

When I shared this recently with a friend, she told me, "Don't tell yourself you're going to meditate. Just say, 'I'm going to sit on this cushion and breathe.'" This has been such a wonderful benefit to my meditation practice, because now I feel free to let go of the high expectations I set for myself and simply enjoy a few moments to sit and breathe. This is the gift of non-meditation, and I hope it is a benefit to you as well.

Namaste,

Cory  
cory@compassionarkansas.org

I read your Dharma Friends newsletter whenever I can. I always enjoy your meditations and what other people write.

-Shawn, TX

Life is our teacher. Thanks for reminding me of that fact. Somehow I forgot the wise word of Bruce Lee. I guess I've been so preoccupied with life that I tend to forget advice from the sages of our past.

-Doon, CA

The last issue of Dharma Friends has me looking for teachers everywhere I go. One of the best things I am learning how to do is to learn from people I usually try to avoid. Thank you for the wise words you share with us.

-Andrew, PA

# A Meditation

By ANNA COX, CWFA Founder

**S**it comfortably with your back straight as you breathe gently. Take some time to merely breathe while your mind and body calm down from any external and internal stresses.

When you are ready, think of a time when you acted in an unkind or unskillful way which brought suffering to the world. Do not condemn or criticize yourself. See this act as an opportunity to gain insight into yourself which will allow you to be more skillful in the future. There is no more blame than if you dreamed that you had done a cruel thing. That time is over and now you may learn from your past. Watch the scenario unfold in whatever way it presents itself. Feel compassion for that “you” who

responded to the world, to another, or to your inner pain with such unskillful actions. Perhaps you may understand immediately why the situation triggered your response. It could be that such a response was habit or it could be that the stimuli brought to the surface an old wound that you wanted to escape.

No matter what the reason or justification, your action brought pain. Reflect on how you would like to respond with more balance, more kindness, and more clarity in the future. Feel this motivation.

Now, watch the scenario unfold again, only this time, listen to your heart, your inner Buddha, tell you how to handle the situation in a way that benefits yourself and others. As though you are watching a movie, watch yourself behave in these new ways. Feel what happens within you. See what happens to

other players in this new scenario. Know that you can live out this new self if a similar occasion arises again.

Take a few minutes to breathe in the pain that you caused to others. Visualize the suffering as a black smoke but know that its essence is pure space so that to breathe it in will not hurt you. Breathe this pain in to your heart and see if it transformed into love and kindness. Now, in whatever way you visualize this love, breathe it back out to those who you have hurt. Breathe it back out to yourself as well, because you have been hurt most of all. Let this breath of kindness extend out to every living being and bring them all joy.

Dedicate your meditation to all those who suffer and to your ability to always be of benefit to them.

# Poetry and **Art**

## Where the Rainbows Never Die

By **Harold, GA**

I'm an old man I can't do nothin.  
Young folks don't pay me no mind.  
But in my day I sure was somethin.  
Before I felt the heavy hand of time.  
I'm an old man now, I'm bound for glory.  
Time to lay my burden down.  
Had enough of this old world of worry.  
Gonna trade my troubles for a crown.  
I will make my way across the fields of cotton...  
And wade through muddy waters one last time...  
And in dreams, I come out clean when I reach the other side...  
Just west of where the sun sets  
Where the rainbows never die.  
I got one last thing to do  
And one more mile before I'm through  
Casting off these earthly chains  
Going where there's no more pain  
Where rainbows never die.  
I'm an old man now  
Maybe I can teach someone else  
Not to make the same mistakes I made  
That will make going where the rainbows never die.  
That much better to get  
One kid turned before I go  
Where the rainbows never die.

## Where Enlightenment Begins

By **Leaf, MO**

Suffer, suffer, suffer  
This is my life  
They won't let me be happy  
They make me so mad!  
Anger, anger, rage, punch, push, pull, hate!  
tired...I try and I try, this way and the other.  
Why are you so angry?  
They won't let me do what I want!  
Why do you want to do it?  
Because it makes me happy! I need it!  
Can you still feel happy without it?  
...I guess I could.  
You guess you could? Is it not said: 'do or do not, there is no try'?  
Lol! Really, Master Yoda? But how do you be happy without having it?  
And so the enlightenment begins.

## For His Eyez Only

By **Doon, CA**

This winter the birds didn't coo  
Like they used to

The gray ones  
Who look to us for nourishment  
And who you would sometime see  
@ the park  
Moving with the grace  
Of a Tao person

Sometimes I would wonder...  
What causes them to fly  
From one spot to another?

Maybe if I'm patient enough  
I might be able to get close  
So i could ask them myself

Where did you come from?  
How long have you been here?  
Is this your favorite spot?

I noticed you in particular  
Because you never say a word  
And I couldn't help but wonder  
"What's on your mind?"

Artwork by  
**Michael, NM**



# Yoga On The Inside

Thanks to Sixth House Studio in Little Rock for providing this month's Yoga on the Inside poses. Practice these movements in a rotation to release lower back discomfort.

## 1. Windshield Wipe Knees

Laying down on the mat, let both knees fall towards one side of the mat and then the other side. Go side to side slowly, windshield wiping the knees. Breathe generously as you move softly and slowly.

Option to turn your head in the opposite direction of your knees. After you move side to side for a few rounds, pause on one side and breathe there for a moment; then go to the other side.



## 2. Bridge Pose

Walk the feet closer towards one another, hip-distance apart (you can find this by placing your hands on the fronts of your hip bones and aligning your heels with your hands). Walk your heels close in towards your body while maintaining the feet flat on the ground. Bring your arms down, close by your sides with the palms pressing down into the floor. Breathe out and then press into your arms, hands, and feet and lift your hips and belly away from the mat. Take a few deep breaths here and then slowly, carefully lower down.



## 3. Knee to Chest

Feet flat on the ground, hug one knee into your chest while relaxing the backs of your shoulders and head to the earth. One option here might be to straighten the other leg down along the floor. Take several breaths here as you relax your face muscles and neck.



## 4. Cat Stretch Twist

Keep the knee hugged in and straighten the bottom leg if you haven't already done so. Take the opposite arm of knee that's hugged in and open it on the floor to a "T" with the palm down to support you as you gently guide the knee up and over towards the other side of the mat into a twist. Option to turn your gaze to the outstretched arm. Take several breaths here and relax. Then, gently roll onto your back to release. Switch to the other side and repeat 3 & 4.



## 5. Savasanat

Stretch the legs down and long onto the mat, and separate the heels to the edges. Rest your arms either by your sides in a "V" shape with the palms up, or you rest the hands somewhere that feels comfortable. Close down the eyes and focus on your natural, quiet breath; if closing the eyes is not comfortable, find something to stare at. If lying on your back is uncomfortable, try laying on your side or your belly, or you can sit in a comfortable posture. Wherever you choose to be, allow yourself 5-10 minutes of quiet, undisturbed rest here.



# WHEN IS MEDITATION NON-MEDITATION?

By **Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche**

**T**here are many ways to meditate, many different meditation practices and techniques, but here I would like to focus on the three qualities of sitting or resting meditation taught in Vajrayana Buddhism. These three qualities are:

Non-distraction  
Non-meditation  
Non-fabrication

## What is Non-Distraction?

The first of these is non-distraction. Non-distraction is actually what meditation is all about: being non-distracted from this current experience. Being distracted is a source of many of our problems. It is difficult to accomplish anything if we are not focused on what we are doing. For example, when we are distracted from our conversation, we can get into a lot of trouble with our friends or loved ones.

But also, from the point of view of the Buddhist teachings, when our mind is distracted, that is the time we usually fall into some kind of mistake, negative habit, or get easily disturbed by difficult thoughts and emotions. When we are distracted it is easy to miss when powerful emotions like anger, jealousy, resentment, and so on are arising for us. We may not notice we are experiencing these emotions until they are so intense that we have very little room to work with them. But if, due to not being distracted, we notice them earlier, when they are still gaining some steam, so to speak, we have many more options on how to work skillfully with them. So non-distraction is a very helpful quality.

Non-distraction is not exactly like focusing and concentrating. From the perspective of Vajrayana Buddhism, we don't really need to make a lot of effort to concentrate our mind. Focusing and concentrating is not the key, it is just the tool. It's just a tool for non-distraction.

Even when we say concentrate on the breath, it means breath is a reference point. A reference point for what? It is a reference point for non-distraction. We need a reference point for non-distraction, something that keeps us aware of what is happening in the present.

In the beginning we use the breath because the breath is always happening now, so it is a very helpful reference point for non-distraction. We can't look at the past breath, it is gone. We can't look at the future breath, it is not here. When we look at the present experience of breath, of breathing, we are here, now, resting non-distracted in the present. When we focus on the breath we have this quality of non-distraction. It is important to remember that. Focusing on the breath is simply a tool for not getting distracted from the present, nothing more.

## What does Non-Meditation Mean?

We may think that in meditation we have a lot

to do. That's why sometimes we say, I'm "doing" meditation. Actually there's nothing to do. Just sit. The very statement, "I'm going to do meditation" is problematic. It is like saying, "I'm going to do resting." That doesn't make sense. You don't say that, do you? You say, "I'm going to rest." So there's no "doing" resting. There is no such thing as 'doing' resting, it is just resting. That's the second quality; that is non-meditation. There's no such thing as doing something here, because the instruction is simply for us to rest. It's called resting meditation. If you are doing something to rest then you're not resting. If you are "doing" meditation then you are not meditating.

## The Third Quality of Resting Meditation: Non-Fabrication

This means don't try to be someone. Don't think when you sit in meditation you are becoming a totally different person, a 'spiritual' or 'Buddha' person. It is not the case that you sit down and become a better version of yourself, and then when you stand up from the cushion and become your evil twin. That's not our practice.

Non-fabrication means when you're meditating you are the same person, and when you arise from that meditation you are the same person. Don't fabricate, don't put on a mask, and don't hide from yourself. We have to relax and be ourselves. You don't have to become religious or spiritual. Meditation is not about becoming a religious, spiritual, or 'better' person. It's about discovering who you are. Meditation is about discovering ourselves, who we are, who we actually are, not who we think we are. In Buddhist language, we say meditation is about discovering the true nature of our mind.

## Why is There Nothing to Do and No One to Become?

In the Vajrayana teachings we talk about mind's nature being Buddha Nature. We talk about our mind's nature being awakened now, right now, in this very moment. We don't need to create our mind's nature or improve it in any way. Mind's nature has always been awakened, we just need to discover or rediscover that.

But, if you want to see that nature, that naturally awakened mind, you have to see your mind first. Before you can discover the nature of a thing, you need to find the thing itself.

We say that we want to see mind's nature, and we are really focusing on finding this nature, but at the same time, we don't know our mind yet. That's a problem. First, we have to find out what this mind is, then we can discover its nature. For that reason, non-fabrication plays a very important role in our practice.

In the space of relaxed non-distraction, we need to take a good look at our mind, without any

fabrication, fakery, or pretense. Then we see whatever we see. Once we see our mind, we can start to look for the nature of that mind.

## What About All Those Thoughts?

Within that resting meditation -- with the three qualities of non-distraction, non-meditation, and non-fabrication -- we may experience thoughts. Thoughts are arising and arising for us, continually.

Thoughts themselves are not a problem, but usually we come under the influence of those thoughts and they totally overpower us. We become a very loyal follower of our thoughts. We chase thoughts of the past, the future, and the present. And so in the meditation, if we experience being overpowered by thoughts, we need to come back to non-distraction. The basic technique we learn is "acknowledge the thought." Say "thought" and let go. Come back to breathing. Or, come back to non-distraction. It is that simple.

These are three qualities or three methods of Vajrayana resting meditation. But, all methods have the possibility to bring about the realization of the nature of mind. Don't think, "Oh I need to finish this first, then this, then that, then boom, I will get realization." It doesn't happen that way. And it is never taught in the Mahamudra or Dzogchen teachings that that's how we get it. Realization can happen in any moment. Seeing the nature of mind can happen in any moment. Any method can lead us to that. The key point here is how genuinely and how well we actually apply these methods.

## A Simple Meditation

Here is a simple meditation you can try at home.

1. With a positive, heartfelt motivation sit comfortably with your spine well-supported and allow your body to relax.
2. Bring your attention to your breath, your reference point for non-distraction.
3. With the breath as your support, relax your mind into the experience of nowness.
4. If thoughts arise just notice them without chasing after them or trying to stop them. Thoughts themselves are not a problem.
5. If you become overpowered by thoughts, distracted by thoughts, you can label them "thinking" and then return to a light focus on your breath, return to resting in non-distraction.
6. Relaxing without distraction in the present moment, simply be as you are where you are. Remind yourself there is no need to do anything, no need to fabricate anything, no need to dress up your experience into something more "spiritual", and no need to try to make it better or worse. Don't push away or hold onto your experience. Relax and stay present.

*The teachings presented in this article were originally given by Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche to a public audience in Montreal, in 2015.*

# Bulletin Board

## Write To Us!

### Ask Tim

Tim answers letters asking for help with those things that we know you cannot do in prison. Tim looks up resources, but there are a few things he cannot do: Tim is not qualified to counsel about personal and/or relationship problems. Money or 'things' will never be given to any writer. We will not provide addresses of individuals in the free world to anyone. We cannot provide information obtained from Facebook or other social media websites.

### Request Topics

Let us know what topics you'd like to read about. Whether you're brand new to mindfulness and meditation or a seasoned pro, let us know what piques your interest and it might be featured in a future newsletter.

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the right day to Love,  
Believe, Do and mostly Live

*Dalai Lama*

