

# Dharma Friends

For people in real and imagined prisons | Issue 241 | September 2022

## HOW SIMPLE ARE YOU WILLING TO LET IT BE?

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## From **The Director**



A meditation teacher once told a crowded room of students: “Raise your hand if you want life to be more simple.” As you might expect, every hand went up.

Why is it that just about every person in the world wants to simplify their life? If this is a fundamental desire for almost every human being, how have we not figured it out? My guess is that we have, in fact, figured it out, we simply don’t want to do it. Simplicity is not about reducing our outward experiences as much as it is about taking control of our inner being.

Regardless of what’s happening externally, it’s our minds that hold us prisoner to chaos, uncertainty, fear, and suffering. As meditation teacher Jack Kornfield says, we become very loyal to our suffering and tend to have a difficult time letting it go. Sometimes there’s even something comforting about continuing to wallow in our self-pity and sorrow. As I mentioned in the last issue, it can create a Victim mindset which is a powerful weapon to wield over those around us.

But when we’re willing to say to the chaos, uncertainty, fear, and suffering in our minds, “You’re free. I no longer need you,” we often find that our lives

not only become quite calm, but also quite simple. The sense of feeling overwhelmed with a busy and chaotic mind is usually the result of our refusal to let things simply be what they are. Whether through grasping or resistance, we try to force life to unfold on our terms. This is like trying to force the water in a river to flow the opposite way. You’re going to lose that battle and drive yourself mad in the process.

I am by no means suggesting you should passively take everything that’s thrown at you, to be a doormat or someone who is easily taken advantage of. Instead, the act of simplifying life requires that we accept the natural flow of things while setting forth to do the work that’s required of us to live according to our highest intentions.

This issue is dedicated to the simple life. “How simple are you willing to let things be?” This is a question from which we can all learn many things about transforming ourselves inwardly. I hope you enjoy it, and I look forward to reading your responses.

Namaste,

Cory  
cory@compassionarkansas.org

### **FROM YOU, THE READERS**

The July 2022 issue of Dharma Friends is once again top notch. I deeply appreciated reading and learning from the article “A Meditation on Right Livelihood.” What beautiful loving information. Thank you for being so faithful at sending the magazine out. I know I learn so much from them each and every time. Only one side note, I missed the yoga section.

**Adrian, CA**

Recently I was shown a newsletter that you sent to a friend of mine. I’m writing to request one for myself and to thank you for your kindness and support. I’m currently in federal custody and have had a very hard 3 years into my 10 year sentence and it has brought me to Buddhism and with the path I’m now able to find some joy thanks to mindfulness and the love and kindness its taught me.

**Danny, KY**

I look forward to receiving my next issue of Dharma Friends. It’s hard to believe that it’s been about eight years since I received my first newsletter. Today, like the past, I continue to be inspired by each newsletter. I am thankful for the work being done at CWFA. You all have helped me so much.”

**Arnold, CA**

# A MEDITATION ON RIGHT MOTIVATION

The following was written by CWFA founder, Anna Cox, for a Dharma Friends issue dated September 2001.

**R**ight Conception or Right Motivation is our vehicle and we will again draw from tradition by meditating on the Bodhisattva vow. All of the Mahayana lineages of Buddhism base their practice on the motivation to achieve enlightenment not for themselves alone but in order to benefit all beings. We take a vow every time we do our meditation practice that we will dedicate our life to the happiness of others. We promise to return to help sentient beings even after we die. Until all beings are free from suffering, we will always take rebirth in the most beneficial form for others in order to liberate them from samsara. You need not be in the presence of a lama, teacher, or master to take this vow. You are already a Buddha in your true essence. You can take this vow knowing that your already realized inner Buddha is your witness. If you would like to make this commitment as a Buddhist vow and begin to make it a fundamental principle in your life, you may do that now. Do not worry that you should not take this vow because you may break it as soon as your meditation is over. We all are careless and inattentive and break our vows all the time. We can admit our error, hold regret in our heart, and ask Buddha to purify us. Then we start again. If you are not ready to do this meditation as a vow, you may read this prayer with the hope of being able to realize it as much as possible. Or, you may use it as a meditation to deepen your heart of compassion. There are many of you in Dharma Friends who have taken this vow from your teacher and live it as your meditation practice. Let this be an opportunity to know yourself ever more clearly as a manifestation of Buddha's compassion in the world. Here is the vow as it is in a Vajrayana healing prayer and meditation. I have followed it by another prayer: The Four Immeasurables.

Meditate for a while to bring quiet and stillness to your mind. Sit with your back straight and your body balanced. Visualize that before you sit Shakyamuni Buddha as a being of radiant light. Around him are all Buddhas. Filling endless realms of space are all sentient beings. Say the verse out loud if you can. Repeat it 3



times, 7 times, 21 times, or 108 times. Each time, let the words fill your heart. Be aware that Buddha is watching you and listening to you make this commitment. Know that he loves you for your very noble and pure intention.

*Generation of Bodhicitta:*  
*For the benefit of all beings I develop the intention to accomplish the enlightenment of the Buddha. I vow to then liberate all beings through the enlightened activity that guides beings each according to their needs.*

## **The Four Immeasurables**

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free of bias, attachment and anger. May they abide in this way. I shall cause them to abide in this way. Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and its causes. May they have these. I shall cause them to have these. Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering and its causes. May they be free. I shall cause them to be free. Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never parted from upper rebirth and liberation's excellent bliss. May they never be parted. I shall

cause them never to be parted. Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

*May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes.*  
*May all sentient beings be free of suffering and its causes.*  
*May all sentient beings not be separated from sorrowless bliss.*  
*May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free of bias, attachment and anger.*  
*When you have finished the recitations, rest in meditation for as long as you can.*

"Now, whatever time you can commit to the practice of Dharma- be it one year, one month, one week, or one day- the motivation with which you do it is extremely important. It should be done with bodhicitta, the mind of awakening; this means telling yourself that you are going to do it for the benefit of all beings. Having this inner attitude as the basis of all practices is very important. "While progressing on the path, properly speaking, the most important thing, if one can do it, is to understand as much as possible the nature of the mind and do each practice with this understanding as the basis. If one can do recitations and physical practices with the speech and body while meditating on the nature of mind, these will bring even great benefit." Kalu Rinpoche, from "Homage to Khyab Je Kalu Rinpoche", available from Snow Lion Publications.

# Yoga On The Inside

## 10 MIN STANDING YOGA ROUTINE

YOGAWITHULIANA.COM

### 1. Half Sun Salutation - 2-3 times.



A few deep breaths in mountain pose.



Inhale - backbend.



Exhale - forward fold. Knees can be bent.



Inhale - half forward bend. Straighten the spine, hands on the chins.



Exhale - full forward fold.



Inhale - backbend.



Exhale - mountain pose.

### 2. Chair pose.

5 breaths.  
Seat as deep as you can.



### 3. Rag doll.

8-10 breaths.  
Let your neck and spine release.



### 4. Warrior II.

5 breaths



### 5. Reverse warrior.

1-3 breaths



### 6. Extended side angle.

5 breaths



### 7. Triangle pose.

5 breaths



Repeat on the other side

### 8. Wide legged forward fold.

5 breaths. Optional twist.



### 9. Tree pose.

5-8 breaths each side.



### 10. Standing figure 4.

5-8 breaths each side.



### 11. Wide legged forward fold.

5 breaths. Interlace fingers behind the back for variation.



# How Simple are You Willing to Let it Be?

This quote from Buddhist teacher, Flint Sparks, is on a letter board in my office. Our organization's wonderful correspondence director, Judith, said it to me one day and the weight of it nearly knocked me out of my seat. I immediately wrote it down and have been thinking about it from time to time ever since.

I love the implied statement that things are, naturally, simple. How simple are you willing to let it be? That's different from "How simple are you willing to make it?" Life is simple. That's not to say it's easy, because if you believe that then just wait a second. Life inevitably throws stuff that makes us pause and get our bearings before finding a course forward.

But difficult is not the same as complicated. Each situation in which we find ourselves can be broken down to its very simple parts.

Life itself is simple; it's our thinking and judgment that make things complicated.

When I teach at our local jail I always bring donuts from a nearby donut shop. A few weeks ago I was running late and decided to go by a different shop instead, just to save time. To my dismay, the parking lot was packed and the line was out the door. I didn't have time to drive to my regular place, so I waited for a parking spot and made my way in.

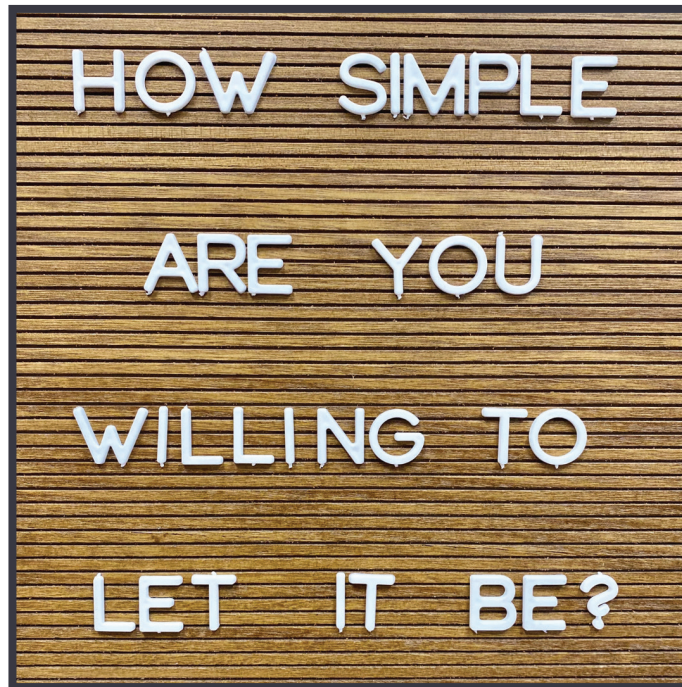
At the front of the line a man was taking his sweet time. "Let me see...how about a couple of those with sprinkles. And maybe a

glazed. What do those taste like, the ones with coconut?"

You could feel the collective cringe from everyone in line.

He finally got his donuts, and the man behind him proceeded to do the exact same thing! "Let's see...we'll start with some chocolate. Are those blueberry?"

AAAAAAGGGGGHHH!!!



Since I was on my way to teach a mindfulness class, I decided to use the moment as a chance to be mindful and started noticing my own physical reactions. My neck was tense. My arms were crossed. I noticed that I kept leaning to my right, straining to see how fast the employee was filling the box. My breath was shallow, my pulse quickened, and the sweat pores on my face and arms opened.

Yep, I was stressed.

So I took a calming breath or two and tried to simplify things. I

relaxed my shoulders, felt my feet grounded on the floor, and uncrossed my arms. I asked myself "What is actually happening?"

The answer was that about 8 people arrived at a popular donut shop in Little Rock around the same time to buy their morning donuts. I was at the end of the line.

That's what was happening. Anything else - whether the line was fast or slow, whether the other patrons were helping or harming, whether the employees were moving fast enough - was all based on the story I told myself.

A thought arose that I decided to keep repeating until it was my turn: the line will take as long as the line will take.

No amount of stress, frustration, anger, checking my watch, sighing heavily, complaining to fellow line mates, or shouting at the donut shop employees was going to make that line move faster. In fact, just for spite,

they might have decided to move even slower. And had I done those things, I would have caused an embarrassing scene and made a fool of myself.

The line will take as long as the line will take.

This is, of course, true for everything in life. One of our long-time volunteers, Cliff, told me recently that he's having a heart procedure next month. I asked him if he's nervous. And because Cliff is a consistent

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# Simple

Continued from Page 5

practitioner of Buddhist meditation and teachings, he just shrugged and said, “I suppose

not. Being nervous won’t change one thing about it.”

Whether we’re stuck in traffic, listening to a lecture, waiting for a phone call, hoping a code will lift, or required to spend an extended amount of time in confinement, nothing we think about our situation will change what the situation is. In fact, wrong thinking can lead us into some destructive places, both inwardly and outwardly, especially when it comes to how we think about ourselves.

What story have you convinced yourself is true about you? I talk with so many people who are incarcerated who sincerely believe that what the prison system says about them is true: I’m just an addict, I’m just a thief, I’m just drug dealer.

Whether those actions are part of your past or not, they certainly don’t singularly define who you are, because none of us are just one thing. I’m sitting here at my desk in my small office above a train station in Little Rock. I am currently functioning as the executive director of Compassion Works for All.

But that’s not who I am.

In just a bit, I’ll leave my office and go to the store to pick up a few things my wife asked me to grab. I do this because I enjoy taking care of her as her husband.

But that’s not who I am.

After I drop off the groceries I’ll go pick up my son from school and enjoy a short car ride home in my role as a dad.

But that’s not who I am.

Just as we must tell ourselves the very simple truth about what’s happening around us, we must also tell the very simple truth about who we are. We are not what we do - whether it’s considered “good” or “bad.”

The simple truth is that we are all living beings, and how we choose to live out our being-ness depends on the story we tell about our truest, deepest selves.

So who are you?

Try this exercise:

Find a relatively quiet place (though that is probably difficult). Settle into a moment of stillness with both your mind and your body. Find your breath. Breathe in and out gently through your nose a few times. And each time, feel your body realx. Once you’re in a state of relative stillness, imagine that an elevator has appeared in your mind. You step on the elevator and press the only button inside. The elevator

begins to slowly move down from your mind into your heart. It stops in your heart center and the doors remain closed for a moment.

You instinctively know that when they open, you will see your True Self as you really are.

Take a calming breath and wait for the doors to open. When they do, step off the elevator and greet your True Self. What does your True Self look like? Is your True Self young or old? The same as you or somewhat different?

What is your True Self wearing? Now spend a moment in conversation with your True Self. What does your True Self say to you? What do you notice about your truest identity? After a few moments together, walk with your True Self back over to the elevator. As the doors open, embrace your True Self with a tender hug.

When you step on the elevator, look back and see your True Self. See how your True Self smiles at you with tenderness and compassion. Feel the forgiveness and love. Get caught up in the radical, absolute acceptance of yourself. When the doors close, press the button again.

The elevator will rise back up into your mind. When you step off this time, notice the difference between the thoughts in your mind and the experience with your True Self. Note that your thoughts are not you. They’re just thoughts. Spend a moment deciding how to move forward from here living more aligned with your True Self. And let your True Self guide you into a more effortless, simple life.

# 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.

### Subscribe

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Interested in learning more about Buddhism and connecting with Buddhist organizations? Consider this correspondence course from Buddhist Prison Ministry. To learn more, contact:

### Buddhist Prison Ministry

PO Box 426

Orcas, WA 98280

**BUDDHIST PRISON MINISTRY: BODHICITTA BEHIND BARS**

#### AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

A TWELVE-  
LESSON  
CORRESPONDENCE  
COURSE  
WITH  
HOMEWORK



This workbook "An Introduction to Buddhism" is the first in a series written specifically for the incarcerated population. It is a presentation of the core elements of non-sectarian (Ri'me) Buddhism, teachings common to all schools and sects of the Dharma. Thanks to generous donors and the Khyentse Foundation, this workbook is available free of charge to the incarcerated population.

Tools, skills and practices from the Buddhist tradition written specifically for the incarcerated population.

Rev. Susan Shannon, M.Div., BCC.  
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# We Need Your Help!

So far we've received about 10 submissions and we'd love to get just a few more.

We've sold out of Compassion Works for All t-shirts and are on the hunt for a new design. If you're interested in submitting a design that captures the spirit of our work, please either use the frame below OR send us something on your own paper.

Submit your image along with a short bio about yourself. If yours is selected, we'll share your image and bio on our social media pages and website. **So please only submit something you're willing to have shared.**

Send your submissions to:

**T-Shirt Contest  
Compassion Works for All  
PO Box 7708  
Little Rock, AR 72217**











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[www.compassionworksforall.org](http://www.compassionworksforall.org)

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"Speak with kindly motivation.  
Speak what is true and helpful,  
speak in due season and to the benefit of all."

-Buddha