

Dharma Friends

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

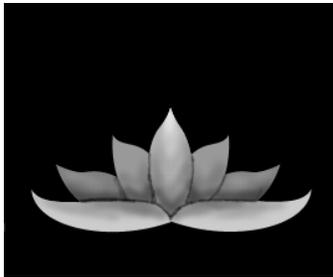
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Have a Happy Thanksgiving, everyone –

Remember that giving THANKS is the most healing thing you can do for your heart, your spirit and your healthy body..

And we applaud our new president-elect Barack Obama. Time for us all to get to work to make this a better world

The Dhammapada The teachings of the Buddha



VERSE 8: The Thousands

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.

100. Better than a thousand useless words is one useful word, hearing which one attains peace.

101. Better than a thousand useless verses is one useful verse, hearing which one attains peace.

102. Better than reciting a hundred meaningless verses is the reciting of one verse of Dhamma, hearing which one attains peace.

103. Though one may conquer a thousand times a thousand men in battle, yet he indeed is the noblest victor who conquers himself.

104-105. Self-conquest is far better than the conquest of others. Not even a god, an angel, Mara or Brahma can turn into defeat the victory of a person who is self-subdued and ever restrained in conduct.

106. Though month after month for a hundred years one should offer sacrifices by the thousands, yet if only for a moment one should worship those of perfected minds that honor is indeed better than a century of sacrifice.

107. Though for a hundred years one should tend the sacrificial fire in the forest, yet if only for a moment one should worship those of perfected minds, that worship is indeed better than a century of sacrifice.

108. Whatever gifts and oblations one seeking merit might offer in this world for a whole year, all that is not worth one fourth of the merit gained by revering the Upright Ones, which is truly excellent.

109. To one ever eager to revere and serve the elders, these four blessing accrue: long life and beauty, happiness and power.

110. Better it is to live one day virtuous and meditative than to live a hundred years immoral and uncontrolled.

111. Better it is to live one day wise and meditative than to live a hundred years foolish and uncontrolled.

112. Better it is to live one day strenuous and resolute than to live a hundred years sluggish and dissipated.

113. Better it is to live one day seeing the rise and fall of things than to live as hundred years without ever seeing the rise and fall of things.

114. Better it is to live one day seeing the Deathless than to live a hundred years without ever seeing the Deathless.

115. Better it is to live one day seeing the Supreme Truth than to live a hundred years without ever seeing the Supreme Truth.



Some thoughts about this *Dhammapada* Verse: **The Thousands**

The essence of this verse is to recognize the importance of committed focus and intention towards our highest realization as much and for as long as we can. It is true that most of our moments are wasted in an idle fog of habitually going through a day. Most of us would readily agree that if we focus on a goal, we are far more likely to achieve it, whether it is to educate ourselves, make money, create something wonderful, achieve power in the world, or to be a good and loving relationship partner or friend. These worldly goals are quite a challenge to accomplish but the rewards of achievements in society are huge and often recognized as highly worthwhile. There is a pretty big pay off for those who do make the effort to spend their minutes with focused intent. We also know how hard it is to be one of those who meet all those expectations and for whatever reason, we often fall short. The negatives for not making it are pretty huge too.

But what about striving to reach those spiritual goals that are set out in our verse, **The Thousands**? Not too many receive noticeable rewards from others in the world for practicing those long hours of meditation, holding the pure motivation to be kind to all beings, and reading and studying the subtle and hard to understand teachings of spiritual traditions. Instead of the worldly goals of life being easier to reach, they are sometimes made even harder when trying to follow spiritual teachings. There isn't much – if any – monetary reward for a true spiritual seeker. No one makes you head of a company because your values don't often translate into the market place. You hear, "You aren't aggressive enough!" You certainly don't look like leadership material because you are too much of a 'softee'. Few understand why you are the way you are. We live in a country where there are many who understand the views of others who practice the more popular religious traditions but if you practice a religion that is other than that of the majority, you may find yourself criticized or ostracized. Why in the world would we choose to be one of those who follow our inner spiritual path towards our own view of realization?

The answer for most is simply that we know we must. We feel it in our deepest self. We are drawn to it. We know it is our path and we can do nothing else. If it is you that this verse is talking to – whether Buddhist or not, traditionalist or not - our verse says: ***Better it is to live one day wise and meditative than to live a hundred years foolish and uncontrolled.***

Each of us in our own way and by walking our own path will know the reward: ***Better it is to live one day seeing the Supreme Truth than to live a hundred years without ever seeing the Supreme Truth.***

It takes courage to follow such a path, most especially for those who live in a prison. Those in the world who follow their own path are often misunderstood, but for those in a prison, living amidst many more violent, angry, and often somewhat crazy folks, it is difficult to be different. But I know that it is those of you who have that courage to live your spiritual practices and beliefs that are bringing healing and peace to others in your world. Your motivation is to find your highest self and to benefit others. This is noble and far beyond the motivation of many. I applaud you all.

Some of the few among ***The Thousands*** are some Muslim inmates at the East Arkansas Regional Unit in Arkansas who recently held an Islamic Eid feast following their month of fasting and prayers for Ramadan.

I was lucky enough to be a guest. As you all know, I am happy to support everyone on their own spiritual path. I loved getting to meet, honor and speak to those who dedicated themselves to prayers during their holy days. I hope that they felt that out of the ***thousands*** who might have spent their days doing other things, their focus on finding wisdom and peace during their days of meditation was greatly beneficial. I suspect they found that to be true. As our verse says, even one day of wise meditation is important.

I wanted to share the short talk that I gave at the feast in hopes that it may give a little guidance and support to all who are trying to achieve their own ‘one day’ or many more of growing wisdom. Maybe that one day can blossom into two, and little by little, many more. The focus of the talk was on ***Brotherhood***, a wisdom quality that allows us to support one another on our journeys. Here is what I said:

BROTHERHOOD

“After doing prayers during this wonderful month of Ramadan, focusing on your spiritual practice, and even making sacrifices as you did your fast, you get to feast tonight. Thank you Chaplain W. and Warden H. for making this possible. And tonight, we also have the opportunity to focus on the concept of ***Brotherhood*** so that we may move forward into another year with greater awareness.

How can we embrace the concept of brotherhood as more than just a concept?

First, we have to practice ***Brotherhood*** every day. We all agree that there are some concepts that are good to live and ***Brotherhood*** is one of those. But what does ***Brotherhood*** mean? Loving others as your brother. Being kind to each one you meet. Kind not just to some – not just to your friends – but to all others equally. When someone is hurt or needy, ***Brotherhood*** is helping them out. It is putting your self out for others.

This is all good to say that we will try to do but it is often hard to live such a concept. What happens to most of us when we set out to practice brotherhood? For most, there is a little ego self, a little self-centered voice within, that can live some of this, but more often it says – “No way. I want to be #1. I want to be the one that gets what I want. I’m not going to help ***him*** – he didn’t stick up for me when ____ happened!” You probably recognize that little dialogue that always runs through our head even though our highest self would like to ignore it?

So what do we do? What do we do with this self-serving little guy who ordinarily wins out despite our best intentions?

First, we establish our intention. ***I am going to practice Brotherhood.***

Then, we decide that we will do what we know we SHOULD do despite our inner rebellion and see what happens. ***The Fake it ‘til you Make it Approach.***

Then, we work with the feelings and thoughts that come up. This is our spiritual and healing ***practice***. There will be resentment, self-interest, anger, fear, and more. When feelings arise, we follow those feelings back to their root. We ask, “Where did those feelings come from originally?”

We can then ask, How can I heal those old wounds that caused ego’s fears? Because underneath all of ego’s self serving thoughts are fears. Fears that we won’t get what we need. So we need to talk to ourselves gently and reassuringly to say that we will be alright. This brings about self-regulation and calms and balances our body and brain. It is also a form of re-

parenting ourselves to heal those times when we didn't get a reassuring message when we were little. We may have lived our lives based on fears ever since, but we can still heal those fears now.

Our self-awareness of inner reactions points out our obstacles as we are growing on our spiritual path. This is like holding a concept like **Brotherhood** up before us as a constant guide to our equilibrium. It gives us a tool of self-observation, a mirror, to identify and then purify our obstacles.

We all have obstacles that get in our way of living out our true self expression and highest goals. We have that true self to grow into on the path, and we all have that ego self that looks out for #1. Ego is focused on survival – not on brotherhood or spiritual life or reaching our highest and true potential. Ego just cares about one thing – it doesn't want us to die. This is good. Ego probably saved our lives many times over with this process of self protection. But ego makes those decisions about what is dangerous or not based on our life as a kid. Often our fears are now outdated and ego has some pretty confusing and sometimes self-defeating ideas that don't fit the world that we live in today. Some of ego's beliefs may actually create obstacles on our path to spiritual or life success.

We have to assess what our obstacles are or they will keep tripping us up. The proverbial bus comes along and rolls over us. For many of you, the bus has already come and mowed you down. For some, this bus has rolled over you multiple times! Some think that getting hit by the bus is normal, everyday life because they've been hit so often. They don't see it as a warning to clean up the obstacles. I want you to be horrified by the obstacles so you will tackle them and save yourself from going through this process of sabotaging your life again and again. I want you to look at the obstacles that have blocked you from living a happy, successful life.

Here are some examples of obstacles. They can be ego obstacles, or brain and health obstacles. It might be narcissism, like always needing to be right or respected or most important. Brain injuries definitely affect the way our brain works and skews our reality and responses. Addictions of course are enormous obstacles. Biochemical imbalance affects our responses to life challenges and we don't react like others do. Our health can be an obstacle. We might have mental health issues. This is nothing to be embarrassed about and we should get help if we do. It can be socialization or education obstacles. If we grew up thinking that violence was normal then that can be an obstacle because we might respond inappropriately to life challenges with violence and that surely will land us in prison. And if we didn't learn to value education, that is a definite obstacle to learning life skills.

How can we diminish these obstacles?

Three of the very best paths of purifying obstacles are:

The spiritual practice of any tradition but the one that feels right to you.

Meditation - which can also be called prayer.

Education.

Spiritual practice gives you principles to employ that will keep your life more stable. By trying to live those principles, we quiet our life. We are each in a little bitty row boat trying to cross the ocean. If the seas are quiet, we might make it. But if we cross during a time of storms and high waves, we are likely to drown. We create the storms in our lives, often by not following the rules that are built into almost all spiritual traditions and society. Rules like: Don't steal. Don't kill. Don't practice adultery. Be kind. Do unto others as they would do unto you. When we break these rules, we are creating the stormy seas in our lives. By making spiritual principles more important than ego's wishes, we have sure guidelines to calm the ocean and to enhance our chances of getting across that enormous ocean. When we look honestly at how we break the rules, we get to look at what is going on with our brain, our ego, and our belief systems. We must ask why we would create such enormous obstacles – those enormous waves before our little boat – so that we can stop.

Meditation is a fabulous tool for quieting our brain, our body, and our chattering mind. In the stillness, we can hear all the little protests of ego and our constant inner dialogue. We can learn about ourselves. We can teach ourselves that just because a thought arises or an impulse stirs us, we can still sit quietly and we don't need to act on it. We can create a healing balance in our brain, body, body biochemistry, and mind that will harmonize and maximize healing of all that is out of balance. Our immune system will grow stronger and our brain will actually develop new and healthier neuronal connections around peace.

Educate yourself at every opportunity and grow an ever bigger, more compassionate, and wiser world view. We all embrace the world view that surrounds us when we are born. That is our understanding of how we and others should be. As adults, when we are making decisions about how to be, what to do, and what the world is, that is what is automatically assumed as true. But what if our view was somehow skewed? What if we lived in a violent or abusive household? What if we lived in an aberrant culture? What if the view we learned was limited? That view may not serve us well in the ‘real world’ of today. We have to educate ourselves to learn the view that is most congruent with the world that we want to live in and thrive in. We need to learn the view that allows love and allows us to be loved by others.

Brotherhood will grow naturally and be lived truthfully as you heal from your obstacles, grow beyond limited views, and simply practice it with everyone.”

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I was then followed at the lectern by **Omar Mohammad** who had come from Atlanta to join in the feast at the unit he had left on compassionate leave a few months earlier with inoperable and terminal cancer. He looked handsome and amazingly healthy having shrunk grapefruit sized tumors down to a few the size of quarters. He spoke for an hour and a half in words that inspired everyone. Omar has learned and lived **Brotherhood** during his 27 years of prison life. Now he has the chance to teach others that emotional healing and great spiritual growth can happen in a prison. Not only can it happen in a prison, a prison may be one of the very best places to make it happen. Using one’s term in prison as a spiritual retreat with a focus on growth may be the very best ways to spend one’s days of incarceration. Even better than those thousands of days spent free in the world but accomplishing nothing.



A MEDITATION

An emergency meditation to halt obstacles ...

You probably know that there are **thousands** of meditations. The Buddha said that there were 82,000, as many as there are leaves on a tree, and each one is perfect for someone somewhere on their path. Some meditations are helpful at the very beginning of a spiritual path to calm the mind and allow us to develop focus. Some are good for those who are not even on a path of spiritual searching, but who just want to find a little peace and calm in their life. And of course, there are many that have been developed through the centuries to take the very advanced practitioner to the higher and the very highest levels of transformational consciousness. But the meditation for this month is for emergencies!

We all have those days or moments when we are losing it. We are doing well if we are noticing that we are about to go berserk. If we don’t stop ourselves quickly, we will do something that we will regret. Even skilled meditators might need to do something NOW and the first step is to notice what is happening to our body and our brain.

First, here is a simplistic review of what happens to us when we are having a melt down.

You know that different parts of our brain perform different functions, and all are crucial. The part of our brain that allows us to process situations that happen around us, helps to determine the most effective thing to do to handle them, and gives us a clear view of the consequences of our choices, is the prefrontal cortex of our brain’s frontal lobes. That area is behind our forehead and our eyes.

We also are always experiencing life events first with our radar for danger. This is taking in all information that is coming from the more primitive amygdala. This area is deep in the brain and was one of the first parts of the brain formed in all primates. If you put your fingers over your ears and draw an arrow from one to the other, where those arrows meet is at an almond shaped organ on the brain stem: the amygdala. Thank goodness for the amygdala because it registers danger and triggers a surge of fight or flight hormones and brain chemicals long before we can figure out that there is something to be alarmed about. Thanks to the amygdala, our early ancestors had their legs running from the wild animals long before they could think **DANGER**. The amygdala works in the same way today with that ‘danger’ response still deeply embedded in our brain wiring in very primitive and automated ways. But to react like a cave man to danger may not be in

our best interest in 2008. That is why it is good if we can get the information from the amygdala to the frontal lobes to access the danger before we react.

So, here is what goes wrong when we have a *Melt Down*.

If the amygdala reacts primitively to danger with a surge of adrenaline, cortisol, and dopamine but the messages about the situation do not get quickly to the ‘thinking’ part of the brain, the frontal lobes, to decide what is an appropriate reaction, then we may have an emotional or violent reaction, a fleeing response, or feel “out of control” when it does not serve us well or is not really justified. There are many things that can go wrong to block the communication between the emotionally responsive amygdala and the thinking frontal cortex. Some are chronic and very problematic – and landing many in prisons – and some may be just in one situation.

Some chronic problems are issues that hamper the functioning of the frontal lobes and prevent it from swiftly responding. One could have a head injury; stroke; undeveloped frontal lobes (which are not fully functional until the mid-20’s); drug, alcohol, or other substance abuse that wipes out frontal lobe function; certain medications; chronic stress; sleep problems; disease or illness; loud noise or too much environmental chaos; toxins in the body; lack of oxygen to the brain; high levels of pain like headache; dementia; and much more. That is a lot to start with.

On the other side of the equation, sometimes the amygdala is hyperactive and stuck in overdrive. Its’ signals overpower the thinking brain. One responds to a pin prick with a reaction equivalent to a knife wound. Situations that might not bother most folks cause a major fight or flight response because it doesn’t take much to set off the amygdala. This too can have many causes such as organic disease, heredity, chronic stress, lack of sleep, drug or alcohol abuse, or early abuse. With early childhood abuse, the amygdala does not fully develop or it actually shrinks because of the stress. The horrible complication is that that person then has a hyperreactive amygdala that never functions properly. They are often hyper-vigilant as well and expecting horrible events to jump out from no-where and hurt them. Can you see what a challenge that might present?

The issues are actually far more complex but I hope you will see that brain issues are very much a part of our behavioral responses. If we can help our brain to function better, we will make better life decisions. Unfortunately, what we often do with a dysfunctional brain and over-reactive responses in the brain and body is to self medicate with something – anything-- to help calm us down and soothe us. If that *something* is alcohol or drugs, we shrink the brain, further deactivate the frontal lobes, deplete our serotonin (which gives us healing balance) and kill neurons. All of which make us worse. What we have to do is calm the amygdala, heighten the functioning of the frontal lobes, and develop a stronger communicative connection between the two.

Our Emergency Meditation: *for any situation where we feel we are losing it –*

1. Take at least three deep breaths. Breathe in through the nose and breathe out slowly through pursed lips. Let the out-breath be twice as long as the in-breath. (a great habit to keep stress from building up is to take our three deep breaths regularly – every hour take three breaths just to relax and let go of tension.) This releases endorphins into the brain and blood stream and decreases the cortisol and adrenaline.
2. Gently rub the back of your neck. This stimulates the vagus nerve and relaxes that fight or flight response. It also opens up and relaxes the arteries that carry blood from the brain and pulls new, freshly oxygenated blood into the brain for better brain function.
3. Say silently to yourself – THINK. Then think about what is happening and know you can make a decision rather than just react impulsively.
4. If it is too much and you can’t think clearly, and if it is possible, GET UP AND WALK AWAY. Keep walking as much as you can. If you can’t walk away, BE QUIET and say nothing. Give yourself time to calm down.
5. Write these words down or tear out this part of the page. Keep them in your pocket and read these words over and over in a meditative way: PEACE, CALM, HAPPY, SERENE, KIND, SUNNY, LOVING, FUN, BEAUTIFUL, VAST. Saying these words switches your brain function from a more aggressive and reactive brain function to a calmer brain. The rest of your body and your emotions will follow.
6. Smile or even laugh if you can. This activates the vagus nerve and releases endorphins that make you feel better and more relaxed. Even a half-smile helps.

Of course, it doesn’t have to be an emergency to use these techniques. You can do all these things before you get out of bed in the morning, before you go to bed at night, prior to your everyday meditation practice(s), or frequently throughout the day just to stay centered. But the more you practice, the more you will be ready for those times when you really need it!



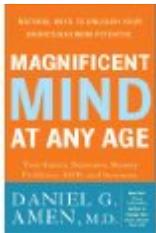
From Your Letters

Now, there are many, many people in the world, but relatively few with whom we interact, and even fewer who cause us problems. So, when you come across such a chance for practicing patience and tolerance, you should treat it with gratitude. It is rare. Just as having unexpectedly found a treasure in your own house, you should be happy and grateful to your enemy for providing that precious opportunity. -His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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 – Dr. Daniel Amen’s new book – Magnificent Mind at Any Age

Why? If we can get a handle on the complex issues of a dysfunctional brain, we can change and heal our life with greater success. If our brain is out of whack, the obstacles are almost insurmountable. Be sure to watch for Daniel’s PBS series coming up soon as well.

Here is what he says about his book: “I just finished filming a new PBS special based on my new book, Magnificent Mind At Any Age, that is coming out December 2nd. Over the next few months I will include snippets of the book and PBS show in our Brain in the News e-newsletter. Here is a piece from: Magnificent Mind at Any Age”

Protect Your Amazing, But Fragile Brain

The brain is the most complicated organ in the universe. It is estimated that the brain has 100 billion nerve cells and more connections in it than there are stars in the universe. Even though the brain is only about 2% of your body’s weight, it uses about 25% of the calories you consume. If you take a piece of brain tissue the size of a grain of sand, it contains 100,000 neurons and a billion connections all talking to one another. If you are not thoughtful, the brain loses an average of 85,000 brain cells a day, or one per second. Information in the brain travels at the speed of 268 miles per hour, unless of course you are drunk, which really slows things down. The brain is the organ of loving, learning, behaving, intelligence, personality, character, belief and knowing.

The brain is also very soft and it is housed in a really hard skull. Most people think of the brain as firm, fixed, and rubbery. Yet, that is not how it is inside your skull. That is how it is once it is fixed in formaldehyde on the pathologist’s table. Inside your skull the brain is 80% water and the consistency of soft butter, custard, somewhere between egg whites and jello. Neurosurgeon, Katrina Firlik, in her book *Another Day In The Frontal Lobe*, describes the brain “like tofu, the soft kind, which when caught in suction during surgery slurps into the tube.”

Your soft “tofu-like” brain is housed in a really hard skull that has many ridges. These ridges damage the brain during trauma. If this is true, which it is, then why would you ever let a child hit a soccer ball with their heads, play tackle football (even with helmets), skateboard, snowboard or ski without helmets? Why would you ever buy your teenager his first motorcycle or take her four wheeling in the desert unless you didn’t like them? From a neuroscientist’s point of view, these are dangerous activities that could grievously injure the brain. Sports like boxing, football, motocross and cage fighting are simply not worth the risk. The brain loves physical activity and it is better to think about safer brain sports such as tennis, table tennis, track and field (although not pole vaulting) and basketball.

A 2007 study by John Adams and colleagues at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine found that playing soccer, where the ball is often hit with the head, may be linked to long-term brain injury and memory problems later in life. Researchers found evidence of reduced gray matter in the brains of male college soccer players, compared with young men who had never played.

The single most important thing I have learned from looking at tens of thousands of scans is that mild traumatic brain injuries change people's whole lives (by damaging their brain) and no one knows it. The brain injured person often subsequent to the injury suffers from emotional, behavioral or cognitive problems that may lead them to a psychiatrist or psychologist, who typically never looks at the brain. Problems which are physically based are often considered psychological. If you never look at the brain, you miss what many researchers have called the "silent epidemic." There are two million reported new brain injury cases every year, and millions of others that go unnoticed.

When I first started the imaging work, I saw a lot of brain injury patterns on scans. When I asked patients about a history of head injuries they denied them. When I pressed, a whole new world opened up. I found out that people often forgot significant injuries. I had to ask them three, four, even ten times. Many people forget or they did not realize that they have had a serious brain injury. You would be amazed at how many people, after repeatedly saying no to this question, suddenly get an 'ah ha' look on their face and say, "Why yes, I fell out of a second story window at age seven." Or, they tell us they went through the windshield of a car head first, had concussions playing football or soccer or fell down a flight of stairs. Not all brain injuries, even serious ones, will cause damage. There is an interaction between genetic vulnerability and trauma. Plus, the brain is buffered by the cerebral spinal fluid that bathes it. Still, damage can occur more than most know.

So many of the troubled people we see at the Amen Clinics have had a brain injury or two or three. Damaging your brain may limit or impair your ability to be successful in any area of your life. People who have experienced head injuries have a higher incidence of drug abuse, alcoholism, mood problems, divorce, domestic violence, arrests, financial problems and every other type of trouble that leads to failure. Be smart. If you want to be your best, protect your soft brain.

To your brain health! Daniel Amen, M.D.
CEO, Amen Clinics, Inc. Distinguished Fellow, American Psychiatric Association

Submitted by Paul V.:

Buddha's Tooth - Author Unknown

It suddenly just appeared there, where it came from, or how it got there, I don't know, but there it was. Right there on the table it was kind of white and had 3 legs, a big head, and a large hole on one side that was black, or maybe, green. I'm not sure I can touch it; well, it had to be cleaned. So I cleaned and polished it and then used it in meditation practice for 2 years (until my release) and then I smuggled it out. Sweet Buddha's tooth now laid to rest in a stupa out in California radiating loving kindness to the world.

The Secrets of the Last Prayer from P.V.

One knows of formal, informal, prolific and meditative prayer. However, there is a very little known fifth type of prayer. This form of prayer is used by Buddhist monks and Native American Indians. It is to pray without words, to pray in the present as if already done, from the heart. One does not pray for something, such as rain, one prays as if it had already happened, smells the rain on the ground, sees the plants start to grow. The scene of the otherworld should be then at the place of prayer. One does not ask, one gives thanks as if it were being done. Use all six of the senses. Give the feeling of rain and it will mirror back rain. Done without attachment to the emotional field, when this form of prayer is done correctly, it can bring about miracles and cures as has been recorded in both ancient and modern times.

P.V. also wants to make sure that all members who need it have the following information: *Gay Buddhist Fellowship: General Inquiries, 2215-R Market Street PMB 456, San Francisco CA 94114*



by L.C.

Yesterday's Grief by *Katherine Lee Bates* *Submitted by K.R.*

*The rain that fell a-yesterday is ruby on the roses, silver on the poplar leaf, and gold on the willow stem;
The grief that chanced a-yesterday is silence that encloses Holy loves when time and change shall never trouble them.
The rain that fell a-yesterday makes all the hillsides glisten, coral on the laurel and beryl on the grass;
The grief that chanced a-yesterday has taught the soul to listen for whispers of eternity in all the winds that pass.
O faint-of-heart, storm-beaten, this rain will gleam tomorrow, flame within the columbine and jewels on the thorn,
Heaven in the forget-me-not; though sorrow now be sorrow,
Yet sorrow shall be beauty in the magic of the morn.*

The Convict and the Bodhisattva by Tojin

Following the traits of a convict in prison is easy and comes naturally to so many. That's why these traits – greed, anger, hatred, ignorance, delusion, and selfishness – among others, are so obviously prevalent in this environment. Succumbing to the mob mentality, when one is part of the mob, is easy. There are, however, still consequences. Following the traits and ideals of a Bodhisattva in prison also carries with it consequences. These traits – compassion, patience, generosity, and wisdom – among others, can be quite difficult to carry out and don't come as naturally to very many behind these walls.

As was pointed out to me by a Sangha member, "This is exactly the ideal environment to cultivate compassion." These words couldn't be more true, but living up to the Bodhisattva vows and ideals has been exhausting for me recently. I realize that the world of delusion is bigger than the cell hell I live in and that many "free-world" Bodhisattvas are pushed to their limits as well. But this "prison life" is my world, our world, and lately, I've felt like I'm in a world of my own. I don't mean to come across as "woe is me" or "let's feel sorry for poor Tojin, he's having a bad time of it lately." What I want to share are the things that have become clearer to me lately.

All worthwhile things are hard and require patience and diligence. Thus, acting like a typical convict – EASY! Following the Bodhisattva way – HARD! For those of us that have completely taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, I've learned that through the so called "tough-times," we need to whole-heartedly depend on the triple treasure and all the wisdom it bears, to get us through. I've learned that as cognizant as I am of how I'm perceived by the world around me, I can't let those perceptions affect how I live my life in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path. People get paroled and transferred, staff members change their jobs and retire, prisoner job assignments change, but the path is always there.

Above all I've learned that while beings are indeed numberless, I can't free them all. I need to examine and cultivate my Upaya, (skillful means), helping those I can in the ways that I can is the best use of my effort. Now, to remember all of this and be mindful of it on a moment to moment basis, that will be a beautiful feat.

To lead people, walk beside them - As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate - When the best leader's work is done the people say, 'We did it ourselves!'" - Lao-tsu

From Chokyi Nyima: Dear Anna, Tashi Delek! Thank you for continuing my newsletter even though I haven't stayed in communication. I really do appreciate it as I always have. I've seen that we have a lot of new members, but I still recognize a few old-timers who were the original contributors of the paper; such as, Chokyi Lodro and his wonderful poems. Sometimes, I get frustrated at some of the writers who try and say things to correct another's writing and somehow I don't believe the Buddha or any of his disciples would have approved. Tactfulness is not the Buddha way. But showing one who might have a misconception on things a better way, that may very well be. After all, this is a newsletter for brothers and sisters of the Sangha who have nowhere else to share their problems with. I, Chokyi Nyima, am not a teacher nor am I a Lama or a Rinpoche, so I do not try and solve other people's problems. But I do look at what other people write and see if what they have can help me in some way. **The Dhammapada** is a very important tool for anyone along the path and I do really appreciate seeing that in all of the issues.

I see you are doing battle with the death penalty again. At least there are some good things happening that are making changes in the death penalty, like what's going on with how they sentence the mentally ill and the DNA testing. But that really doesn't help much with the older cases. Thanks again for continuing the newsletter and I'd like to close with some words of His Holiness that I think may help the Sangha.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama – "Relinquish your envy, let go your desires to triumph over others and instead, try to benefit them with kindness, with courage and be confident that in doing so you are sure to meet with success. Welcome others with a smile. Be straightforward and impartial. Treat everyone as if they were a close friend. I say this neither as Dalai Lama nor as someone who has special power or ability as of these, I have none. I speak as a human being; one who, like yourself, wishes to be happy and not to suffer.

(and he continues:) If you cannot, for whatever reason, be of help to others, at least don't harm them. Consider yourself a tourist. Think of the world as it is seen from space, so small and insignificant, yet, so beautiful. Could there really be anything to be gained from harming others during your stay here? Is it not preferable, and more reasonable, to relax and enjoy ourselves quietly, just as if we were visiting a different neighborhood? Therefore, if in the midst of your enjoyment of the world you have a moment, try to help in however small a way those who are downtrodden those who, for whatever reason, cannot or do not help themselves. If you can, try not to even think of yourself as better than the humblest beggar. You will look the same in your grave. I would like to share a short prayer which gives me great inspiration in my quest to benefit others:

*May I become at all times, both now and forever
A protector for those without protection
A guide for those who have lost their way
A ship for those with oceans to cross
A sanctuary for those in danger
A lamp for those without light
A place of refuge for those who lack shelter
And a servant to all who are in need"*

"Ethics for the New Millennium" His Holiness the Dalai Lama

From D.G.: Dear Anna, It turns out that I have cancer; it's on the back of my tongue on the right side and in a lymph node. I have been taking radiation treatments for it, 35 total, 14 to go. Usually, at this stage people are taking pain medication (because of the intense pain of burning in their throat), but I have not needed it. My throat is a little sore, but as yet, no pain. I believe it's because of my meditations and the mantra I keep using: "Sore throat, little pain." That's it. I repeat it when they're giving me each treatment and whenever I meditate, walk, whatever. Now, the chemo is a different story. That stuff just makes you downright sick. I haven't figured out how to get by that one.

If I ever get down, I think about all of you guys. There are a lot of people getting *Dharma Friends* that have probably been through what I'm going through now. Anyway, to get to the point, I want to thank you for all your effort, work, and compassion that you exert putting the newsletter together every month. Namaste, may you always walk in the Buddha's shadow, sincerely,

"To qualify as servant leaders in the deepest sense, I think that leaders must have four essential qualities. They must have a deep sense of the interconnectedness of life and all its enterprises. They must have a sense of engagement and responsibility, a sense of "I have to." They must be aware that all human endeavor, including business, is a part of the larger and richer fabric of the whole universe. And perhaps most important of all, servant leaders must know what they ultimately serve. They must, with a sense of humility and gratitude, have a sense of the Source from which all values emerge." -- Danah Zohar in Rewiring The Corporate Brain: Using The New Science To Rethink How We Structure And Lead Organizations

From K.N.: It's amazing how hard doing the right thing can be. I know the next statement might sound strange, but when I was acting out, there was a level of calmness and predictability about what's going to happen. But now that I'm not acting out and trying to do the right thing, it's more chaotic. If you have a pleasing personality, then it's looked upon as a weakness, at least in criminal circles. This use to be the case while/when interacting with inmates, but it's more so with the officers now. You can approach an officer with a humble request, and receive a denial that feels more like a back handed slap. Another person can approach the same officer with the same request but in an aggressive manner, and his will be granted.

Sometimes I think of this place (prison) as crazy world because everything is out of balance. I feel that the officers have and are becoming more institutionalized than the inmates. And the sad part is that they don't even recognize it. If I was to say that kindness and conformity are of no value in this world will this statement have any merit? In a normal world, I could strongly say, "no" to the above question, but this world is far from normal and that's where the mixed feelings come in at. I say to myself, all the time, that I'm a free world person. I'm not an inmate or convict, I'm a free man. And my constitution, my fundamental principles and beliefs are rooted in a normal society. I love, care and have empathy for others. I can give without having any expectation of receiving and I can receive without questioning others motives for giving. The above characteristics are traits of healthy people and I try to hold on to them. But the question is, are they conducive to this environment (crazy world)? Love always,

*Should we free our mind from attachment to all "things," the Path becomes clear; otherwise, we put ourselves under restraint.
-The Sutra of Hui Neng*

From R.F.: Dear *Dharma Friends*, I recently had the pleasure to receive the January 2008, #132, edition of the newsletter (my third) that you have been generously been sending me. I have enjoyed reading them and contemplating the wisdom contained within – and I appreciate the kindness of being able to receive it. On page 8 of this last issue, I've read the comment by Anna – and the following information from L. Then I read T.Z.'s comments to Kristopher – relative to the sex issue. I've been thinking this over from a number of perspectives, including, of course, in the context of Buddhism as T.Z. suggests.

Rather than submit to an overabundance of doctrine and a certain, exact, specific, direction from the Buddhist perspective – I am reminded that from many teachings the real direction obviously, ultimately, comes from within ones on being. This is not to say one abandons the direction of the Dharma nor allows "ego" and ones delusional sense of opinion to guide one – but, from my own experience, imposing some doctrine and particular direction for "all" tends to be like most "dogmatic" religious experiences we have suffered from – in our own life experience. To lose touch with the innate knowledge of the great teachings (religions/spiritual), one can see the crystallized outer forms – only – this replacement of one set of dogma for another is quite restricting, not that some discipline – direction – and understanding do not help/assist one to balance life – just as the Buddha did after years of his training prior to him striking the instrument – hit the core of balance – we must do this as well – find the inner balance and direction ourselves. Now this is not a philosophical answer to this important question, but an observation that only with intellectual zeal do we tell others what to do – when the real answer might be just go within – sit, meditate – contemplate the teachings.

As one matures in ones practice, the tendency for right or wrong disappear and one follows some "higher" wisdom. But is one's internal truth – avoid of ego – one knows when this happens – a taste of the higher comes – space – openness free from "I" and me. So, finally, I suggest that one be guarded on making clear directions for others when it seems we all suffer from a degree of delusional thinking and actions. Peace and love,

Difficulties and obstacles, if properly understood and used, can turn out to be an unexpected source of strength . . . To be a spiritual warrior means to develop a special kind of courage, one that is innately intelligent, gentle, and fearless. Spiritual warriors can still be frightened, but even so they are courageous enough to taste suffering, to relate clearly to their fundamental fear, and to draw out without evasion the lessons from difficulties. -- Sogyal Rinpoche

From Jack Waldrop: Greetings *Dharma Friends*, I'm very thankful for the newsletter. I really enjoy reading about all the topics ... and over the years, how it's grown. I would like to ask our *Dharma Friends* readers if they would know someone who would be interested in helping me with a book I'm trying to put together? Even if it just a person with advice. I'm an artist and have spoken on topics and techniques I have perfected, etc... I would be very grateful.
(note from anna - this is a bit late getting in because we are so behind, but if interested, write to Jack at:)
Jack Waldrop, SRCI #7273441, 777 Stanton Blvd., Ontario OR 97914.



By R.T.

Shariputra asked: "When a follower attains the great insight of perfect wisdom, does that follower then covet and cultivate omniscience, infinite knowledge?"

The Buddha answered: "Such a follower never covets or cultivates infinite knowledge. That very attitude of not coveting and not cultivating reveals everything to him and he sees all possible structures--from objects of the senses to buddhas--to be transparent in their nature. This radiant transparency is, in fact, simply the total awakensness of a buddha. The now-awakened follower becomes, in this way, immersed in infinite wisdom and blossoms spontaneously as omniscience itself." -Prajnaparmita

From Cameron West: Dear *Dharma Friends*, This may be strange, but I am looking for a friend to write who shares interest in the Dharma. I am a person who is stuck 24 hours a day with men. So my hope/request is that a female who reads *Dharma Friends* may see this and write. It would make my day to hear from you. I know this is not a forum for this type of thing, but it is one of my only outlets. I am for the most part, all alone here. I do not fit in with the type of people who are in prison. For one thing, I'm here for something that I didn't do and I'm sure that everyone knows it. So my friends in the Dharma, I hope all is well. I send my blessings to one and all and I hope everyone takes time to learn from whatever life has given you whether you be in prison or free. Learn from life for it is truly our teacher. We must take the good with the bad. Learn patience from all that is around you. So, my friends, please take care and know you are where you need to be to learn what you need to learn, Blessings to all. Cameron West V52033, MCSP B-GYM-118L, PO Box 409040, Ione CA 95640

(and another note from anna: Cameron is right that we are not a pen pal group and even though probably every one of you could have written his letter, I will include a few such request periodically so that those of you who can write to others in prisons might be able to find supportive community among the others who want to give and receive support on your spiritual path.)

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 receive *Dharma Friends*, here is what to do. Make a \$30 or more donation and you will receive *Dharma Friends* for one year via email (so be sure to include your email address!), and your donation will be tax deductible. 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. If you cannot receive your copy via email we will send a paper copy but your tax deduction receipt will be for your amount less the \$30 for the product – your newsletter issues.**

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.

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.

Thank you for all that you give to all of us.

I often see students who are narrow-minded, who gain a little bit in a limited context, with a limited perspective, and consider this enough, immediately insisting on stopping and resting. Eating their fill and sleeping, not taking care of anything at all, they consider themselves lively, but they are destitute ghosts. -Hui-k'ung (written in China during the Han dynasty)

Sand and Stone

By Michael N.

A story tells that two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey, they had an argument and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "TODAY MY BEST FRIEND SLAPPED ME IN THE FACE."

They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning he found something sharp and scratched onto a stone: "TODAY MY BEST FRIEND SAVED MY LIFE."

The friend who had slapped his best friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?"

The other friend replied: "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone, where no wind can ever erase it."

LEARN TO WRITE YOUR HURTS IN THE SAND AND TO CARVE YOUR BENEFITS IN STONE.

It takes a minute to find a special person, an hour to appreciate them, a day to love them, and an entire life to forget them.

*Compassion Works for All/ Dharma Friends
PO Box 7708
Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708*

DONATION: RELIGIOUS MATERIAL
Webpage: www.dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com

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You might consider things like old age and death as negative, unwanted, and simply try to forget about them. But eventually those things will come anyway. -His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Dharma Friends

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Additional Pages for EMAIL VERSION of *Dharma Friends*

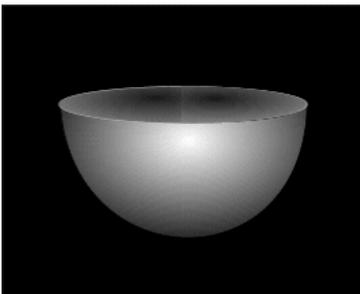
Happy New America!

We have a new president-elect, Barack Obama, and the promise of a new vision for all of our world's people. I honor all those who have worked so hard to make this happen, and all of those who have paved the way through many years of effort in politics and service.

Here is a story of the true grit of one 80+ year old *Dharma Friend*' family member who has spent her life benefitting others and fighting the good fight of political activism. The first weekend of November she was feeling a bit puny so went to the doctor on Monday. Blood tests were taken, some issues were reviewed, and the doctor would get back to her. Tuesday, election day, the doctor called and said that the blood tests were concerning, so go into the emergency room. Well, she hadn't voted yet. So first stop was the voting booths where they very nicely rushed her through and then on to the hospital. The doctors there said that with her blood counts, it was amazing that she could move, much less go vote! And she was happy to hear the next day that her candidate won! Thursday night, she was operated on for cancer and I'm glad to say she is doing much better -- and almost ready to hit the streets to help with the **YES, WE CAN** agenda!

Our *Dharma Friends* family member is June Cox. So I'm proud to say I come by all this idealism with good genes and good programming!

Compassion Works for All – Looking ahead to 2009!



With this wonderful reminder of why we are doing all this great effort for ourselves and others, we at **Compassion Works for All** begin another year and a fundraising campaign to support it!! I do know that there are many of you angels that live out your service to others as philanthropists. You are thrilled to support all of these individuals who are doing sincere and dedicated practice while in prison and turning their lives around. I wanted you to know our vision for 2009 because I know that you agree with us that it is through these people who are healing themselves that the criminal justice system can be at least made better and it is the start to fixing society's misunderstanding of crime and punishment. The people who find healing through **Dharma Friends** are the most important vehicle we have to reach into our most violent, disadvantaged, and lost pockets of society and to our children who are vulnerable as the next generation of prisoners. We have to make this work!! It is your heartfelt support and donations that have created our one family as we weave our energies together to make these great changes.

Here is our reminder to new and old *Compassion Works for All* supporters of what we are doing and why!

Compassion Works for All – our vision for 2009

Compassion Works for All, a 501(C) (3) organization (tax ID# 55-0895373), offers free to those in prisons our monthly **Dharma Friends** newsletter, used and new books and magazines primarily on Buddhism and spiritual issues, and emotional and spiritual support and guidance. We also educate the community about issues relevant to prisoners, crime, and violence, and how to re-unite those lost to our criminal justice system back into our one human family.

Dharma Friends newsletter a unique healing and education offering that reaches far beyond the prisons

Let me start by sharing two letters from prisoners who say better than I what **Dharma Friends** newsletter means to them.

From M.M.: *As I sit here, I am grateful for your efforts and Dharma Friends. The latest (#141) issue arrived at my new cell location yesterday. Reading these pages I feel “I am at home.” My true place is in this wisdom, not in “this” cell or even in “that” home. In this wisdom space beyond words I am set free. Thank you for reminding me.*

And from S.J. on a death row, in his own un-edited words. He makes me smile but I'm not ready to go out and propose the new lineage he suggests! *I put Dharma Friends newsletter in the category of a Buddhist lineage. September 2008 was my 9 year being part of Dharma Friends and I have received over 108 issues of Dharma Friends. I don't have them all. But I read and study them all. Did at least 75 of the meditations. ... Most of the insights I have on Buddhism and my mind is base on your teachings and instructions. (verse commentary and meditation each month) Also my practice. My point is the part of Dharma Friends (the **Dhammapada** verse, commentary and meditation) is like a spiritual training program for people in prison. It's self-practice. But if a person go through just one round of all the teachings of the **Dhammapada** verses, commentaries and meditations, they will have went far in their understand of the Buddha's teachings and their own minds. Your Dharma lineage (Dharma Friends) is more psychological, but it's still Buddhism. One day someone is going to get their hands on all of your Dharma Friends (every issue) and read the verses, commentary and meditation and then say, This Bodhisattva (anna) show the true meaning of the phrase “Compassion and Skillful Means.” Anna, this is a legitimate Buddhist's lineage. Thank you.*

I share these two very sweet and kind letters because it is letters like these that motivate me to keep going. No matter how many times I might waver after 142 monthly issues going out to over 1500 prisoners around the country and forwarded on to cell mates and friends, I remember that they have little else than what we give. Some prisoners have started meditation and study groups and use the **Dharma Friends** newsletter as a study guide. Some prison chaplains receive **Dharma Friends** and keep issues in their library for those who want to borrow them. Many readers are Buddhist but many are of other spiritual traditions who apply what they learn to their own spiritual life journey.

As S. mentions in his letter, there are consistent sections that appear each month. I have rotated through the verses of the **Dhammapada** at least eight or nine times as the foundational teaching that grounds each newsletter in sacred wisdom. These verses are a base to all Buddhist traditions but are a truth that allows searchers to find excellent guidance in each. I love repeating the **Dhammapada** verses round and round again because it cuts through westerners' quest for intellectual knowledge and reinforces that one does not read wisdom teachings once, get it, and then move on to accumulate more knowledge. We can go deeper and deeper into true insight only by study and practice, allowing the seeds to be planted and then to grow in stillness and contemplation.

My Commentary to the **Dhammapada** each month tries to use the verse as a springboard to speak to those of all traditions and at every level of spiritual evolution. I just trust that what comes to me will hopefully accomplish a bit of such an impossible feat.

Each month I include a Meditation section. Again, I try to hold all my readers in my awareness from the very advanced Buddhist practitioner, to those who barely know Buddhism, to those who practice any religion or no religion. If these

folks can begin to meditate, their brain and body can find more balance, they can learn impulse control, and they can learn the essence to healing their lives and listening to their inner truth.

We also have the From Your Letters section where I include letters from readers as they tell their stories, debate past articles or letters, share support with each other, or share some significant thoughts that help them. This section is very important in that it allows people in prison to feel a sense of community with others in their life situation and with those readers in the free world. Many have no-one and feel that **Dharma Friends** is their only family and friends. I encourage readers to allow the Letters to be a mirror of their mind. Far more than seeing the thoughts or arguments of others, they have a chance to see themselves in this mirror. Again, they have an opportunity to grow beyond intellect and to heal their wounds and expand their self view. And at the most profound level, together we are creating a mandala of one family, free and imprisoned held together, that will set the course for reuniting those often forgotten in prisons with the rest of us. Recently I started a new section called Book of Knowledge. My hope is to highlight books with which readers can educate themselves for a re-entry into the world or to just function more competently with crucial life skills. Few have the opportunity or resources to buy these books but they can request that their prison libraries purchase them and then they and others can read them. For example, this month I am recommending Dr. Daniel Amen's new book, **Magnificent Mind at Any Age**. So many people in prisons have dysfunctional brains with multiple etiologies ranging from deprivation in the womb and childhood, head injuries, biochemical disturbances, emotional and physical distress and abuse, psychological illnesses, and all often aggravated by pathological disabilities of substance abuse. It is virtually impossible to function successfully in the world or in a prison with such grave disadvantages in brain function. Even if it is only through an understanding of their situation, they might do some self-healing. Of course, in our Book of Knowledge focus, we are recognizing that it is only through their own solitary efforts that these people will heal because very few get any rehabilitative or medical support from their prisons.

Throughout every issue, a primary theme is empowering people to heal themselves and then to reach out and offer healing and support to others. Our readers are in a unique and rare position to bring change from within to their prisons and fellow inmates, and they are doing that! They also are in a very rare but crucial role of reaching back to family and friends who live in the most unreachable and disadvantaged pockets of society with new skills, knowledge, and their own healing to change the lives of those left behind. Our great hope is that they can successfully reach those young boys who are our next generation of prisoners. Our **Dharma Friends** readers can be mentors and healers and lead others out of this terrible cycle of America's broken criminal justice system. Someone has to do it and they are our best bet.

We have decided to drop our 'extra pages' in the **Dharma Friends** email version for free world folks in 2009. We made a push during this past year to add extra pages to each **Dharma Friends** issue with the hopes of attracting more 'free world' readers. Subscribers and donors received 10 additional pages added to those that went to prisoners that addressed topics of living a life of compassion. I don't believe that we will lose donors who primarily wished to receive these extra pages of **Dharma Friends** and each issue took much additional time for me to produce. Resources are few and even though the cost of printing and mailing was nil, my time can be far better put into serving the needs of prisoners who have so little. Those in the free world have such an abundance of options; ours was only a drop in what was an already overly-filled bucket for most. In 2009, we will only add a few extra pages that have calendar updates and other items of interest.



Other offerings by Compassion Works for All

Kristopher Davis contracts with us at \$250 per month to help with letters and books. He is an ex-prisoner who has successfully completed his parole. He responds to all who write to us and mails out books and magazines that are donated to us on to prisoners. I imagine he writes 300+ letters per month and mails out about 100 books or magazines a month. He supplements our budget for book and magazine mailings by selling the hardcover books that are donated to us (and are very rarely acceptable by prison mail rooms) on e-Bay and the proceeds go to our mailing funds. Kristopher is helping me in working against the death penalty. He transcribes all the letters that go into the **Dharma Friends** issues. He also helps fulfill as many prisoner requests as he can for specific titles or information that folks need off of the internet.

Michelle Moore is a new volunteer who is sending a welcome packet to each new prisoner requesting a subscription to **Dharma Friends**. She has also set up a MySpace page for us. Go to: www.myspace.com/dharmafriendscwfa

And you know we have a web page: www.dharmafriendsprisonoutreachproject.com

Linda Bessette is a financial advisor and an invaluable volunteer that handles all of the finances and keeps up the regulation postal service mailing labels that go to the printer each month for our newsletter mailings. We have a base of approximately 125 faithful donors who have given periodically throughout the past 12 years and who have sustained our efforts. Most gifts are small, being less than \$100, but many are made again and again each year. Our costs are fairly constant and we are truly meticulous with every penny. Unless we change our structure, we will probably continue to operate in this same expense range of less than \$25,000 per year. Thanks to Linda, every penny is meticulously managed. We are sharing our vision with a funder who will hopefully help us to take the flying leap to a new reorganized structure with Linda as Director.

New plans also include noted author and investigative journalist, Mara Leveritt, helping with spreading our message and organizing future fundraising.

We also have board members who are continuously on call and who guide the ship with their wisdom and kind hearts. Sandra Pope, Robynn Zinser, and Kelly Quinn are our board members – and it is time for a board meeting, guys!

I still write each **Dharma Friends** newsletter, along with writing to those prisoners who have been working with me more personally on psychological or life issues for many years. When requested, I often give talks on death penalty issues, on violence, on healing those in prisons, on encouraging people to write and visit those in prisons, or whenever I can climb up on a podium to get the word out! I give talks and teach meditation to those in prisons as I can but do not do the prison visits that I did in the past because of the toll it has taken on my health through the years. I try especially to support those prisoners that the general public is less likely to encourage on their spiritual journey, such as providing food for the Muslim Eid feasts as possible.

After thirty five years in the field of social work and psychotherapy, as a student of Buddhism, with a focus on meditation, and with a particular interest in the rapidly evolving arena of dysfunctional brain issues, I also try to offer education to the public. People know so little about what goes wrong in the lives of people who end up in prison. I want very much to elevate awareness of all those in a position to spot and intervene in the lives of children and young adults heading down the path to violence or criminal behavior or addictions long before they cause harm to others. I want people to get their children help before they are imprisoned. I think that this is becoming more possible every day. My hope is to hold a conference addressing all of these issues as they relate to violence, the criminal justice system and incarceration in 2009, and I want to write more for the general public, but I will have to see how much I can accomplish!

What Your Gift Accomplishes:

Many like to visualize what they are actually manifesting for others. You might like to know that:

\$25,000 will cover our offerings for the year

\$1000 just about pays for printing and mailing an issue of **Dharma Friends** for all prisoners for one month

\$250 pays for one month of Kristopher's invaluable services to us

\$200 pays our postage for mailing letters to prisoners for a month

\$100 pays for mailing free books and magazines to prisoners for a month

\$100 pays for helping fulfill prisoner's requests for support in spiritual practice and celebrations like Eid feasts

\$50 covers our supplies for a month



A Reflection on new possibilities:

Of course, it is imperative to continue the **Dharma Friends** newsletter and our other services, but my hope and vision is that it is far better for me to focus on reaching the prisoners and the public with services than in doing the secretarial work and fundraising that takes so much of my time. We have the “dream team” and we have written a proposal to make this step. We will see what happens. If it doesn’t happen now, we may start a big push to have it happen through additional fundraising efforts. Stay tuned. No matter what, we are all determined to continue our primary goal to reach those folks that we can best help, along with educating all of us in a society affected by these enormous issues.

I am so happy for your interest in these most forgotten folks in prisons. Any help that you can offer is most gratefully appreciated! So many of you are doing wonderful work in the world. Know that any help I can offer to you in your efforts, I am here as I can be.

We will be sending our fundraising letter out soon, but if you would like to make a donation now, please mail it to:
Compassion Works for All , PO Box 7708, Little Rock, AR. 72217-7708

Mark your check as your 2008 end of the year donation or you can date it for a tax deduction for 2009.

Please include your email address if we do not have it so that you can receive your *Dharma Friends* newsletters for the next year.



Thank you from Anna

The Great Aikido master Tohei, in his book, Aikido, the Arts of Self-Defense

"Remember that you live always under the protection of some mysterious force. This force is nature. Therefore, true self-defense does not stop with defending oneself against others, but strives to make oneself worthy of defense by nature herself. It respects the principles of nature. True practice must be in consonance with the will of nature. When man observes the principles of nature, he helps to make them the principles of humanity because they are directed toward the good of humanity. True self-defense must be according to the will of God... When your mind and your acts become one with nature, then nature will protect you. Fear no enemy; fear only to be separated from the mind of nature. If you are on the right path, nature will protect you. And you need not fear anything. When an enemy wants to attack you while you are asleep, nature will awaken you. When an airplane has an accident, you will fortunately not be on that plane. Trust nature and do not worry. Leave both you mind and body to nature. Do not recognize friend or foe in your mind. In your heart let there be generosity as large as the sea which accepts both clean and unclean water. Let your mind be as merciful as nature which loves the smallest tree or blade of grass. Let your mind be strong with sincerity that can pierce iron or stone. Repay the forces of nature, work for the good of all and make yourself a person whom nature is pleased to let live. This is the true purpose of training."

From Thought for the Day WisdomAtWork offered by Joel and Michelle Levey on the internet



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

"When we try to pick up anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe." John Muir

This wonderful quote is true in our inner lives as well. I say often how important it is to meditate, read inspiring words of wisdom, to do a self-exploration practice like journaling, poetry or art, but I often look around at those who struggle most with life, repeating self-defeating patterns again and again, and they are the ones who do none of these things for self-healing. I must admit an urge to give them a little shake! We can take any life event, a thought, a body symptom, a psychological state, or an obsessive thought, lift it up and then just follow it to all of our deepest wounds – and on to healing them. I am so happy when I hear from someone who is doing just that and I'm grateful when any of you write and share your process and your progress.

That is why I wanted to include this letter from one of our *Dharma Friends* in the free world who meditates, journals, and does spiritual readings every day. Look at what she is discovering and how her wounds are revealing themselves to her. This is such good work!

Our reader says: This morning my first 2 reading had to do with letting go. The third one was about change. But then the forth reading was about fear: "To experience fearlessness, it is necessary to experience fear." That seems to me to be my underlying problem with letting go. There is fear underneath my defenses.

As I was tidying my apartment this morning, I felt very shaky. I've experienced that every time I'm doing a new organizing behavior. I think the fear about housecleaning is three fold: either I may still trash things instead of tidying them; if I do the clean up, it won't be good enough; and, if I get started cleaning, I'll become aware of how much there is to do, and I will either clean until I drop, or disavow the knowledge and go back to my usual pattern of ignoring everything that needs to be done. This morning I was able to feel the fear and do it anyway, so I got enough done that my cleaning person can do the rest. It feels odd to experience all of that shakiness, however.

I know my concern about letting go of my tears is that I'll start crying and not be able to stop. That happened to me once. After I had written a letter to my parents telling them why I needed to leave college, onto which I had pinned the belief that, because I needed to leave so badly, and because I prayed about it, if there was a God, He would see to it that I would get to leave. When my father called and said, no, I really fell apart, after I hung up the phone. I had been hanging out in a dorm room with some friends who were joking around, so I went back in there with them. I didn't tell them what had just happened, but at the next funny thing they said, I started laughing and couldn't stop. Then I switched to crying and couldn't stop. Thankfully, one of my dorm mates was a (medical person) who had come back to school to get her degree. She recognized that I was in trouble, and she took me for a drive. She also bought a beer for me, a no, no at my college. The drive and the beer helped. That's probably when I learned to use alcohol to deal with my problems.

When I got sober, my first 2 years of sobriety were really rough. I started feeling the feelings I had blocked by drinking. They were quite overwhelming. I know that going to AA meetings helped, whether I talked in the meeting or not. I probably got enough good information from the meetings to make it through, but I probably somaticized my feelings,

which I probably did when I grew up. Thus, my tears turned into a sinus headache. I'm aware that I probably could get rid of my sinus headache by crying, but I'm still afraid of losing control.

I know that, after I (*went through a great trauma*), I got really depressed, and my coworkers did an intervention for my depression that we sometimes used back then. They tried to make me mad, so I would blow and release my angry-depressed feelings. I was aware of what they were doing, but I couldn't go with it, because I believed I'd become psychotic if I did. At that time, I think I really would have become psychotic, I couldn't afford to become psychotic. I had too many things I needed to do.

I've had fleeting hallucinations, illusions, and delusions since then: but I was always able to keep them under control enough that I could continue to function, more or less. Since I have done this work with you, I don't think I would become psychotic, but I'm still afraid that I would.

So there are my underlying fears. My **Shambhala** reading goes on to say that, "Because we possess such fear, we can potentially experience fearlessness." What a challenge. I guess that, before I become fearless, I need to continue to feel the fear, and do the work anyway. I know I have encountered many fears and so far, I haven't become engulfed by them, so I have some hope that the same is true for getting my external house in order.

After I believed that God didn't exist, following my college experience, it has taken me quite a long time to define a new Higher Power for me. The Buddhist teachings have really helped. Now I define my Higher Power as Universal Consciousness, and Unconditional Goodness. I'm really comfortable with that definition. Last night I was trying to do the tonglen exercise, and I found that before I could take in any more suffering from myself, or anyone else, I had to breathe in Basic Goodness. I'm still feeling depleted, so I needed some fuel before I could take on anything else. After I breathed in Basic Goodness, I was able to breathe out love and compassion. I think I'll reach the point where I can breathe in suffering, but I'm not there yet.

As I've written ... about my somatic problems, each one of them has lessened. My sinus headache has definitely improved. My migraines have decreased, and my gut pain has improved markedly. I believe I'm on the right path to dealing with my fears; I'm just not there yet. I'm trying to be compassionate toward myself, and not push myself too hard. I do still need to push myself a little to deal with my fears, because I would much rather run away. I have gradually been facing them. It would be great to be fearless in the Spiritual sense. At least I can envision my goal. But, right now, climbing the mountain is still difficult.

THANK YOU. What an inspiration you are!

A few upcoming events –

Muslim Eid Feast December 13 –

There will be the second Eid feast for the EARU Islamic practitioners on December 13. If you are interested in attending, please let me know and I will tell you more about it.

Your donations to help purchase food are MOST appreciated.

Just send your check to CWFA – feast, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708

Hi from Charlotte, President of our Ecumenical Buddhist Society in Little Rock.

The Buddha Relic Tour is coming to Arkansas over the Thanksgiving Holidays. This is an exhibit of sacred relics of the Buddha and other Buddhist masters, such as Ananda, Shariputra, Milarepa, Lama Yeshe, Yeshe Tsogyal, and more. These crystal-like objects have been found post-cremation in the ashes of holy beings such as the historical Buddha. Part of the purpose of this tour is to help fundraise for a large Buddha statue to be built in Bodh Gaya to house them. The dates are: Friday, November 28th, 7:00 p.m.--Opening Ceremonies

Saturday & Sunday, November 29th & 30th, 10:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m.

Location: Chua Bat Nha Temple, 1000 Pine Haven Road, Bauxite, Arkansas 72011

Hope you all can attend.

Holiday gift giving best bet!! **MINDFUL MONEY** by **LINDA BESSETTE**

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) or Linda (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 .

Or you can email me at anna@aristotle.net if you want to purchase one or both.

They make good holiday gifts too!!

Sometimes

*Sometimes things don't go, after all,
from bad to worse. Some years, muscadel
faces down frost; green thrives; the crops don't fail,
sometimes a man aims high, and all goes well.*

*A people sometimes will step back from war;
elect an honest man; decide they care
enough, that they can't leave some stranger poor.
Some men become what they were born for.*

*Sometimes our best efforts do not go
amiss; sometimes we do as we meant to.
The sun will sometimes melt a field of sorrow
that seemed hard frozen: may it happen for you.*

-Sheenagh Pugh



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 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.

