

COMPASSION WORKS FOR ALL

# Dharma Friends

For people in real and imagined prisons | Issue 239 | May 2022

## FROM DESTRUCTIVE TO PRODUCTIVE



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**Q:** About meditation, I always thought that my atmosphere had to be quiet. Where I'm at it is never quiet and I am not exaggerating when I say this...Is it still possible to meditate? If so, will you please guide me with this?  
-Carlos, TX

**A:** Hi Carlos - thank you so much for your letter and your question. If we could gather every Dharma Friends subscriber into a room and say, "Raise your hand if it's hard to meditate in the place where you're incarcerated," I predict 100% of the hands would go up. You're not alone! And you're absolutely right, it is LOUD inside our jails and prisons, and therefore it is often difficult to meditate. I always tell the students in the classes I teach at our local jail that if they can meditate in jail, they can meditate anywhere! So, how do we deal with noise and distractions? We start by **naming what we hear** around us. "I hear someone yelling. I hear a door slam. I hear loud music. I hear the air vents." And as we name what we hear, we do so with **nonjudgment** - assigning no positive or negative value to what's going on. The sound is just the sound. We're merely observing what's happening in the present moment with full awareness. By doing this, we become one with our surroundings and our minds are much more capable of opening up to the deep truths about ourselves. Personally though, I've found that external distractions are far less difficult to overcome than internal distractions. As I typed that sentence a train passed by outside my window. I paused a second and enjoyed the sound. But eventually the train will go away and I'll still be left with my thoughts. We manage internal "noise" by giving our monkey minds a task - focus on our breath, focus on our body, focus on a mantra. By doing this we don't fight or resist our mind; instead we harness its power and use it to keep us firmly rooted in the present. All of this is much easier said than done, and that's why it's called meditation practice. I hope that's helpful.

## From **The Director**



A year ago this month I underwent surgery to remove what my doctor diagnosed as carcinoma ex pleomorphic adenoma, which is a fancy way to say cancer in my salivary gland. The tumor was about the size of a grape and was bulging out the side of my neck.

When I first received a cancer diagnosis, I turned to the earth to find a sense of grounding and healing. I had never grown a garden before, and decided it was time to give it a try. So I purchased some lumber and built a raised bed. I bought the soil and the saplings and watched several hours of YouTube videos to - at minimum - learn how not to kill my plants.

This became a wonderful, therapeutic experience for me because I learned that flowers and vegetables are not "grown" by a gardener - they mysteriously grow all on their own. The gardener's job is to cultivate the ground in such a way that it allows the good stuff to grow. Most of us

mindlessly allow our lives to become like an untended field with weeds and poisonous plants that extinguish any hope of fruitbearing life. Mindfulness is the practice of clearing our head- and heart-space so that the good stuff that's buried deep inside us has what it needs to emerge.

Let's face it - living in prison is like planting a garden in a concrete parking lot with no sunlight. If you're going to cultivate life-giving things like peace and love and hope and goodness, it's going to take more work than the average person. But you can do this! You can commit yourself to a path of life-giving grace through your thoughts, actions, speech, and intentions. You can cultivate the spiritual soil within you so that the most beautiful parts of life come bursting forth.

As Buddhist teacher, Jack Kornfield, has said: "Where we're going is the eternal present, and what we're becoming is what we already are."

Namaste,  
Cory  
cory@compassionarkansas.org



# A Meditation

Every one of us, in prison or not, has done a lot to cause suffering to others. We have all had thoughts, said words, and carried out actions during times of anger, fear, greed, confusion, lack of information, and even in rage that have hurt other beings. Our intention at those times was self-serving and at some level, we meant to cause harm. Even if we were horrified the moment after the event occurred, it is important to take responsibility for that part of us that was willing to cause pain. Now, as a meditator, one aspiring to be “endowed with dharma”, and one vowing to not harm other beings, consider that we may offer kindness and healing even where we have caused pain. Think of one particular incident that you would like to turn into healing and benefit.

## A TongLen Meditation

Spend a few quiet minutes relaxing your body. Sit up straight but comfortably. When you are ready, follow your breath in and out until your mind is calm and balanced. As you can, rest in your calm mind. Develop the intention to heal the pain of others as well as your own. In your mind’s eye, replay the event in which you caused pain. See clearly how you created the situation and examine your willingness to harm others and yourself. Don’t be critical or condemning of yourself or of them. Just watch with equanimity and feel compassion for everyone hurt by the event. Draw your circle of compassion as wide as you are able to. See before you the being (it need not be

a person) that you caused the greatest pain to in this incident, whether they are living or dead today. Imagine that you are breathing into your heart the pain that they feel. Believe that your heart has the capacity to transform that pain into love and healing energy. You might see this transformation as different colors or textures or symbols, or you might physically feel the change happen. Just trust that whatever appears to you is true. As you exhale, breathe that energy of healing and love back to the being before you and see them receive your love. Continue breathing at a normal pace but feel that you are breathing in the other’s pain and send back healing love until you see them transformed and then fully healed.

Expand your meditation. See all those others who were hurt by your actions. Breathe in their pain and let your heart transform it into healing love. Breathe that love back into their hearts. Slowly, breathe in their pain and breathe out love. Continue until you see in your mind’s eye that all of those beings are healed.

Now, place yourself before you in your mind’s eye. Breathe in your pain and in your heart, transform it into compassion, love and healing. Breathe this love back into the heart of the you that is visualized standing before you. Continue your meditation until you see that visualized self responding and letting go of the pain. Forgive yourself and see yourself filled with love.

And now, expand your meditation to all beings ever hurt and in pain. Of course, that is being throughout all

time — those hurt by mean words, angry acts, physical attacks, those robbed of their precious belongings or of their security or of their lives.

It includes every squashed bug, every hooked fish, every slaughtered animal, every abused child, every being killed in war, every abandoned elderly, mentally ill, or imprisoned person, all those sick, all those wrongly punished, all betrayed lovers, and all murdered innocents. Breathe in their pain and suffering. Transform all that horror into love and healing. Breathe that energy back to all of those you hold in your vast view and watch. In whatever way your vision reveals itself to you, watch as they take in this love. See everyone receiving exactly what they need. Watch as they are healed and their pain is lifted from them.

Rest gently in this state of breathing in suffering and breathing out compassion to all for as long as you can. Dedicate your meditation to benefit all beings everywhere equally. Continue to live this meditation always. If you cause someone pain as you go through the day, immediately breathe in their pain and breathe out love and healing. Say or do what needs to be said and done just as quickly as you have the capacity to do so. If you sit in a cafeteria or a chow hall, or sit waiting for a movie to start, if you are standing at your cell bars watching others, or if walking down the hallway or the street, do this meditation continuously for everyone that you see — and all that you don’t see — with every breath.



# A Poem

## Purpose & Intent

By Broderick, AR

I was sentenced here to serve time,  
reflection and rehabilitation were the last things on my mind - at that time.  
As the days turned into months and the months into years  
my confusion turned into anger and my anger turned into tears.  
Tears of remorse not yet for the victim,  
but for my perception concerning all those lost years.  
For how could I truly mourn for him  
if I didn't truly understand why I was here?  
Somewhere along the journey I realized the purpose and intent  
the physical separation not the dehumanization for which my sentence was really sent.  
It wasn't to restore order or even undo the chaos caused by the event.  
It was reflection and rehabilitation for all purpose and intent.  
Now the path to rehabilitation is narrow not wide  
and it's easy to get distracted by things on the outside.  
I turned my focus inside/inward on a quest to discover why it is that I'm alive.  
It was on this quest that I discovered my gift of using words to encourage and uplift.  
By sharing my experience I hope to prevent  
any future harm caused by those once hell-bent on pursuing the path of selfishness.  
I'm not claiming to be perfect by any means,  
but I've changed my views and actions on a lot of things.

# Yoga On The Inside

## 15 MIN FULL BODY YOGA STRETCH

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### Cat-cow.

Repeat 3-5 times.

### Thread the needle.

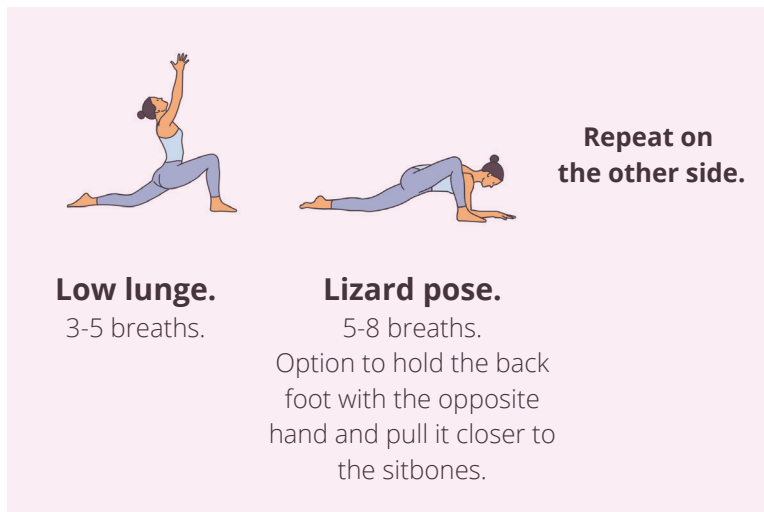
Stay for 3-5 breaths and repeat on the other side.

### Puppy pose.

5-8 breaths.

### Downward dog.

5-8 breaths.  
Option to walk the feet one by one, stretching the back of the legs.



### Low lunge.

3-5 breaths.

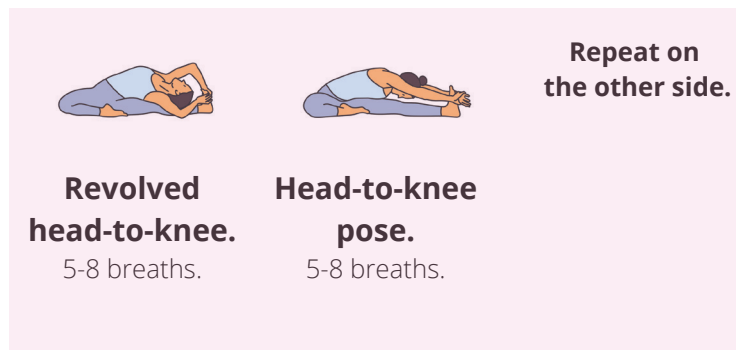
### Lizard pose.

5-8 breaths.  
Option to hold the back foot with the opposite hand and pull it closer to the sitbones.



### Wide-legged forward bend.

5-10 breaths.



### Revolved head-to-knee.

5-8 breaths.

### Head-to-knee pose.

5-8 breaths.



### Double pigeon.

5-10 breaths, then repeat on the other side.



### Seated twist.

3-5 breaths and repeat on the other side.

# THOUGHTS ON DESTRUCTION

From **Anna Cox, October 2001**

This was originally written in the month following the September 11th attacks on New York City and Washington DC.

I find it interesting in the light of the circumstances of this past month that we have been challenged with this Dhammapada reading - a lovely image of flowers with all of their colors, scents, and temptations. The world, "Yama's realm of destruction -- this world and the realm of the gods", is offered to us as a garden of beautiful flowers. No wonder we get so confused! Yama is the god of death and Mara is the temptress into suffering. This realm in which we live is referred to as the realm of destruction" for all beings. All beings include the gods, beings who exist symbolically or literally, depending on your interpretation of the Hinayana teachings. The gods live a long life of abundance and happiness until they too face death. They endure suffering even more enormous than our own because they have felt immune to death. Yama visits everyone. This 'world of destruction' is only the recognition that all that manifests from the composition of materials (all form) will at some point no longer exist. All that we see that exists around us, at some point will be destroyed. We know that ultimately and truthfully this is a realm of destruction but we forget. We look around and see a garden of flowers, fragrant and lovely. Tempted by their beauty, we leisurely stroll about noticing our desire for this one or that, and linger to pick the most beautiful ones. Perhaps our arms are full and yet we gaze about the garden, wanting another and another before we leave.

"Whoever realizes that this body is just like foam, whoever knows all things are like a mirage, will break Mara's arrows of desire which look like flowers, and will travel on, unseen by the Lord of Death." To spend one's life searching for flowers, or even practicing dharma as though the dharma teachings themselves are flowers to be gathered, is to never leave the realm of Mara and Yama; to never learn the essential teaching. Each flower as well as each manifestation of form, all of Mara's arrows of desire that convincingly promise beauty and pleasure, are like a mirage. The flower we pick never in truth exists. And as we wander the garden engaged in desire, "Just as a raging river sweeps away a sleeping village, death will carry off the one spellbound by picking flowers." Those whose minds are held spellbound by picking flowers will be overwhelmed by death, their desires still unsatisfied."

But then, the last verse says that those who recognize the mirage know the truth of the flower and the truth of their own existence. They are not subject to the power of Yama's realm of death. That person passes through the garden drinking in the scent and feeding on the beauty. Yet, they have no desire to pick the flowers. "Just as a bee extracts the flower's nectar without disturbing the flower's color or scent, the Sage moves through the town and quickly passes on."

For her, there are no worldly dramas of flowers to pick, nor story lines of who picked what or took more than their share. The one who is following dharma knows that the only benefit is in mindfully being aware of one's steps on the path of their own practice. "Do not reflect upon the missteps of others, their deeds and misdeeds, but rather look upon what you yourself have done and left undone."

When our focus is on following the teachings, then all the flowers are opportunities and tools that enable us to implement our dharma practice in the world. "Just as one makes many garlands from a heap of flowers, those who are certain of death perform many virtuous actions." "A fresh and fragrant lotus of breathtaking beauty grows on a heap of rubbish along the highway." For all of those beautiful flowers are the heap of rubbish even when they are but seeds first planted in the dirt. Ordinarily, we suffer in our confusion if we long for the flowers and despise the heap of rubbish. In knowing that they are the same, we are the lotus flower, a wisdom Buddha, that lives freely in that recognition. "In this same way, followers of the perfect Buddha, those who shine with wisdom, stand out from the dustheap of ordinary men, those who are blind to virtue." In Vajrayana Buddhism, there is a teaching image that is offered that is quite a contrast to this one of picking beautiful flowers. It says, Practice dharma as though your hair is on fire! For sure, if your hair were on fire, you would be racing to put it out without a second's pause. You would know that it was an emergency. What can I do to put out this fire? Quick, get me some water - anything that works to put out the fire! Before September 11, 2001, we can imagine picking flowers in the garden and perhaps even believe that we had the leisure to pick the flowers of dharma teachings. After September 11, we might better identify with looking wildly about for the water.

## **How can we approach this world event as a dharma teaching?**

Many are suffering enormously. We see Yama's realm of destruction and embrace those who feel overwhelmed. If we know the mirage of Mara, but those suffering know no other reality, our unshaken stability can plant seeds of a vaster wisdom without saying anything about their destroyed garden unless we are asked. We have to be the containers, the safe place, for those who have had their reality destroyed.

Many are talking endlessly about this theory or that. Everyone seems to hold this expert view to wage war or that expert view to bring peace. If we know that Yama's realm of destruction is just that no matter what the theory, Until all beings find equanimity in the recognition of their true essence, there will forever be samsara and suffering that cannot be fixed. Remember Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching about the arrow? When a man is hit by a poison arrow, the best course

of action is to grab the arrow and to pull it out. We could ponder how the arrow went in; who shot it; what kind of poison it might be; what the antidote to the poison is; how to prevent more such attacks.... but by then our victim will be dead. As Buddhas, we always respond to suffering by doing what we can to eliminate it and to help any and all beings as best we can.

Many are pointing out enemies and aligning with friends. When we see the reality of the realm of destruction, we know it is one's view, not actual reality, that allows us to discriminate between beings as 'friend' or 'enemy'. When we truly look at what is, we see the display of a myriad of qualities that all make up this perfect mandala of samsara. We each have our own individual glimpse of reality. This samsaric mandala is a mirror held up before us to present us with our own creation. Who and what we see are not friends and enemies - good stories and bad. All of that display in the mirror is us as a reflection of our multidimensional selves -all the better to know ourselves in this special presentation. This is true in our individual identities and in our group and national identity. Once we stop separating from others and know that we are all one in our essence, and can be one in our hearts, then we look clearly at those qualities and manifestations of what is. Only then can we utilize all that energetic capacity with wisdom. Another story: the rabbit is pacing the riverbank wondering how to get across the swiftly moving river to her family of starving babies. Along comes a fox and offers to carry her across. She is somewhat suspicious since this is, of course, a fox. But he assures her that he is deeply moved by her predicament and is happy to carry her across the river. With no other options, she climbs on his back and, uncertain, the journey begins. Little by little, she learns to trust him. He carries her securely, chatting in a friendly way as he swims confidently through the waves. Finally at the other side, she is profoundly grateful and expresses her embarrassment that she had been so untrusting. He waves good-bye and no sooner does she turn to hop on home to her burrow than the fox pounces on her with sharp teeth ready. In amazement she asks why he has turned on her so horribly. "You forgot that I am a fox and it is my nature to kill rabbits," he says matter of factly.

**In dharma, we must see what is as it manifests in ordinary reality and as it is in wisdom reality. We then hold all in balance and equanimity. We do not perceive reality with judgement and desire to change or fix, but in a clarity that allows us to meet what is with our full presence and willingness. We recognize the power of manifestation and all that it embodies and all that is as the embodiment of true essence. Then we go on, taking nothing and leaving nothing, to enter the next moment - again, with our totality.**

# 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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FREE RELIGIOUS MATERIAL



"If we live our present moment mindfully,  
we will know what to do and what not to do,  
and we will try to do things in the  
direction of peace."

-Thich Nhat Hanh