

COMPASSION WORKS FOR ALL

Dharma Friends

For people in real and imagined prisons | Issue 230 | Fall 2020



RISKY COMPASSION

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From **The Director**



Have you ever played the board game, Risk? It's a game of "world domination." The game board is a map of all the world's continents with each one divided into territories. Player begin with some "troops" in a few territories, grow their armies, and battle other players to control more territories. The game ends when one player controls the whole board. Of all the names you might give a game like this (Battle, Domination, Annihilation, etc), **Risk** may not seem like the most obvious choice until you start to play. To take over a territory, you must risk your position with a roll of the dice. If you win, you continue to advance. But if you don't, you lose whatever footing you once had, and it becomes increasingly difficult to win. Likewise, we don't often associate risk with compassion. But as many of you know, a compassionate mind can feel risky in a prison environment.

We received a letter recently from a reader in Arkansas with this request:

I'd like to see tips on dealing with the violence and negativity in prisons. Others often see you as weak if you're not willing to talk trash, make threats, or fight over the smallest thing...They could also get new charges for you, and even more time in prison. So how do you live by Buddha's code in an environment that only seems to value the convict's code?

I'm grateful for this request. And we will fill the pages of this newsletter with thoughts on that very subject. For now I'll say that there are no easy answers. The path from our brain to our heart can take a lifetime to travel. But the peace we seek can only be found inside ourselves when we choose compassion over anger, hatred, and violence.

Namaste,

Cory
cory@compassionarkansas.org

FROM YOU, THE READERS

Responses To The Last Newsletter

I want you to know that this newsletter (Summer 2020) really spoke to me. It resonated with my struggles, my daily issues. "Breathing," "Finding Silence in the Noise," "Being Mindful." Wow! That pretty much sums up each day, doesn't it?

-Mike, Arkansas

I loved the Summer 2020 issue of Dharma Friends! Everything was informative. I am glad you included "Yoga on the Inside." I am so happy to see the newsletter again.

-Shon, Missouri

Thanks for sending me a copy of Dharma Friends newsletter along with a list of resources and a meditation practice. I have already begun to incorporate the breathing techniques & ways to silence the noisy chatter in our minds & environment.

-Eduardo, Illinois

Thanks Compassion Works for All because you give individuals like me hope. Keep up the good work.

-Jerry, Texas



A (Risky) LovingKindness Meditation

By CORY JONES

Sati is a Pali word that we translate as “remember” or “return,” and it’s where the practice of mindfulness originates. Those who are new to meditation and mindful ways of living might mistakenly believe that the objective is to escape the present for some state of detached consciousness. But the real work of meditation involves consistently returning to the present moment in its truest form. Meditation prepares us to live mindfully, which means to live in a way that we remember to be kind, remember to be at peace, and remember to be compassionate.

In times of conflict with others, it’s difficult to know exactly how to handle the situation. If someone annoys, threatens, or assaults us, we tend to mindlessly fall back into

places of fear, anger, and violence even though we know that walking a path of peace requires a better response.

So, when conflict creates uncertainty and the “right thing” is unclear, lovingkindness acts as the grounding on which we take the first step. Because no matter what, as people of peace, we wish for every living creature to be well, to be happy, to be healthy, to be safe, to be loved, and to be at peace. We want this for those who love us and those who don’t; for those who value our life and those who threaten it. Love feels like a far greater risk than anger, hatred, or violence. But who are you trying to become, and which path will help you get there?

If you are working to become a person of peace instead of violence, assume a mindful posture and extend the following thoughts to yourself:

May I be well.
May I be happy.
May I be healthy.
May I be safe.
May I be loved.
May I be at peace.

Now, call to mind someone you love. Then call to mind someone toward whom your feelings are neutral or indifferent. And finally call to mind someone with whom you have conflict. For each person, extend the following thoughts, and let them shape all your future interactions:

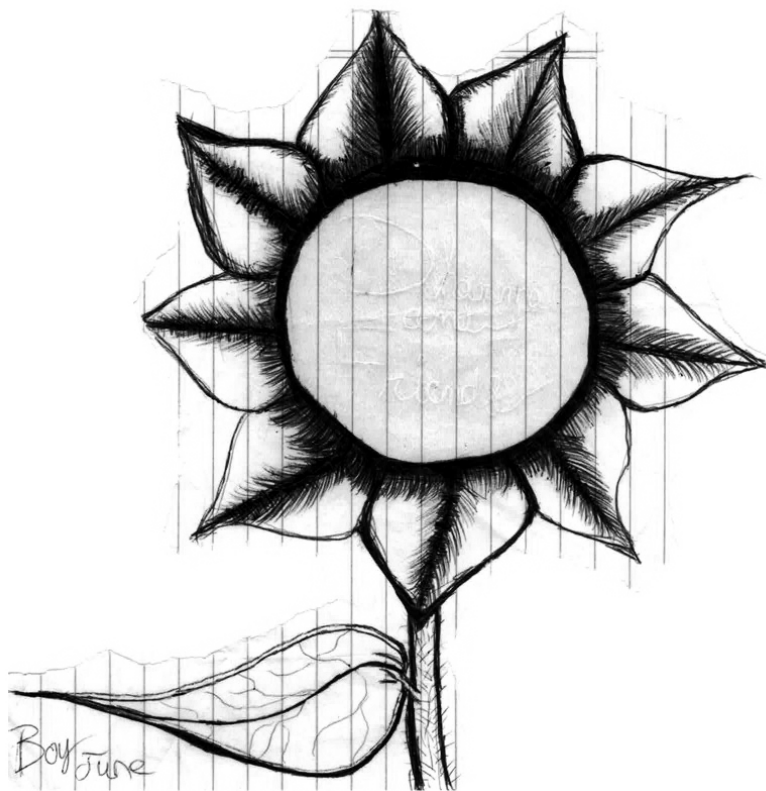
May he/she/they be well.
May he/she/they be happy.
May he/she/they be healthy.
May he/she/they be safe.
May he/she/they be loved.
May he/she/they be at peace.

Poetry and **Art**

Haiku #1

By **Larry**, Georgia

Dawn struggles with night
Shadows come out of hiding
Welcome to the light.



Art by Boy June



Art by Mikey

TEMPER,
TANTRUM,
TANTRIC
BREATH.

RELEASE,
RELAX,
REALIZE
WITHIN.

WORLD,
WORRY,
WHIRLPOOL,
WIND

DISPEL,
DISPATCH,
BEGIN AGAIN.

- MIKEY

Haiku #4

By **Larry**, Georgia

Lending my hand - friend
Your journey looks difficult
Together - let's go

Reader Poems

Longing for Home

By **Gerald**, Arkansas

Home
Where flowers grow And beauty flows
Where love blooms
And happiness resides
Where you freely pick the time
When you step outside

Home
Where I dress in the attire
That I truly desire
Any color I wish to wear
A chance to again have my own flare

Home
Where I control the lights
There's no glare of spotlights
So I can sleep with the darkness of nights

Home
Where stars shine
I can choose my time to dine
(A late meal suits me just fine)

Home
So close, yet so far away
Only years slow my dreams
Of getting back home...someday

Home...

Compassion for All

By **Eric**, Texas

Compassion for all! But, would
Somebody please tell me
How I'm supposed to have
Compassion for all, when so many
People's actions leave me
Feeling no compassion at all?
These are the types of questions
That burn deep inside my mind
As I lay awake at night in my cell and
I stare at the wall.

Wondering what it will all
Be like when they finally do release me.
Will it all still be mass confusion
And chaos or will it all end peacefully?
These are the types of questions
That burn deep inside my mind
As I lay awake at night in my cell and
I stare at the wall.

In Memoriam

In our last newsletter, we shared that our longtime friend and CWFA volunteer, Kristopher Davis, had grown seriously ill. Just a few weeks later, he passed away. Kristopher was a passionate advocate for spreading compassion to everyone, but especially to people who live in jails and prisons. Having served time himself, he had experienced the devastating trauma of prison life and chose to overcome it with love and peace. Kristopher wrote to so many of you over the years, and his contribution to our work - as well as his presence in your lives - will be greatly missed.



KRISTOPHER DAVIS
Rest in Peace

Yoga On The Inside

By **Tanesha Forest**

Try these mindful movement poses to elongate the spine and find your breath.

1. Child's Pose

Knees on the ground
Sit your hips back on your heels
Reach your hands out in front of you
Lower your forehead to the floor
Take 5 deep breaths.



2. Reclining Pigeon

Lie on your back
Knees bent, feet flat on the floor
Put your right ankle across your left knee
Pull your left knee into your chest
Take 5 deep breaths.
Change sides



3. Sphinx Pose

Lie flat on your stomach, legs extended behind you
Come up onto your forearms
Push your heart forward
Push into your forearms, knees, and feet
Lift your chin
Take 3 deep breaths.



4. Supine Twist

Lie on your back, arms out to the side
Knees bent, feet flat on the floor
Drop both knees to one side, turn your head the opposite way
Return to center
Drop both knees to the other side, turn your head the opposite way
Take 3 deep breaths each time



So Much Of Anything Good

By **Majid**, California

“One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is my-self” -Walt Whitman

I greet you in the spirit of great love and respect. I would like to say that I admire you all very much for the thoughtfulness and compassion that I felt from your Summer 2020 issue. It was my first experience with you guys and I could sense the spirit of teamwork and family that went into that effort. I was introduced to your newsletter through a guy who ended up being my roommate for a while, and I did not know that this kind of network even existed; I told him how I thought I had been practicing mindfulness for almost 10 years but had only done so truly for about a year.

We talked about a lot of things like getting out of prison (of course!) and traveling around the country. I told him that I believed there were people all around the world who, if I met them, would instantly experience a bond with. I believe that we all have “spiritual” families to seek out, and that they are uniquely a part of our destinies and that once we decide to live in that higher purpose, all the things we need to fulfill that destiny - whether it be creativity, relationships, encouragement, training - it will flow to us because its just how the universe works. It’s like the natural order of life!

Since I’ve been in prison, I’ve seen and heard about some of the most hateful and disturbing acts of violence inside of prison and outside. The conclusion that it has led me to about hatred, racism, violence, and other ego-powered ills is that it’s a mindset, a pathology.

This is why I now consider myself a self-proclaimed Mental Health and Wellness Activist. I am strongly proposing to prison administrators a wellness program I created with some other inmates that emphasizes mindfulness meditation as an important tool in maintaining mental clarity and wellness. I am a true believer in the “hurt people hurt people” axiom. If a person had a traumatic childhood, it’s a

good chance they’re going to form the kind of mental complex that prompts one to resort to the same kinds of violence - physical, emotional, sexual - visited upon them as a child. I, myself, am a testament to this fact.

In 2012, I discovered mindfulness meditation through a mentor and I’ve only recently begun to realize how that time was, for me, one of life’s intersections - a sort of crossroads of destiny. Since then, there have been countless insights and breakthroughs that have pushed me toward myself in deeper and deeper ways. I recently told a friend about the experience of the inner self. I said that it was like seeing a great lighthouse after being tossed and shaken up by the tempests and storms of life. There is the immediate feeling of relief, safety, and warm compassion. I told myself, “I have come home.”

By deeply observing and analyzing my thoughts and feelings, and just allowing myself to be in those experiences has given me such an inner peace and love that is quite incomparable with anything else.

I never knew that so much of anything good could be found within my own mind, within my own spiritual center. In the poem Song of Myself, by Walt Whitman, he says:

One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is my-self.

The line strikes at the heart of my greatest insight: all of my perceived “problems” are only solvable from within my own mind. Nothing else can offer me the kind of clarity and resolve that being aware of my own thoughts and emotions can; accepting those feelings gives me the power to change them to something more positive or pleasant. In this way, I transform negative to positive, heavy to light, pain to serenity, and blindness to sight. This is seeing God in all things; this is being absorbed in awareness.

Lots of people seem to believe that they can simply buy the solution to all the problems

they’re facing. The materialistic notion that money or drugs or sex can provide whatever you need to be happy, that you can purchase a peaceful mind, is obviously not true. And even though you may not say these words, this is what you’re thinking. It’s a pathology of the ego and a complete misconception.

For lots of people in jail or prison, this is an important thing to understand: a lot of our opinions, beliefs, likes, dislikes, reactions, and perceptions are a part of our past conditioning.

We think they are our own, that they come from within us, but most of our so-called “knowledge” and wrong understanding is not even original. It has been accepted from others: parents, bad friends, TV, pop culture, society. To be free, to know the truth, we must be freed from this conditioning, this mental programming. A person’s own mind is the root cause of all the conditions and experiences that affect him. He vibrationally attracts conditions corresponding exactly to his predominant and habitual thoughts. Through his own mind, a person creates his own “hell” or “heaven” right here and now.

Make no mistake, “enlightenment” is not something that happens overnight, but gradually over time. How much time? It depends on how long it takes us to give up our ignorance, conditioned reactions and patterns, and to recognize the truth about ourselves, others, and the world. It takes a certain amount of receptivity, kindness and compassion toward oneself as well as fearlessness to give it all up.

May we all find the courage and compassion to see ourselves truly, and may we all live in that Love and Light that is our truest nature.

Namaste,

Majid, California

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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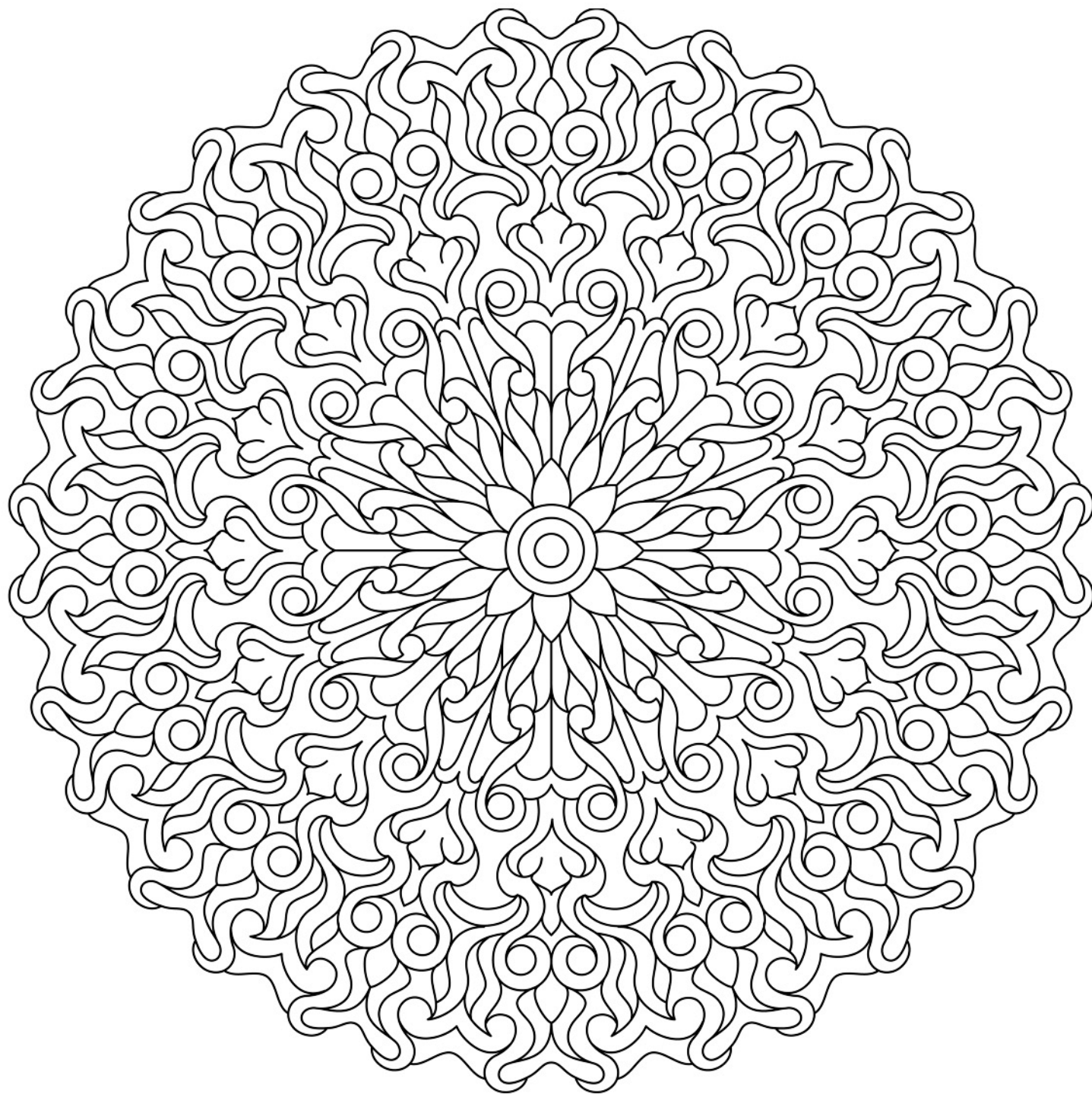
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Thanks to a suggestion from Mark in Missouri, we've added this page for those who find peace and calm through artistic expression.



Temple of Kindness

More coloring pages at
mondaymandala.com

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“Nothing ever goes
away until it has
taught us what we
need to know.”

Pema Chödrön