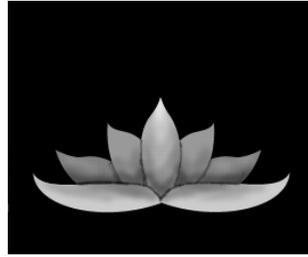


# Dharma Friends

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

October 2008 issue # 141 copyright 2008, Compassion Works for All

## The Dhammapada The teachings of the Buddha



### Verse 7: The Saint

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.

Copyright © 1985 Buddhist Publication Society. Access to Insight edition © 1996

For free distribution. This work may be republished, reformatted, reprinted, and redistributed in any medium. It is the author's wish, however, that any such republication and redistribution be made available to the public on a free and unrestricted basis and that translations and other derivative works be clearly marked as such.

- 90.** The fever of passion exists not for him who has completed the journey, who is sorrowless and wholly set free, and has broken all ties.
- 91.** The mindful ones exert themselves. They are not attached to any home; like swans that abandon the lake, they leave home after home behind.
- 92.** Those who do not accumulate and are wise regarding food, whose object is the Void, the Unconditioned Freedom — their track cannot be traced, like that of birds in the air.
- 93.** He whose cankers are destroyed and who is not attached to food, whose object is the Void, the Unconditioned Freedom — his path cannot be traced, like that of birds in the air.
- 94.** Even the gods hold dear the wise one, whose senses are subdued like horses well trained by a charioteer, whose pride is destroyed and who is free from the cankers.
- 95.** There is no more worldly existence for the wise one who, like the earth, resents nothing, who is firm as a high pillar and as pure as a deep pool free from mud.
- 96.** Calm is his thought, calm his speech, and calm his deed, who, truly knowing, is wholly freed, perfectly tranquil and wise.

97. The man who is without blind faith, who knows the Uncreated, who has severed all links, destroyed all causes (for karma, good and evil), and thrown out all desires — he, truly, is the most excellent of men.

98. Inspiring, indeed, is that place where Arahants dwell, be it a village, a forest, a vale, or a hill.

99. Inspiring are the forests in which worldlings find no pleasure. There the passionless will rejoice, for they seek no sensual pleasures.



## Some thoughts about this *Dhammapada* Verse: **The Saint**

Do you know any saints that walk the earth? They are all around us but not noticed by many. Certainly, few are famous. Some may be realized Buddhas who have fully achieved enlightenment and some are almost there. There are those practitioners of many other spiritual traditions that might be called saints by those who know them. Some may actually be named as saints in those organized religions that recognize exceptional beings. They are few in number, but if we would or could see them, we might find that there are many more than we might think. I've known some and some may be right there in your prisons. How to recognize them? Read some of these short descriptions from our verse, **The Saint**, again. *Calm is his thought, calm his speech, and calm his deed, who, truly knowing, is wholly freed, perfectly tranquil and wise.* Here are some more qualities that our verse suggests that they embody. They are *sorrowless, free*, and have *broken all ties* and *severed all links*. They have *no desires* and *seek no sensual pleasures*. They live *without a path* and are unable to be traced *like birds in the air*. They have *no pride* and are *as pure as a deep pool free from mud*. Their focus is the *Void* and *Unconditioned Freedom*. They *know the Uncreated*.

In our essence, each one of us is a saint; a wisdom being. But most of us don't see ourselves as such, nor do we know that we embody all of these qualities as our own pure nature. Our inner Buddha or inner saint is obscured by the deluded view of an ego self. To the degree that we believe in our ego self, we cannot know our true inner nature. And to this same degree, we may not be able to know the wisdom of others. It is interesting but we are only able to see in others a reflection of ourselves. So, for those who feel anger and hatred within, if they look at a saint, they see someone who is angry and hateful. No matter how that saintly person might act towards them, eventually they will find a way to confirm their belief and eventually justify their perception that **that** person is angry and hateful. It may be that they doubt a kind person's sincerity and believe that underneath those kind words is someone who is trying to manipulate them. On the other hand, if we ourselves have a compassionate and good heart, then we can recognize a kind and good heart in another without being suspicious about their motivation. Depending on where we are in our own spiritual evolution, we are likely or unlikely to recognize one who is ahead of us on their path. If we are a good distance along on our own journey and we meet a saint, we are far more likely to recognize them as someone of true wisdom and compassion.

Projection works in another tricky way as well. If we are a bit grandiose in our assessment of ourselves and we want others to reinforce our deluded ego's belief that we are better than others, then anyone who praises us as enlightened or saintly is embraced as highly realized because they reinforce our inflated view of self. *The message: we only see what we are capable of seeing and we only see that which fulfills our beliefs in our self and the world.*

### **WHAT ABOUT FINDING A TEACHER?**

*If we find someone who we think is a saint or a teacher should we follow them?*

It takes many years of knowing someone on these paths of spiritual journeying to observe and honestly assess whether someone lives the wisdom qualities of a truly great saint or is merely an ego self that is a skilled showman. Unfortunately, there are those egocentric and self-proclaimed teachers who are not following a practice of kindness and we could suffer because of their dishonesty. Some pretty successful sociopaths have pulled off the role of being spiritual teachers and made lots of money at it. So we should take our time and just go slow before embracing another as a teacher. First, just see them as ordinary and respect them on their journey.

## First find your own inner teacher.

Until you are really ready to embrace a teacher, trust that what comes to you naturally in your life is your own special curriculum offered by your inner wisdom teacher. There will not be any errors in your homework assignments. Everything that comes to you is your work in developing wisdom and compassion. It is that easy – and that hard. Ego will say, But, but --- this is not how I want it to be. I want \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with everything else you would rather have!) This inner wisdom teacher is not a pussy cat and the lessons are hard! But that is your teacher for now.

Our focus should be on developing our own wisdom qualities through meditation, the practices of kindness and great compassion, doing good and beneficial things in the world, holding right motivation, and never judging another as either good or bad. We can't truly know who another practitioner is, what their motivation is, or how realized they are until we watch them for a long, long time. There are many, many stories in Buddhism that are meant to curb our judgment of others. One is of a monk in a monastery that was the butt of derisive jokes because he was so lazy. All day, as the others did their meditation in their monastery cells, they would peek in the door of this monk's cell and see him asleep on his mat on the floor. For twenty years or more this was true. They criticized him by calling him "the sleepy monk" and wrote him off as worthless. Then, when he died, he appeared to them as a rainbow. All knew then that he was actually an enlightened being. We never know!

I would say though, that if we were to use one guideline to assess another's capacity to be a teacher, it would be to notice how kind they are. If they get angry, are judgmental, diminish us in any way, or are self-important, then they are likely still working on themselves just as hard as the rest of us are. If they make pronouncements that they are right and others are wrong, especially as spiritual teachers or guides, or try to coerce us to follow their lead instead of listening to our own inner sense of what is right and wrong for us, then step back and let them continue their work while we continue to do our own work. No one should tell you what to do or should say that they know better than you how you should be! Honor all beings and see them as the embodiment of sacred essence, but do not attribute any qualities to them that elevate them to a role that has power over you. You are your best teacher.

## SO WHEN DO YOU TAKE A TEACHER ON AS A BUDDHA OR A SAINT AND FOLLOW THEM?

All saints and realized beings live to benefit others. Most live rather invisible lives of doing good. But some do take on the role of a teacher. Many of you have asked about finding a teacher or following a particular person who is a teacher that has come to your community or to your prison. Of course, there aren't too many teachers who live in or even go into the prisons, but there are some, and taking on another as your teacher is a possible and good step if it is right for you.

But -- this step is a hard one to take, is tricky, and is often confusing to westerners. We are talking here about something that is different than going to church each Sunday and listening to the sermon. That is just hearing a lecture or a teaching. It is different than studying under a teacher about a certain practice and thinking, *This is a really wise person. I want to learn more!* And it is different than reading or listening to someone like me who has been given a job assignment to share what may be helpful with others but is not a true teacher. A true teacher is someone who has realized very high levels of consciousness and wisdom. To take on another as one's teacher is embracing and committing to a level of spiritual work that very few people ever do, but it is a traditional part of the spiritual path of many esoteric religions.

As we said above, sometimes it is a matter of having grown enough along your own path to have the capacity to recognize a true teacher when you see them. It is also a matter of your good karma and readiness, and, as the valid saying goes, ***When you are ready, the teacher will appear.*** When ego has settled down and you know that you want a guide to allow ego to become "no one special" – rather than holding the motivation to be special because you have a special teacher on a special path – then slowly you might try embracing one as a teacher after you have studied with them for some time. I would suggest this after you have spent maybe 6 -10 years evaluating their capacity to live the teachings that they offer. Then you are ready (maybe) to enter into the most challenging relationship that there is. To take on another person as one's teacher is to believe that this other is a highly realized being, maybe even fully realized or enlightened, and able to lead you to very subtle and sacred levels of consciousness. A true teacher will ask you to live in wisdom and to practice compassion **always** – no excuses. You say you want to transcend ego's view and live as a Buddha or saint in order to benefit all beings? You want to know **All That Is** as Sacred? Can you love this teacher more than your self and do all they

ask of you? By loving this teacher more than your own ego self, by allowing them to nudge you beyond your ego attachments, and by allowing their wisdom knowledge of spiritual teachings to take you to your next step, you may be offering yourself a quick path to awakening with fewer exit ramps on which to escape. Do you want to devote the rest of your life to following this person to achieve highest realization? If you can say a clear “yes” to all these questions, you might be ready to give this a trial run. Of course, you can see how this can take you beyond your ‘ordinary self’ and anyone who is not yet ready to go there could be greatly harmed by trying. You have to have a very strong and successful ego first in order to give it up.

BUT – if that being appears and you feel this sense of rightness in your practice to surrender self to merge with their pure essence and to allow your life to be led by their teachings, it may be time. Every one who has become a Buddha or a Saint has done this, but this is very few beings throughout the course of all humanity.

- The task will be to love this teacher as a Buddha or a Saint as a pathway to learning to love all beings as Buddhas or saints, even though most beings do not yet know their true essence.
- The task will be to allow the teacher’s guidance to move you forward into spiritual practices and understanding that will open you to vast awareness with a person who can give you support if you feel shaky.
- The task will be to let go of all the safety nets that reinforce that you are *somebody* and to realize that you are *all beings* and *all that is* with no definition and no limits.
- The task is to know that you are *great love* manifesting for the benefit of all suffering beings.

Only one who has walked the path to realization themselves can guide us down our path successfully.

**While you journey on your path** – When you have tilled the garden, readied the soil, planted all the seeds, pulled up all the weeds, watered thoroughly, made sure that you have plenty of sun to shine on your budding plants, and then worked to obtain the good karma of blessings on your project, then those beautiful plants will come to fruition as flowers – your wisdom awakening.

- Your quiet meditation time is tilling the garden and preparing the soil. Meditate as much as possible.
- Read the SAINT again and let the words be the seeds you are planting.
- Read and study your tradition’s wisdom teachers as much as possible. Planting more seeds. Meditate on each.
- Practicing kindness is one of the best ways to pull up the weeds. Practice kindness as much as possible.
- Doing your practice, whatever it may be, and reading and listening to as many teachings as possible is maximizing the sunshine and rain.
- Sit with as many wisdom teachers as possible in order to receive teachings and meditation practices and do the ones that most feel right to you.
- Allow all life events to expand your view to know who you are and to know all that is as your perfect teachings of wisdom and compassion.
- Then have faith that when you are ready, you will have the karma and blessings to know that each next step will unfold perfectly for you.
- At some point, when the time is right, a teacher may come along and invite you to take **the next step** and the great leap to transcendence.

Have faith that in your heart, although you are not yet fully realized, **you are pure essence** – a saint. A Buddha.



## A MEDITATION

A few weeks ago, the world honored *UN Peace Day* and prayers were said everywhere in hopes of peace for all those on our planet. Little Rock participated by holding a prayer vigil on the State Capitol steps. Prayers were to be said by a

Buddhist (me), a Sikh, a Moslem (who did not show up), a B'hai (who did not show up), a Catholic, a Jewish rabbi, and a Hindu. But, we were all by ourselves. No people came to the vigil. (Those of you who feel discouraged that folks don't come to your prisons to speak or support your projects, take note. This is in a city of 350,000 where no one needs to go through security in order to participate.) We all knew, though, that prayers do not need to be heard by the beneficiaries to work, so, with gratefulness for each others' words, we held our vigil and said our prayers, offering them to the vast sky and to benefit all beings.

Part of our ceremony was to exchange gifts. The organizer had gone to our local **Heifer Project** shop to pick up the gifts. **Heifer Project** is one of my favorite organizations and is among the top 3 contenders for a Nobel Peace Prize this year. The choice should be made by the time you receive this newsletter. I am hoping for them to receive it because it will bring a great deal of recognition to their marvelous efforts. (*a note right before we mail this issue: Heifer Project* lost. Boo)

One of the *12 Cornerstones* taught to all participants of Heifer's services is *Passing on the Gift*. **Heifer Project** goes into underdeveloped communities all around the world and teaches people to be self-sufficient so that they may get a foothold out of poverty. They also teach people many skills that help them grow beyond destructive beliefs, such as practicing prejudice and disenfranchisement of others, especially that of women, who are often lower class citizens in underdeveloped countries. One of the most beautiful Heifer principles is giving a villager an animal that can help to provide food for their family, an income, and eventually, off-spring. The animal may be a water buffalo, a goat, a rabbit, a chicken, or others. A chicken or a goat may be the beginning of a life of independence for a family and it is a big deal. Before receiving an animal, villages take a course in caring for the animals and learning economics so that they can build a good financial foundation with their products. Once there is a baby born to their animal, the owner chooses someone in the village to give that newborn to. There are periodic ceremonies where many people give their new babies to others in their community. Can you imagine how this benefits families, one after another, and builds supportive community ties? Villages around the world are growing beyond poverty with the amazing work of **Heifer Project**.

The gift that I received from the Sikh participant at our *Peace Day* meditation was a DVD movie of the work of **Heifer Project** and it told of how the lives of women in Nepal are changing by empowering them to be self-sufficient. I love it. It is most touching to hear the stories of so many woman who are developing lives that take them beyond the enormous suffering that they have been hopelessly enduring.

The reason that I tell you this story in the **Meditation** section of our *Dharma Friends* this month is that we too can pass on the gift. The gift that we have is the knowledge of our capacity to transform suffering into peace. The wisdom qualities of *THE SAINT* or *THE BUDDHA* that are in every being and in each of us (even though we do not yet fully realize or recognize ourselves as a Buddha walking the planet) are still manifesting in our efforts and in the compassion of our hearts. We know that we can benefit beings everywhere with every wish, action, and breath. The qualities that are at work in **Heifer Project** are the qualities of great compassion. The qualities that are at work in your own meditation groups, your efforts to benefit others in your communities, and in your meditation as you live your life are the *passing on the gift*, whatever that gift in your world might be. You are living wisdom qualities as they manifest in many, many ways.

So here is the prayer that I shared at the UN PEACE VIGIL, and hopefully, even though you weren't there, you received it!

### **Tong len (Tibetan) or TAKING AND SENDING**

Take some time to feel all that is around you and within you. Breathe. Relax. Open to the intention to benefit and offer peace to all beings everywhere.

Within every being, whether they are aware of it or not, is the capacity to transform suffering into peace. In the wisdom of great compassion, we know the insubstantiality of all that brings about suffering. We can transform it simply by knowing its true nature. By breathing in the suffering of ourselves and others, holding it in our heart with the wish that all are healed and will find peace, and then by breathing out love, we have the ability to truly bring about healing and peace. Breathe in and know that you are breathing in suffering. Breathe out and know that you are breathing out love. With every breath, know that you breathe in suffering – then hold that pain in your great heart of compassion – and breathe out love.

Look around you at all those that you see. Know that all beings everywhere suffer. Not a single life anywhere is spared suffering. Breathe in the suffering of all those who you see. Breathe out love. Offer out Peace –Compassion -- Healing.

Think of your families and your loved ones. Think of all the suffering that they are going through right now. Conflict. Fear. Illness. Breathe in their suffering. Hold it in your heart and transform it into love. Breathe out that love. That peace. That great compassion. Envision that each of those who are suffering receives that love and they are healed instantly.

Think of all those everywhere who are suffering. Those who live in war zones, who are fighting in wars, who are poverty stricken, hungry and starving, those who are dying today, those who are in prisons, those who suffer abuse, those who are alone and lonely, those who are ill and in great pain, those who are unloved, the mentally ill living in confusion and delirium, those who live lives of hopelessness, those who hate and struggle against others - think of them all and breathe in their pain. Hold their pain in your heart and breathe out love and healing. Breathe out peace for all. Breathe out great compassion for all.

Think of yourself. Think of your suffering. Breathe in this suffering and hold yourself in your heart full of love. Breathe out great compassion for yourself and for your suffering. Feel yourself receive all that you need to be peaceful, happy, and healed.

Knowing that we each are one with all beings, **know** that *ONEness*. For every breath we take, whether we remember or forget, we will breathe in suffering and transform it into peace and breathe it back out for the benefit of all. We will live as one who transforms suffering into peace and compassion with every breath and in every way.

*This is the way of the saint.*



## **From Your Letters**

### **From Daiji in remembrance of our friend Jess –**

Dear friends,

Our brother, Jessie James Cummings, was taken from us last night by the State of Oklahoma.

Most of you reading this did not know Jess, a few of you did.

Jess was a quiet, unassuming sort. He wasn't very well educated but he possessed a wealth of just plain good common sense.

He was my cell partner for nearly 13 years.

He didn't cuss.

He didn't steal.

He didn't try to swindle the guys around him out of anything.

He did tell lies – not the hurtful, gossipy kind of lies that people often tell when they don't realize that the character flaws actually belong to themselves, but the kind of lie that contained no malice, the kind of lie designed to allow the person that he was talking to to find a shred of a ray of hope in an otherwise dismal situation.

He was a Christian man. He believed in the scriptures and the wisdom that could be found within them. That often put him at odds with his fellow Christians.

Jess always forgave them, even though they wouldn't or didn't ask. Jess knew that once the mind was made up – the ears close down.

Jess also knew that you couldn't fix a problem using the same thinking process that helped create the problem in the first place.

Sometimes he went against the wishes of others, not out of selfishness – never out of selfishness. But, rather, out of concern for the ones who were left out of the thinking processes of those who wanted him to do something.

Someone had to think of those people.

Jess figured that he could.

Jess didn't have much money but he shared his stuff. If a fella' was hungry – Jess had a soup for him.

26 men here wrote letters to the clemency board on Jess' behalf. To my knowledge (and I've researched it) that's a record for Oklahoma's death row.

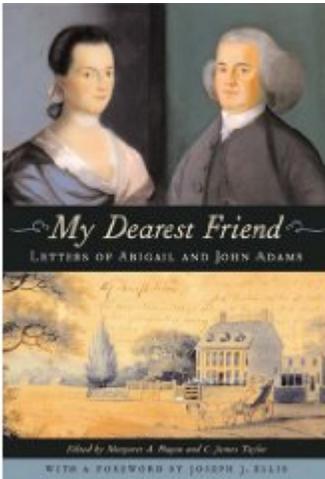
Many people who knew Jess didn't or flat out refused to write a letter of support for him. He was hurt. He was puzzled but he was happy that they weren't saying anything against him. Jess had friends all over the world. People whose lives he touched and shared. He took his friendships as seriously as he took his next breath. Jess understood that with friendship there came obligations and he never once had to tell a friend that he was sorry that he let them down. Jess was a truly good man. He was my friend He was my brother. Addio, fratello mio! Daiji

*"In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever-approaching thunder, which will destroy us too. I can feel the suffering of millions, and yet if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, For perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out."*  
 --Anne Frank who as a Jewish teenager, lived for years in an attic in Germany while those all around her were rounded up and taken to concentration camps and extermination furnaces.

## Book of Knowledge

**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 -  
 My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams  
 (Hardcover) by Abigail Adams (Author), John Adams (Author), Joseph J. Ellis  
 (Foreword), Margaret A. Hogan (Editor), C. James Taylor (Editor)**

John Adams was our second president from 1797 – 1801 and active in the forming of our new nation out of the Revolutionary War. He traveled out of the country and was away in Washington DC for many years as a diplomat, so wrote letters back and forth to his wife, Abigail, during those times of separation. Their letters tell the story of the evolution of our government, their brilliant political ideas, of a loving relationship, and a story of life in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. So this is a book on history, relationship, ideas, and writing all wrapped up into one beautiful story. You will love it and feel intimately connected to our country's founders. How perfect it is to read right before these elections!

## Color Blind

By: Douglas Stream (Tojin)

A popular Buddhist publication recently asked the question, "What can white people do to become allies to people of color?" As a realist I understand the need for the dialogue but as a Buddhist the question had a stench of duality. Webster's Dictionary defines allies as: 1. those united in an alliance. 2. persons, nations, etc. bound together as by treaty. I would submit that we already are in an alliance called the human race and that the act of being allies is - - in and of itself - - something that requires reciprocation. To fully respond to this question we must first ask the question, "What causes white people and people of color to be adversaries in the first place?" Known in Buddhism as the three poisons - - greed, hatred and ignorance (sometimes called desire, anger, and delusion) are, I believe, major factors on what causes us to be adversaries. These poisons transcend skin color. They manifest themselves in thoughts, words, and actions. We all know how quickly thoughts, words, and actions can turn into something that divides us. We

should be equally aware that these manifestations (thoughts, words, and actions) can be cultivated to bring us together, to counteract these poisons, to fight the hatred and racism.

Preamble to this alliance requires first that we look at each other as human beings and not only seek understanding but accept the fact that as human beings we are capable of understanding each other. We are all, regardless of skin color, capable of hating and of being hated, of discriminating and of being discriminated against. Much is written in Buddhism about “letting go” and not holding on to our past, to be aware of the present moment. I think it’s naive to expect people to forget or to let go of their past and its not fair to ask them. We must realize that as human individuals, irrespective of skin color, we are the sum of our life experiences. We are responsible for the (our) past but more importantly we are responsible for what we do in the present. It’s our collective response to the present what will decide if the future contains the same mistakes as the past.

So what can we do? I think people of every color need to realize the world we live in. The easy answer to the question of what white people can do to become allies to people of color is: **TREAT THEM LIKE WHITE PEOPLE!** The same would be true if the question would read, what can people of color do to become allies to white people: **TREAT THEM LIKE PEOPLE OF COLOR!** See yourself in others; then who can you hurt? What harm can you do? Responding to our current environment is the place to start. **ATTENTION WHITE PEOPLE:** if you are in a situation with fellow white people and you hear them using racial slurs or other ignorant hateful speech, then speak out against it! **ATTENTION PEOPLE OF COLOR:** if you are in a situation with fellow people of color and you hear them using racial slurs or other hateful speech, then speak out against it! For how can one contribute to the solution when they are part of the problem. (Ignoring the problem makes you a part of it!) It’s going to take courage and the willingness to act - - on the part of everyone - - for us all to become truly color blind.

***Put away all hindrances, let your mind full of love pervade one quarter of the world, and so too the second quarter, and so the third, and so the fourth. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around and everywhere, altogether continue to pervade with love-filled thought, abounding, sublime, beyond measure, free from hatred and ill-will. -Adapted from the Digha Nikaya***

**From Gary Hallford:** *Dharma Friends* has become important to me. Not only as an addition to my curriculum vitae, but because you hold to a higher standard than any other Dharma publication. Unlike the vast majority, you are not simply printing the “touchy feely,” generic bullshit that everyone has already seen before... you allow the readership to write from the heart, and not just politically correct gibberish, some is cutting edge, and some can piss people off, but that’s the point isn’t it? If you don’t allow ideas to be exchanged freely, how can people learn? How can they find peace within a world of chaotic confusion?

Occasionally, I ask friends, allies, strangers, essentially anybody, to contribute to *Dharma Friends*. Whether they have or not is on them, and none of my business. With current trends in property values going through the floor, and Federal Grant money denied to any non-Christian groups, being able to find funding is difficult at best... therefore, we must look “outside the box” for any functional assistance. Presently, I have a case in the Ninth Circuit that should be settled in my favor. As I told the Court, all I want is some of my expenses covered... the rest will go to charity. *Dharma Friends* is on the short list of groups to receive payment. When that will happen is anybody’s guess, but I feel certain that payment shall occur next year...

All too often, the Buddhist community fails to act in any rational manner, on any important topic. Simply to “sit” seems pointless, unless you also explain/promote your ideology, and combat the horrific realities that are so obvious to virtually everyone... to simply sit quietly, and not speak out, violates every moral ethic imaginable... So, I have been pushing for a more dynamic form of Buddhism... more than the current “engaged” idea. The reason for this should be fairly obvious, but if not, here are a few reasons: Illegal/Immoral laws of Imperialism; Mass Incarceration; Suspension of Habeas Corpus; Secret Trials in Foreign Courts; Environmental Destruction; Abysmal Education; Impossibly Expensive Health Care; etc... If we don’t speak up, how is anything going to get fixed?

Granted, that goes against the grain of several of the “traditional” schools, but I’ve come to the conclusion that most Buddhist schools have actually lost sight of the Dharma, and have become some kind of esoteric club exclusive to certain people. That is not the Buddhism I revere, but an ego-centric delusion that is foisted on unsuspecting people.

Just for one simple example, the Tibetan schools which are supposedly so pure and natural, are actually only a hybrid of Hinduism and Catholicism, and have very little functional Dharma teachings to provide. To add another example, both the Pure Land sect, add the Soka Gakkai groups, make it into a Protestant type teaching: “If you accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior, you are saved.” Neither example reaches into what could be called “functional religion, and while they proclaim unity with other sects, actually they tend to be overly exclusive and prejudicial. Is that what Siddhartha Gautama envisioned? I doubt it...

During my 335 day AD/SEG – SHU term, I meditated a lot on the meaning of, and reality of, Buddhist thought, practice, and potential. What became clearest to me was the absolute need of a new modernized “Middle Path,” that was not stuck on esoteric chants in obsolete languages, or relatively hypocritical ideology. What I came up with was “Guerrilla Buddhism.” If you want to chant the Heart Sutra, Hare Krishna, or the Burger King jingle (Hold the pickles, hold the lettuce...), the key point is whether or not it brings you peace of mind, not what language it’s in, or what the translation is...

Another feature is to be proactive. You do not need to tackle every single issue, but morally you can no longer feign ignorance to the plethora of challenges out there. To simply pick three issues (Say racism, global warming, and AIDS), could keep a person busy enough for several lifetimes. The point is to be involved, and to not be discouraged by the lethargy and hypocrisy you run into immediately.

Bottom line is that we must either stand up for our beliefs, or go hide in the corner as cowards. The former is difficult, but the latter is impossible. To do nothing equates to the latter...

About a year ago, I received a book from a group called "**Art in Translation**," or something similar. There was a short piece of *De Rerum Natura* ("On the Nature of Things"), by Lucretius, which I used in some litigation. There was also a story that may fit the Buddhist Community: *On the Art of Standing Still*. It was originally published in a newspaper in Prague on April 5, 1939... shortly after the Nazis captured Czechoslovakia. At present, I don't have the name of the author.

At any rate, she tells a story about an incident prior to the war, where the Czechs (working men) were demonstrating near her house. They ran into some Slovaks (neo-Nazis), and assorted insults were exchanged. Also present, were some Gendarmes (cops). Her mother noted her father in the front ranks of the Czechs, and the tension was immense.

As is fairly normal, the incident got volatile and eventually a shot was fired. Quickly there were more shots, and people running everywhere. When the smoke cleared, she saw her father, still standing in the same spot. After a couple of minutes, he slowly moved forward and started to calmly bandage a wounded man...

The point of that story transcends religious, political, or any other lines. As Buddhists, we are taught to not go to any extreme... not to run forward blindly, not to run away cowardly... simply to stay in the middle. That is what her father did. He did not run forward like a fool, nor did he run away. He stood still, amongst the chaos, and when it was over, helped where he could.

Is that not the Buddhist Path? Neither act a fool, nor be a coward, but simply act for the greatest good? As complicated as life tends to be, having the courage and moral compass to avoid idiotic extremes is a rarity. But it is also a necessity...

May peace come soon,

*Morihei Ueshiba regarded by many to be the greatest martial artist in modern times, deeply understood the larger flow of balancing. O'Sensei, the founder of the martial art of Aikido, was once asked by his students, "How do you keep your balance all the time?" The master laughed and said: "The art is not in trying to keep your balance, but in losing it and seeing how fast you can regain it. The reason you don't see me out of balance is because I regain it so quickly!" Joel and Michelle Levey in "Living in Balance" (Conari Press, 1998)*

*Joel and Michelle continue by saying: Turn up the juice on your mindfulness so that you notice when you are beginning to lose your balance, and then return again, and again, and again. Remember, "choice follows awareness" and in those moments when you "wake-up" and return to mindful awareness you have the choice to move toward or away from balance.*

**From Mark G.:** (in response to a letter from Kristopher) Dear Kristopher, Thank you very much for the books you sent! They came at a great time, as I still am languishing here in confinement. Being in a privately run contract facility, they tend to blame any delays on the state. Sadly enough, I came here by virtue of my own choices, knowing that each time I use dope, I end up in handcuffs!

For about a week after this happened, I didn't sit much, perhaps only once or twice. Once again, I am sitting at least once a day, usually at night, it's quieter and my roommate is usually asleep. For today, it's just a matter of discipline and commitment. I'm trying to make meditation a part of my daily life upon release.

I was initially introduced to sitting through **We're All Doing Time**. (by Bo Lozoff) I was facing LSD charges by the Feds, and it seemed like a good way to keep the psychedelic thing going. I probably could've gained a lot more of my inner nature back, but I just wasn't looking at things the "right" way then. I guess that's not to say I am now either, but I believe I've matured and made progress. Instead of dropping Buddhism upon my release, I see it as an integral part of my life. I have not had a lot of "real life" experience. Most of my knowledge is from books, but I do feel most comfortable with Zen.

My latest experience has allowed me to transform some of my knowledge into action. I'm letting things go, practicing acceptance and working on my mindfulness in each of my actions. I'm also trying to stay out of "die morass" called the past, and the green grass of the future. I know if I stay focused on "now," I may have a tool which will bring me a little peace of mind, but will help me to stay clean/sober (with help of a 12 step fellowship and Sangha).

You had mentioned a little of your sojourn behind the walls; any suggestions? Have you found, in looking back, that your experiences in prison helped you to follow this path as well as to grow spiritually? If you could offer advice to a novice, someone with little formal knowledge (but lots of heart), what would you suggest? Is it easy to find a Sangha which accepts one's personal history (i.e. prison)? Time is precious, as I go home in November. Warmest regards,

**Kristopher's response:** Dear Mark, I'm very happy to hear that you've received the books and are enjoying them. I look back at my time in prison with a lot of gratitude as when else in my life would I have taken the time to read all of those Buddhist and recovery books that fed my brain, armed me with facts about my disease, and gave me the words to express what I thought and felt. **I never would have!** The effort of earning a living and my ego's need to experience life in more and more exciting ways would've over-ruled as usual.

Buddhism, like recovery, is about helping your fellow man. You can't be a spiritual person and judge others at the same time. Go to any Buddhist center and/or 12 step meeting and hang with the people who you can feel the love from. They are the folks who will reinforce you, and when you have some "life experience," you can start helping others. Be into and live life in peace and others will be drawn to you. You, my brother, will always be an example to others. Be abundantly blessed,

*At some ideas you stand perplexed, especially at the sight of human sins, uncertain whether to combat it by force or by human love. Always decide, 'I will combat it with human love.' If you make up your mind about that once and for all, you can conquer the whole world. Loving humility is a terrible force; it is the strongest of all things and there is nothing like it.'--Dostoyevsky*

**From Erik Johnson:** Dear *Dharma Friends*, I am making changes in my life. I had to come to the conclusion, a little late in my life that the things I've been doing were not working. I am a 34 year old third timer. I have eight plus years left then I am done with prison. One of the changes I've made is I'm following the path of Buddha. I need to get right spiritually. Another change is I am getting a college education so I can make an honest living once I'm released from prison. I am enrolled at Coastline Community College in California. They have an Associates degree. Afterwards, I want to go on to get a Bachelors of English, then a Masters of Creative Writing. I want to be an editor and write fantasy novels.

As a prisoner, I do not qualify for any federal funding. The state gives me a tuition waiver at Coastline, but I still must purchase the books. I make \$0.13 an hour at my job. My family has been paying for the books, but the burden is becoming too great. I must seek aid from the private sector. Is there anyone you could refer me to that might be able to help me? I am in desperate need of someone willing to give me a chance at a better life.

Erik Johnson, H-90230 D2 – 117U

CSATF @ Corcoran

POB 5246

Corcoran CA 93212-5246

*Note from anna:* I include this because it is an issue for many who would love to get an education while in prison. Does anyone know of any resources to write to? If so, you can let Erik know but let us know as well please.

*"Knowledge speaks but wisdom listens." -- Jimi Hendrix*

## Seeking MIND by George Kayer

To all my *Dharma Friends*, reading *The Mind*, (verse 3) in the June '08) provided an opportunity to reflect. In Buddhism, it's generally considered rude to speak of ones "abilities" or level of awareness, except with ones master. As such, I beg your forgiveness and understanding in advance.

I'm sharing my path to MIND today with my Dharma Friends family because soon, nearly every prisoner publication will have ads and articles about my latest project called DiSSE but, this letter isn't about DiSSE, it's about Mind. DiSSE is a 100+ page magazine published four times per year, a tool to ease suffering but, like most tools this one too can be used to create suffering and distractions. DiSSE is an acronym for: Directory of Inmate Shopping Services and E-commerce. DiSSE contains over 200 reviews of businesses seeking prisoners as customers. Listings for 50 -100 businesses looking to buy poetry, crafts, lyrics, art and various material from writers. DiSSE is full of opportunities and distractions.

It took nearly three years to research, write and get published. It will be available in August, but, again, before your heart beat quickens; your hopes soar and dollar signs flash before your eyes in expectations of selling your skills, I remind you of your priority, that of MIND. Everything else is but a distraction.

For MIND, I've given up everything, friends, family, career, money, freedom, all of it for one second between thoughts. I did this again and again, soon, thirty years had past. The one second is now a few minutes each day, close to MIND. People ask; how often do you meditate? Which is a bizarre concept because I always meditate. It's not something I "do" anymore, it's what I am.

It absolutely makes no difference where you live, free world, retirement community, prison or navy ship, when you're on the path to MIND, seek it first and to hell with the rest. It's not where you live or who you've been that's important it's living in meditation and who you are becoming that counts. Distractions will come in all shapes and sizes; solitary confinement, cleaning house, writing a book, etc. once you understand each of these are the same distraction you'll be closer to MIND.

When one attempts to ease suffering, one also produces distractions. This may be a poem, art or book but for those at the publisher or printer it's a job, suffering. Also, it's easy for money to become a distraction, in this spirit, my publisher will donate 29.5% to *Dharma Friends* Newsletter for each order received from our Dharma Family. All you have to do is write *Dharma Friends* on your order. DiSSE price is \$9.95 + \$4.00 first class postage. Total \$13.95 send to DiSSE P.O. Box 91008 Tucson, AZ 85752-1008 or, online at disse.biz. Some people will look at DiSSE and think wow! George is making fat stacks. My *Dharma Friends* will look at DiSSE and know, all George is making is more distractions. May these words and DiSSE ease the suffering of all who reads them. George Kayer

**Thank you George from all of us!**



**From H.L.:** Dear Sir, *Dharma Friends*, Compassion Works For All, Thanks for you January issue, #132, *Dharma Friends*. I'll be passing it around here after I read it and then place it in the library cart for other inmates, as usual. Ironically, all Americans are rich, and go to Sunday Church constantly, but only for their personal need. They do not believe in any God, Spirit, Ghost at all. This includes Christians and Catholics. They love to do evil things when no one sees it. And all Buddhist are poor, but they still send blessings and pray for others to have peace, even the rich. They only good and spiritual and pray all day and do nothing wrong, like me now. The ancient monks had their groups in the jungle work on their own farming so at least they can feed themselves. Thank you! Metta! Yours in sincere ness,

**Kristopher's response:** Dear H., "All" is a very "big" word. I'm not sure that's really the word that you mean to use in this letter or not. To say "All Americans... love to do evil things," simply is not true and has no compassion in the words. To say that "All Buddhists are poor... and pray all day," doing nothing but good deeds, is not true. We are not able, any of us, to live our lives without doing harm. We can not walk down the street without doing harm to something, somehow. All we can do is try to do the best we can. Please be more open and loving rather than judging others. We all learn from your lesson.

May you be abundantly blessed,

*Even if you seek tranquility, delight in goodness, and search for the source, if you don't meet someone with genuine true knowledge and understanding, it will turn instead into major error. The fault lies in false teachers. -P'u-an*

From M. N.: Dear Dharma Friends, I do want to ask a few questions about Buddhism and meditation.

1. How long must I study and meditate until I can change my religious preference on my prison record?  
(from anna – I would say – when it feels right in your heart, unless there are rules in your prison.)
2. How long must I study and meditate until I can adopt a Buddhist name?  
(usually a Buddhist name is given by a teacher when you take the Buddhist refuge vows with them.)
3. In my meditating, I'm experiencing something that's not at all unpleasant, but rather pleasant and somewhat enlightening, I just, unfortunately, don't know nor understand what's occurring. I'm meditating now twice a day, early morning and late evening, for 45 min. My breathing becomes calm and slow, no disturbing thoughts, however I'm going into this deep like – trance – sleep, where I'm having these interesting "visions" and am seeing colored balls of lights, which are truly, truly, "magnificent" in they're entirety. When I first come out of this trance – sleep like state, I'm somewhat disoriented and bewildered as to my not being sure what to make of it, and at first, I've no recollection of what has occurred. Is this normal? And if so, just exactly what "IS" occurring – happening... going on? (you are entering an altered state. Stay aware of all that happens, rest gently, and be attached to nothing.)

**Subscription information:** 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 subscribe to Dharma Friends, here is what to do. The fee is \$30 for one year. 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.** This amount covers the subscription for you and a partial subscription for a prisoner. 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. If you know of anyone who funds philanthropic programs that are rehabilitative or supportive of those in prisons, send a copy of Dharma Friends to them and ask if they would consider reading a funding proposal from us. If so, connect us to them!

**Also:** We are encouraging those who are not in prison and who have the ability to receive their issues by Email to let us know. Of course, we can send these issues for no printing and no mailing costs, while generating more interest and support in the newsletter. Most of you in prison cannot do this, of course, but if you are a chaplain reading this who has email and can print copies off for your library, that would be helpful. Or – if you have family or friends who might like to receive Dharma Friends as well, they can send a donation of \$30 or more to us and receive Dharma Friends by email plus get a tax deduction receipt because we are not mailing a paper newsletter. 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.

**And a bonus comes with the email subscriptions – extra pages!!** These pages will focus on issues and problems that those in the 'free world' might be more likely to experience, and we will explore life in ways that also draws from the connection to our Dharma Friends community.

Know that we are continuing non-stop efforts to secure funding so that we can all benefit from the loving and supportive Dharma Friends community you have all created. Thank you for all that you give to all of us.

*My call for a spiritual revolution is thus not a call for a religious revolution. Nor is it a reference to a way of life that is somehow other-worldly, still less to something magical or mysterious. Rather, it is a call for a radical re-orientation away from our habitual preoccupation with self towards concern for the wider community of beings with whom we are connected, and for conduct which recognizes others' interests alongside our own. -His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

## Stay Strong

By Michael N.

12-08-07



Within every difficulty, there's inherent good if you can stay strong – you should ...  
Stay strong when unexpected problems come your way, you can bear them another day...  
No matter how tough they may seem to be, you must face facts realistically...  
When fear, nervousness and anxiety rise up inside of you, you're through if you don't know what to do...

Because worrying is a state of fear, keep your faith near...  
Through deep breathing exercises, meditation and sincere prayer, you'll be able to do things that are beyond compare because a strong person has a fully developed mind that's in harmony with time...

They are filled with optimism, do not see difficulties in every situation, and believe that the good in life outweighs cynicism...

With inner strength you begin to look like you're Buddha- sent...

But practice "IS" the key, when you begin to be, you'll see...

Stay strong...

*Our highest potential as a species is our ability to achieve full self-reflective consciousness or knowing that we know. Through humanities awakening, the Universe acquires the ability to look back and reflect back on itself--in wonder, awe, and appreciation." Duane Elgin*

*Compassion Works for All/ Dharma Friends*

*PO Box 7708*

*Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708*

DONATION: RELIGIOUS MATERIAL

Webpage:[www.dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com](http://www.dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com)

*Permit NO. 160*

**Non-Profit organization**

**US Postage PAID**

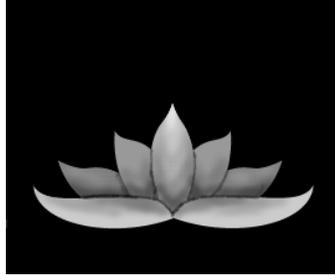
**Little Rock, AR.**



*Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn't learn a lot today, at least we learned a little, and if we didn't learn a little, at least we didn't get sick, and if we got sick, at least we didn't die; so, let us be thankful. -The Buddha*

# Dharma Friends

October 2008 issue # 141 copyright 2008, Compassion Works for All



Additional Pages for EMAIL VERSION of *Dharma Friends*

*Every time a problem arises, the essential thing is to immediately become aware that the problem comes from our selfish mind, that it is created by self-cherishing thoughts. As long as you put the blame outside yourself, there can be no happiness. -Lama Zopa Rinpoche, "Transforming Problems into Happiness"*



*a card made by K.S.*

(Here is a short piece that I offered to the Arkansas Democrat/Gazette to hopefully use which invites Arkansans to establish a commission to study the use of the death penalty)

## **Towards a more peaceful Arkansas**

### **Some reasons to study the death penalty**

Unfortunately, some humans are inhumane to others. As a psychotherapist, for four decades I have observed the effects of violence on individuals and families, and have a special interest in how violence hurts everyone. My organization, *Compassion Works for All*, offers healing counsel to those in prisons. I work to help prisoners find those healthy selves that they feared lost. I know many on death rows around the country. Some in prisons are innocent – more than we would like to think. Some are mentally ill. Most come from impoverished backgrounds, are uneducated, and many were gravely abused children. Some are mentally impaired or brain damaged. But all who live in prisons and on the row are fellow human beings.

Science is increasing its understanding of why people are brutal and cruel to others. Many interconnected things can go wrong with people's brains, bodies, and psyches that can increase their potential for violent behavior. It is clear that the one thing we *can* say is that we are not sure how much or how little control some people have over the violent actions that they commit.

Our criminal justice system must take into account all new information about violent behavior. Company execs who greedily take the money of their investors, the rapist behind the bush, the jealous murderer of a wife, a child abuser, and the serial killer all have their own unique problems and dysfunctions to heal. A justice system must draw on the latest science, utilize professional consultation to make the best rehabilitation choices possible for each individual, and must strive to identify at-risk children and families to get them help and healing. This sensible approach to diminishing violence and to saving potential victims from ruined lives must become the new paradigm of our legal system.

### **The Death Penalty Study and Moratorium Campaign is a start**

Evaluating the efficacy of the death penalty is an important first step. Is the death penalty part of a truly just and ethical criminal justice system? **The Death Penalty Study and Moratorium Campaign** ([www.deathpenaltystudyar.org](http://www.deathpenaltystudyar.org)) has been organized by many civic and faith based community groups to ask Governor Beebe and our Arkansas legislators to look at this issue regarding its fairness. Arkansas citizens are circulating petitions in many churches during October's **Faith in Action Week** (19<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>) asking for a commission review by knowledgeable citizens of many perspectives. We want lawmakers to remember that these are human beings lined up for executions. Some have done terrible things but, again, what if someone is innocent, or mentally ill, or may have rehabilitated themselves and are trying to do beneficial things with their lives?

The goal is to study why we impose the death penalty at all, but especially on some violent individuals and not on others. Does the death penalty truly deter crime? Does race or poverty factor into sentencing? What about the costs of execution versus a life spent in prison? What about information that we know in 2008 that is pertinent to understanding dysfunction that led to violence but was irrelevant to the courts and ignored in sentencing? Do we have the wisdom to impose death? The death penalty is an emotional issue but we need to find balance in reasoned justice to ensure that all aspects of a tragic crime are considered.

Logically, can we promote a non-violent society by practicing violence? We urge everyone, including the Governor and our legislators, to evaluate these many issues and consider whether the death penalty is an effective policy in this modern age and in a culture of compassion.

**The Death Penalty Study** will be a positive step to educate Arkansans about what the death penalty does and does not do. It creates an opportunity for all of us to learn more about brain function, mental health, and how we are acculturating the children who will create our future cities and neighborhoods. We then need to expand our view to learn what is just, moral, and effective to do with all those who are handicapped in their capacity to be kind and safe people so that they can rejoin our human family.

**In taking a life through execution, we do not know what we are doing or why because our knowledge of violence is primitive. Some may find retribution attractive, but is this an irrational approach to a complex problem? We are now entering a new era of medical and scientific understanding. This must become the foundation of the criminal justice system. Based on this greater understanding of human behavior we must change our broken and outdated system by first evaluating and maybe terminating a legal response that is irrevocable – the death penalty.**

**If you would like to help with gathering names for the petition, please let me know. Thank so much!**

**And - on the topic of death row** - Arkansans are all too aware that we have a number of executions that could come up this fall. Many of these guys are members of our **Dharma Friends** community and have been our friends for over ten years. If you would like to help with the petition effort to present 100,000 signatures to Gov. Beebe and our state government to ask for a review of the effectiveness of our death penalty laws in Arkansas either as a petition gatherer or a sponsoring organization, let me know. And here is a poster that you could put up in a visible location.

# Movie: **AT THE DEATH HOUSE DOOR**

Followed by a

**Death Penalty Discussion** with Anna Cox  
**October 20th, 7:00 p.m.**

**At the Ecumenical Buddhist Society Center  
1015 West 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Little Rock**

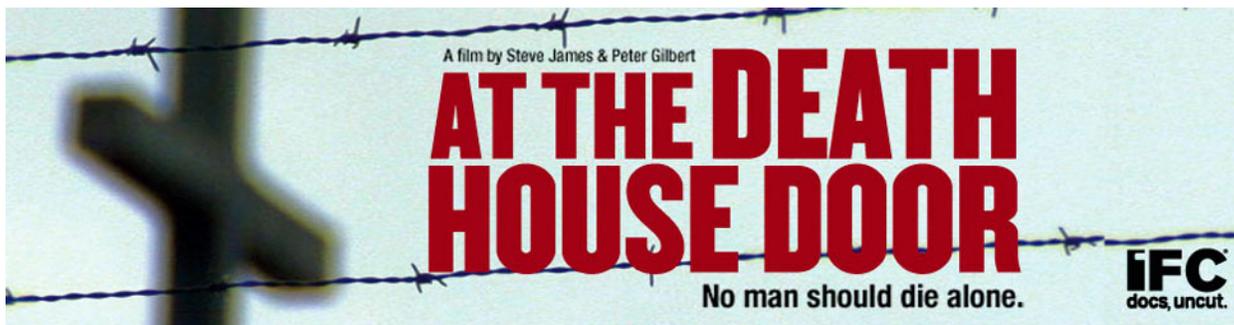
**Any donation is appreciated!**

**This showing is part of the  
*Campaign for a Death Penalty Study and Moratorium's*  
focus on death penalty issues during Faith in Action Week**

EBS has joined over 23 organizations, many religious denominations, around the state of Arkansas to ask Governor Beebe to form a commission that will discuss issues concerning the death penalty. Arkansas is part of a national effort for those who want to take a stand on this issue. Please take a few minutes to do practice or to say prayers for the people on all sides of the death penalty—crime victims and their families, those on death row and their families, lawyers, judges, juries, prison workers, chaplains, and all those who work on behalf of death row inmates. You do not need to “choose a side” to participate.

EBS has supported the efforts of Compassion Works for All prison outreach program since its beginning. Many of the prisoners served by our *Dharma Friends* newsletter are on death row. This is an emotional issue in our country, but through work by the Innocence Project and other groups, the application of the death penalty has been shown to be inconsistent and, at times, discriminatory. We want to know the efficacy of the death penalty in Arkansas through this study.

**Please come and be a part of this important discussion.**



*At the Death House Door* is a personal and intimate look at the death penalty in the State of Texas through the eyes of Pastor Carroll Pickett, who served 15 years as the death house chaplain to the infamous "Walls" prison unit in Huntsville. During Pickett's remarkable career journey, he presided over 95 executions, including the world's first lethal injection. After each execution, Pickett recorded an audiotape account of his trip to the death chamber.

The film also focuses on the story of Carlos De Luna, a convict Pickett counseled and whose execution troubled Pickett more than any other. He firmly believed De Luna was innocent, and the film tracks the investigative efforts of a team of Chicago Tribune reporters who have turned up evidence that strongly suggests he was. From award-winning directors Steve James ("*Hoop Dreams*") and Peter Gilbert ("*Vietnam: Long Time Coming*").

For more information call 803 3830. Web page: [dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com](http://dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com)

## COME TOGETHER? Is it possible?

*If we divide into two camps--even into the violent and the nonviolent--and stand in one camp while attacking the other, the world will never have peace. We will always blame and condemn those we feel are responsible for wars and social injustice, without recognizing the degree of violence within ourselves. We must work on ourselves and also with those we condemn if we want to have a real impact. -Ayya Khema, "Be An Island"*

Brain scientists are making great progress in teaching the mysteries of how we learn and process our world, even though we are still just examining the tip of the iceberg. I find some new research findings about how we assimilate our world view quite extraordinary. It helps me make sense of *The Great Divide* in our society today and throughout our history.

What they have found is that most data is learned by exposure to information that we then remember and integrate into all the rest of what we know. But, our world view is acquired differently. It is absorbed in one big conceptual awareness of what "is". This takes place from birth until about 3 years old. We can see that this awareness is absorbed long before we can differentiate various aspects of our world view into parts like religion, politics, ethics and morals, socially acceptable or unacceptable, functional or dysfunction. Our suborbital frontal cortex just takes it all in as 'reality'. Then, because it is so deep in our being and influences so much of our idea of self, the view we are exposed to *seems* to be the only right and true way to be. From then on, anything else somehow seems wrong or aberrant. Now, to add the clincher, while the suborbital frontal cortex is determining the truth of the world according to our life experience, the limbic system is also revving up and attaching primitive and strong emotional reactions to all of these very same life events. Not only do we intellectually believe that what we have been exposed to is what is *right and true*, we add these complex biochemical responses surging through our brain and body to reinforce our deep sense of safety when we are in a world that is familiar. In the world that is harmonious to the one we integrated as a small child, every molecule of our being says that the world is safe. We race with "fight or flight" alarms when we are presented with a world view, or the proponent of a world view, that differs from the one we knew as a child. Of course, if we add trauma or other ingredients, the picture becomes more complex, but if our world was happy and safe, that is what we believe that the world should continue to be.

Is it any wonder that the Republican and Democratic conventions and debating candidates set our blood to boiling? Is it any wonder that the mind-sets of conservatives and liberals reflect not only their politics but such comprehensive world views that Op-ed pieces and Letters to the Editor in any newspaper throughout the world pronounce those on the opposite side of the fence the enemy? Is it any wonder that we extrapolate these differences and make those 'others' into villains or victims, or even terrorists, with hardly a thought of the logic of it all?

We can make guesses about how far back to take the genetic benefit of this assimilating brain function that might have led to a more "liberal" or open view versus a more "conservative" or closed view that tend to be the dominating divisions. This may become clearer as we gain information. Some researchers differentiate the DNA of hunters and gatherers as a possibility. It is all very interesting. What helps me though is simply to know that there is actually little intellectual analysis present for any of us that contributes to our various perspectives. If you are like me, it is simply hard to comprehend how someone can believe what they believe to be true about the world when it differs so drastically from my own view. Hopefully, I'm growing a little more tolerant. I am willing to try to understand their view because I want to know how to bridge the gap.

For me, with my work as a psychotherapist and with prisoners, one immediate and necessary application of this information is to better understand social and emotional dysfunction and violence. We have long known that there are many factors that contribute to aberrant behaviors that most would agree are harmful no matter their world view. We have also known that early environment and family patterns influence how one behaves towards others later in life. Now, with this additional information on brains and learning, we see the almost intractable embracing of ideas about relationship behaviors for those who grow up in a violent family or in a societal pocket of cultural violence. For these children, that violent way of life is "what is". That world and its relationship mores are embraced as the only way to be. For some, even their larger culture embraces violence and they see nothing else. Then, here in the US, there are those smaller but very violent sub-groups in our inner cities, in rural politically-based or religious compounds, or even in very isolated and dysfunctional families or family groupings. For children growing up in such settings, reason, exposure to surrounding

cultural views, and the perspectives of teachers, social workers, or differing social rules may mean as little to them as when a Republican approaches a Democratic rally to try to convert the crowd to vote for his candidate. The only way to bring change to people who are indoctrinated to violence as *normal* may be to introduce them to new information that might contribute little by little to a new world view. We must be much more skillful with such an education because it turns out that this is a much harder project than we could ever have imagined. Many ask, why don't they just do the right thing? Now we know more about why they don't – but it is possible to change.

## A HEALING BRIDGE

One of my favorite things to do is to walk across our Arkansas River Big Dam Bridge. For those who don't live here in central Arkansas, this is the longest walking bridge in the world! It crosses from Little Rock to North Little Rock and will eventually be a part of a 26 mile circle. One will be able to walk or run or ride a bike from downtown Little Rock at the Wm. Clinton Presidential Center, through the city, through the parks, onto and over the Big Dam Bridge to North Little Rock, and then through more parks, through downtown North Little Rock, and then across a choice of three bridges back over to the Little Rock side of the river. Quite spectacular.

Walking over the Big Dam Bridge is majestic. It rises high over the raging waters funneled through the Murray Lock and Dam that is raised and lowered to allow boats and even long barges to navigate the river. The bridge has become a great gathering place for families, exercising walkers, runners, bikers, and dog-walkers. I love to go at sunset for the beautiful views. There are always people there. And the people are from every walk of life, every ethnicity, with many speaking foreign languages. Some are padding along in their slippers while others are jogging in top price running shoes. There are a lot of older couples getting their slow, daily walk with a walker or cane, and many, many families are hand in hand with kids, or tots on tricycles and pedal cars. Hispanic families and African/American families often combine a walk with an afternoon of fishing. I love it. Everyone is friendly and happy. No one looks at others with fear or sees their differences. I believe that everyone is so inspired by the weather, the view, and the invigorating feeling of being alive, that this bridge invites everyone to transcend intellect and judgment. The bridge symbolizes and unconsciously offers an experience of *being one human family* beyond any ideas of *how it is*. *People don't see enemies as they stroll across the bridge*. If we could all live in this space of great appreciation for all the happy faces that we see on others as we go through everyday life, we could carry the view gleaned from our Big Dam Bridge with us all ways and heal the planet. That would be good.

If you live in Arkansas and have not walked across the Big Dam Bridge, that is your homework assignment for this month.

### THE BIG DAM BRIDGE (from the web pages)



Opening the "Big Dam Bridge" in Little Rock, Arkansas

That may just be the most spectacular feature of the bridge— the way it is bringing people together. Thousands of people gathered on September 30th, 2006 for the opening ceremonies and 5k footrace, and daily walkers, runners, and bicyclists and families from all walks of life can be seen enjoying the bridge.

**Bridge wins 2007 award for "Exemplary Human Environment Initiatives"**

It is the longest bridge in the country built specifically for pedestrians and bicyclists. The bridge is one of the exciting projects that will be featured at the [National Trails Symposium](#) when it is held in Little Rock, Arkansas, November 15-18, 2008.

"It truly is a gift to every member of our community," Anne Woker, of Little Rock says about the bridge, "no matter how old or young, rich or poor, fit, or physically challenged... and, it is a gift that will keep giving to each of us in our lifetimes and those to come. Wow, I love that dam bridge!"

Speaking at the ribbon cutting ceremony in September, Judge Villines furthered that notion, "This bridge, like the very early bridges, connects people and places. Spanning this river that would divide us, it connects us in a very human way. We will bring our families and our friends here, and we will meet other families and make new friends. We will be better and our community will be better for the experience. Let this be a "BRIDGE TO FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNITY."



**"Our spirits will be renewed as we gaze upon the beauty before us, over this river whose waters have come and passed this way for thousands of years, connecting us to our history— our past, our present and our future. Our future, our history yet to be written. We can be what we choose to be. If we can conceive it, we can achieve it! For all things are possible, if we only believe! Let this be a BRIDGE OF DREAMS." —Judge Buddy Villines**



**DHARMA FRIENDS – PLEASE HELP ME TO FIND MY WAY! :**

**QUESTION FROM A DF Reader** - Anna, can I ask you a personal question? I don't want to intrude into your privacy so tell me if you don't feel comfortable answering my question. I know that you have had your fair share - is it ever fair, I wonder? - of challenges - your health and the loss of your livelihood, Jim's recent illness, to name a few that I am aware of. You always seem so positive whenever you talk of these things. Do you ever struggle in coming to terms with these things? I am feeling so badly about myself that I am having such a difficult time accepting these latest challenges in my own life. I am committed to staying the course, so to speak, committed to the "learning" once again of how to accept suffering and the plans for my life from the spiritual realm, plans I have no control over. And I think I have a lot of ego that I need to learn to let go of. I just feel terribly stuck in despair at the moment.

**A few thoughts from Anna** - Here is the **thought of the day** today that I just read from Joel and Michelle Levey - two wise folks - so I will start with this as our base!

***"No revolution in outer things is possible without prior revolution in one's inner way of being. Whatever change you aspire to in your affairs must be preceded by a change in heart, an active deepening and strengthening of your resolve to meet every event with equanimity, detachment, and innocent goodwill. When this spiritual poise is achieved within, magnificent things are possible without."***

- I Ching Hexagram 49: KO from the Book of Changes: A Guide to Life's Turning Points by Brian Browne Walker

A second perspective: The other night, we brought a Tibetan Bon lama to EBS to give a talk - he was wonderful. He went through the different systems the Bon use in practices that allow us to effect life issues with spiritual energies - like divinations, astrology, reading karma, applying Tibetan medicine readings, and doing rituals. This is all a reminder of the multidimensional expression of reality and how helpful it is to visit every level when viewing our life challenges. Our

present circumstances are possibly the result of karma from past lives, are rich with life lessons, may or may not be an energetic imbalance or illness, may or may not be psychological, or may well be that we are on the verge of a major spiritual step forward. The Bon say that we can use rituals, prayers, readings of subtle energy systems like the MO or astrology. We can work with these practices or rituals that can purify our bodies and minds and use the lessons for enormous awakening awareness. hooray. Or, we may just accept that negative events mean that karmic energies are being used up and their influences on us are expended. With that, we can just let it go! As he talked of the rituals that help purify these past actions, I enjoyed the enormous variety that he spoke about. For example, there are water rituals with water specifically from waterfalls, rain water, water gathered in a rock, water from the ocean or a lake, and on and on. I would say that if one wants to use a ritual, let the actual ritual come to you from a dream, fantasy, or spiritual journey, unless you have a Bon lama to guide you! I mention all of this because it is excellent to be an active participant in our healing journey and to be wide open to all the subtle energies involved.

So for our next perspective, let's revisit some of what we talked about earlier in the commentary in this **Dharma Friends** issue's teaching ....*trust that what comes to you is brought to you in your own special curriculum by your inner wisdom teacher. There will not be any errors in your homework assignments. Everything that comes to you is your assignment in developing wisdom and compassion. It is that easy – and that hard. Ego will say, But, but --- this is not how I want it to be. I want \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with everything else you would rather have!) This inner wisdom teacher is not a pussy cat and the lessons are hard! But that is your teacher for now.*

*Consulting with your inner teacher about all life events to discern how each is our perfect teaching is another way to allow our spiritual path to be our unfolding healing.*

***And now about your question about how I handle those challenges that have come to me.***

Well, for sure, don't think that all I have been working with has been easy. There definitely have been challenges. But we just do a day at a time. But there is truly one skill that is imperative to learn because we can't do the other in-depth work until we do. I ALWAYS work with my brain and body during meditation as well as spiritual work. I work with calming down brain and body function, cleansing, balancing and healing. I know that this helps and balances excessive fear reactions. No one is immune to horrible struggles but no matter what comes, but practicing self-regulation is the best tool I know of to get through it - along with all the spiritual teachings. I share this because I believe it has saved my life many times.

But here is how a very courageous woman that recently died from cancer made wonderful use of this tool. I met her when she came to various talks on healing over the last few years that Sandy Pope and I did. Her wise and excellent therapist told me that she was dying and I offered to visit with her. I've worked with dying people very often and the one skill that so many do not get from doctors is how to regulate their emotional responses to their situation.

This woman, who led an amazingly active life of benefit to many since she first got cancer as a teenager, had been having panic attacks whenever she thought of the unknown that was coming. She had done Sandy's Mindfulness course, was a meditator, and in all of the talks on healing, she was responsive to meditation and relaxation and could quickly self-regulate. But in this state of severe illness, she had the additional struggles of a brain and body that were very out-of-balance as she approached death. As we talked, her anxiety began to skyrocket, but she could relax again with just a little suggestion from me and her therapist. She knew she was dying and was grateful to talk openly about it, but was still very frightened. This was a beautiful example of being in the moment and on her edge. So she made a big sign saying - **I'm Just Fine** - and hung it on the wall so she could see it whenever she forgot.

She knew that she needed to talk her anxiety down right away so that she could think clearly and then do her meditation - very often - like every few minutes. And this was her very important meditation practice. If she didn't tell herself gently that she was okay and keep self-regulating back into balance, the spinning out-of-control anxiety would take over and then it was much harder to bring back a peaceful harmony.

So I tell this story because all of us do the same thing all the time to a lesser degree. Every little spin-out is a time to catch the process early and practice coming back into balance. And of course, it helps a lot to learn these skills early so we can practice on lesser challenges throughout life long before we have to face dying! Every event is a good opportunity to practice. If we go immediately to this practice whether the challenges are big or little, then when that day arrives when death is happening and it is most important to relax and say **I'm Just Fine**, then we can. Everyone's words may be different but it is a crucial process. And an on-going life practice.

So that is what I recommend - to everyone - but know it is a minute by minute day by day practice and it does get easier but is never easy.

*So within this mountain-wall of old age, birth, disease, and death, there is no escape for the world. Only by considering and practicing the true law can we escape from this sorrow-piled mountain. -Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King*

## **An Eid feast story .. by Jim Rule**

It was a great honor and privilege to be a guest at the Eid Feast at the end of Ramadan at the Brickeys Maximum Security Unit of the Arkansas prison system last week. After a month of fasting from sun-up to sun-down, 300 men were celebrating their purification and a rededication to the Islamic faith and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed.

Anna and I had again helped raise donations and transported food for the feast so we had places at the head table. From this vantage, we witnessed a remarkable testimony to the inclusivity of Islam and its power to transform and inspire all races and religions to be “the best that we can be” on this Road to Freedom that we are all traveling as members of the human family.

Brother Jesus (the excellent organizer) set the tone with an introduction. Then Anna, the Buddhist psychotherapist, spoke about the obstacles to experiencing Brotherhood (ego, fear, addictions, brain dysfunction, lack of education, etc.) and how all of us must strive to overcome these obstacles to find personal and spiritual fulfillment.

She was followed by a distinguished looking gentleman in a handsome suit and a natty bow tie. Omar Mohammed. Until last summer, he was a prisoner serving six life sentences – three without parole – in the Arkansas prison system and had served 27 years. A year ago, he was diagnosed with liver and colon cancer and was not expected to live long. But he had strong faith in Allah and a powerful will to transform his illness into freedom. He obtained a compassionate medical release and is now able to be with his loving family in Atlanta.

But his heart is still with his brothers in prison. With the wise help of Chaplain Dennis Wilson and Warden Greg Harmon, he was allowed to return and speak to the men whom he loved and had inspired for years by his example. His passionate address urged them to be all that they could be and to set all divisions aside. Omar spoke of the new Islam, love for all. His was a tale of relentless love, courage and determination inspired by deep faith.

I was spell bound and moved to tears by the power of his exhortation to be *all that I could be*.

Thank you, Brother Omar, for who you are to all of us.

**There are two feasts following Ramadan each year. The second Eid feast at East Arkansas Regional Unit in Brickeys, Arkansas is December 13 at 6:30 PM. You are invited.**

**I also have my begging bowl out once again to get food for the feast. I appreciate everyone’s help so much for these folks who are some of the rare ones following their spiritual path with dedication to make their prison world a better place. If you would like to make a donation to the feast, send it to CWFA – Feast donation, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708**

### **BETTER HURRY:**

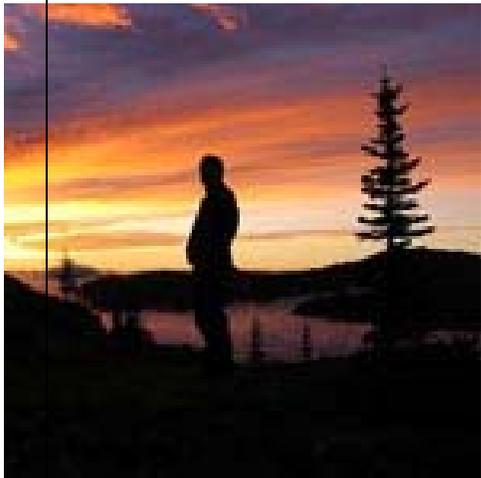
**Anna will do a retreat at Wattle Hollow along with Joy Fox:  
The Next Step on the Path – of your spiritual life journey**

It will be on October 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, beginning at noon on Saturday and ending at 3 on Sunday. Wattle Hollow Retreat Center is near Fayetteville AR. I hope you will join us in what will be a very individualized meditation and explorative time, and Joy will keep us limber with gentle yoga.

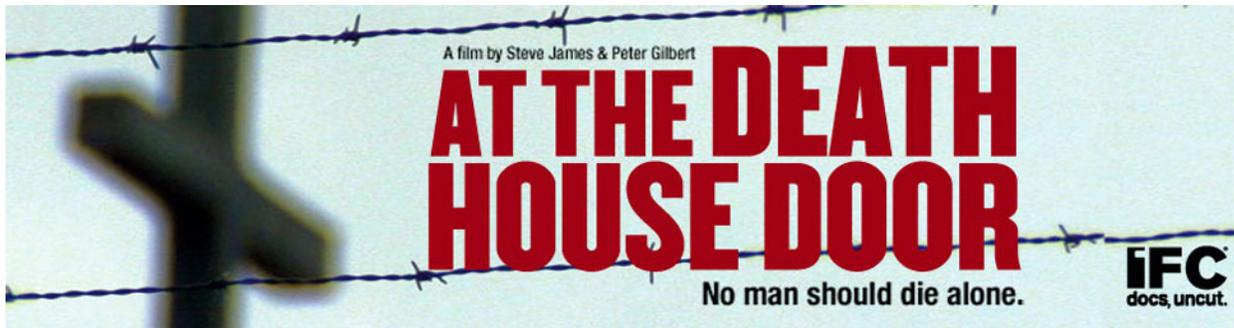
Lodging and meals included. Sliding scale \$100. For questions or to register, go to [www.wattlehollow.com](http://www.wattlehollow.com) This retreat is almost full, so call today if you want to come!!

**Talented artist, Jack Jones on Ar. Death Row, has a hand made incense burner to sell. If interested in knowing more about this item, let me know!!**

**There are also the west memphis 3 efforts** on-going and Brent, Capi, and Damien Echol's wife, Lori Davis, can all use your help with that!! I will pass any emails on to them if you want to help.

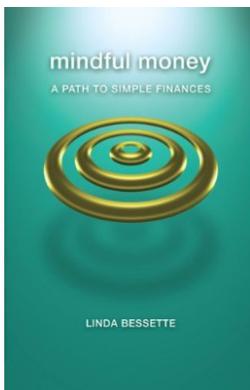


Again – a reminder to **come to the movie** on October 20 at EBS at 7 PM



We have BOOKS FOR SALE:

## MINDFUL MONEY by LINDA BESSETTE



Linda Besette, who volunteers her time and skills to take care of all of our *Compassion Works for All* finances, who helps me with the address database for *Dharma Friends*, oversees the layout of the issues, turns *Dharma Friends* into the pdf email version for you, and takes the layout to Sir Speedy for printing and mailing to subscribers each month, also has spent many years counseling people on their finances.

**Now, Linda has come out with a jewel of a book that is all we need to know about money.**

It is an easily read and easily understood 80 pages! She has captured the essentials so that we can all get our finances in hand by following her advice.

If we have a child or grandchild moving into independence, this is a great gift.

If we are changing life directions and heading towards retirement, this is a good re-orienting tool.

If we just want to make sure we are on the right track or to get back on track, this is a wonderful money Bible.

**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 me ([annacoxar@gmail.com](mailto:annacoxar@gmail.com)) or Linda ([lbessette33@comcast.net](mailto: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** – both of 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](http://www.dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com) .



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](mailto: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.

