

Dharma Friends

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

January 2010 issue # 156

copyright 2010, a project of Compassion Works for All

Happy New Year

**The Dhammapada
The teachings of the Buddha**



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.

Verse 22: The Downward Path Or also translated as -Nirayavagga: Hell

306. The liar goes to the state of woe; also he who, having done (wrong), says, "I did not do it." Men of base actions both, on departing they share the same destiny in the other world.

307. There are many evil characters and uncontrolled men wearing the saffron robe. These wicked men will be born in states of woe because of their evil deeds.

308. It would be better to swallow a red-hot iron ball, blazing like fire, than as an immoral and uncontrolled monk to eat the alms of the people.

309. Four misfortunes befall the reckless man who consorts with another's wife: acquisition of demerit, disturbed sleep, ill-repute, and (rebirth in) states of woe.

310. Such a man acquires demerit and an unhappy birth in the future. Brief is the pleasure of the frightened man and woman, and the king imposes heavy punishment. Hence, let no man consort with another's wife.

311. Just as *kusa* grass wrongly handled cuts the hand, even so, a recluse's life wrongly lived drags one to states of woe.

312. Any loose act, any corrupt observance, any life of questionable celibacy — none of these bear much fruit.

313. If anything is to be done, let one do it with sustained vigor. A lax monastic life stirs up the dust of passions all the more.

314. An evil deed is better left undone, for such a deed torments one afterwards. But a good deed is better done, doing which one repents not later.

- 315.** Just as a border city is closely guarded both within and without, even so, guard yourself. Do not let slip this opportunity (for spiritual growth). For those who let slip this opportunity grieve indeed when consigned to hell.
- 316.** Those who are ashamed of what they should not be ashamed of, and are not ashamed of what they should be ashamed of — upholding false views, they go to states of woe.
- 317.** Those who see something to fear where there is nothing to fear, and see nothing to fear where there is something to fear — upholding false views, they go to states of woe.
- 318.** Those who imagine evil where there is none, and do not see evil where it is — upholding false views, they go to states of woe.
- 319.** Those who discern the wrong as wrong and the right as right — upholding right views, they go to realms of bliss.



Some thoughts about this *Dhammapada* Verse: The Downward Path

I went to see a very powerful movie about Doctors Without Borders. It told the story of some courageous physicians in that organization who were working in Monrovia, Liberia, in the days following their civil war. One very vivid scene was of a group of young soldiers, probably about 14 – 17 years old, with machine guns in their hands and big smiles on their faces. They were laughing as they let loose a rain of bullets on the people in the streets who were merely out doing their daily chores. Of course, all of us who are living in a society that is not in the throes of civil war with armies of conscripted teenage soldiers would say, “These guys are on a downward path! That is HELL.”

But then, we look at our society. We look at our teenage gang members in just about every inner city community throughout our country who are mowing each other down in their gang wars. For many, gangs are a form of fun “war-play”. This, too, is obviously a downward path in the judgment of all of us who have the luxury of a peaceful life while standing back and looking at them. I know well that their young lives are worth much more than whatever feelings of glory and power they get from killing each other in this tragic - but oddly socially sanctioned - form of power and territorial competition.

But, do they know that?

From the position of an observer, most of us can quickly and easily identify the behaviors of others that constitute the downward path as our **Dhammapada** teaching describes. All those decisions that lead us away from our true self and our highest human and spiritual expression are leading us downwards. We know that those actions that express the downward path are going to lead to suffering for ourselves and many, many others. There is no good that can come from those actions of the downward path. When we engage in those activities described in the downward path, we are creating our own Hell on earth.

But when we are in the traumatic midst of such actions, do we realize it?

As I picked up the newspaper today, there was article after article about people in trouble who don't live in inner city poverty and who don't live in a civil war in Africa. These people have all the privileges and advantages of a comfortable world and yet, they too are making some pretty self-destructive and other-destructive decisions. One article was about a minister of a large and powerful church who had been abusing little boys. Of course, he was asked to leave his prestigious job. Another article was of a music minister in a different church who was molesting kids. He likely had an addiction to sexual behavior with young people as well. He was fired. And there was a story of a sheriff who had lost his job because he had accepted bribes. We only need to look around briefly, or even at ourselves, to see tragic stories of people destroying their lives and those of others. Stories of the downward path are everywhere. We all, to greater or lesser degrees, participate in those decisions that lead us on the downward path and into a cycle of negative consequences. On and on we go into the process of losing our selves rather than finding our true awakening. We truly do create our own hell realms in the present.

But why? Why do we all participate in such bad decision making? And why don't we anticipate the bad results when we are caught up in these behaviors?

There are some of you reading this who have said to me “I wish that I had never done that. I wish that I had made a different decision.” I suspect that there are thousands of you, and most likely all of us in various situations, who have said that again and again.

Of course, there are those who may be more narcissistic or sociopathic who always believe that the fault lies with somebody else: “They made me do it.” “I was set up.” But of course, the responsibility is always ours under all the various layers of complexity. Truthfully, it is always “our fault.” Our growth and our healing won’t begin until we can take 100% ownership of our decision making and take full responsibility.

So once again, in this verse, **The Downward Path**, we are reading the list of things to do and things not to do. For most people, following this list is a measure of self-discipline and commitment to believing in the value of rules. For many, self-discipline and moral and ethical behavior is not too big a challenge when we know that the consequences of not following rules is greater than what we wish to suffer. Most agree that rules, ethics and morality help to govern a healthy society and healthy people. The rules aren’t always fair and the consequences are not always just, but we must work together to change them as needed. Mostly, we agree that they are necessary.

Our puritanical ancestors and many of the spiritual traditions throughout the world have categorized people as “good” because they can follow the rules successfully and they will not cause harm to others. Others are “bad” because they break the rules and seem unable to control their behaviors when their own self-interest is too compelling. They often know that the behavior is immoral or unethical and will lead to severe consequences in the long run, but at the moment, they still break the rules. Societies throughout history have judged the good and the bad along these moral lines. People have determined the punishments, sentencing or consequences for breaking the rules and laws. Most rule breakers go to prisons, are banished, or are executed. Some spiritual traditions say that they will go to Hell after they die. We all know that the rule-breakers make our lives harder and they make their own lives miserable in the long run.

But – when we know the rules and we know the consequences yet do “bad” actions anyway, how do we change? How do we help the rule breakers to change?

Most everyone who breaks the rules knows they should not do such things but do not or cannot stop their behavior. I would say that for these folks, there is something broken or disabled within. They cannot handle the world as it is and they need help. But for many adults it is too late and healing is difficult. If one is unsafe in a world where they cannot follow the rules, they need a humanitarian environment where they and others are safe while they heal, which may be for the rest of their lives.

Back up on my soapbox: It is our Brokenness that leads to the difficulty in walking the Upward Path, not our lack of morality. Doing the “right thing” is not just a matter of being told what that is.

Every infant is born with sacred purity as their essential nature: what we Buddhists call Buddha nature. In other traditions, one might see that deepest, pure self as a sacred spark or a love of God or spiritual manifestation of the sacred. We are all born with that push to offer our sacred and unique gift. We want to be all that we are meant to be. And, we all want to be happy and loved. Given that, we must ask what breaks that connection to the inner wisdom voice that guides us in manifesting this highest self and our true goals. How does this expression of pure self get sabotaged for some of us?

Understanding our brokenness – What has gone wrong?

Buddhists would say as a spiritual process, it is our karma. Or at a wisdom level, it is a powerful wisdom teaching unfolding. At the level of science and psychology, we must diagnose pathology and discern a helpful treatment. Here are some things that could go wrong physically, neurologically or psychologically: *For some there may be some physical or mental dysfunction that is present since our conception. Our DNA may have a genetic anomaly or predisposition for a maladaptive expression when triggered. *For some, there is a problem during our gestation in the womb – a lack of blood flow, a lack of proper micronutrients, or an ill, starving, depressed or traumatized mom. *During infancy or childhood development there might be one or many interacting challenges such as illness, trauma, abuse, a lack of healthy brain development, a lack of love and support, living in a community of violence where beings are not honored and supported, or feeling disempowered or subject to derision or prejudice because of qualities that we have no control over such as skin color, gender, ethnicity or sexuality. Trauma and the emotional and physiological reaction to it can scar children for the rest of their life and affect their emotional and neurological development. Along with that damage, trauma and abuse affects their developing brains which may handicap their capacity to ever make healthy decisions. Each life story is unique. Our responses are unique. But for most, one challenge brings about a difficulty in handling others. If we have a major obstacle to our development, we cannot proceed through normal growth tasks successfully. For a child who has had such obstacles since birth, difficult circumstances are their “normal”. Abusive people are what love is to them. For many children who have been sexually abused

and who have been terribly disempowered and violated, their unconscious mind often does an empowering survival twist and they identify with the abuser so they need not feel like the victim. They might become an abuser so that they may then be the one who has the power rather than being the victim that they still feel themselves to be inside. There is more to their wounding than just the abuse and the disempowerment. There is a psychological wound and shame to the deepest sense of self. And, there is often an understandable and enormous internal rage which dominates them compulsively and often addictively. These are not easy issues to resolve and there is layer upon layer of woundedness.

For all of us, when in distress, our motivation is to fight for our lives. I suspect that was the case of the machine gun wielding boys in Morovia and our own cities' gang members who know only terror and fear of survival. It may feel like a good and exciting thing to be the ones who have their hands on the trigger. Our brains, our bodies, our psyches are always fighting for survival during times of stress and challenge. Because of very traumatic life issues, where we don't get to consciously make decisions about how we will transcend them, we unconsciously employ defense mechanisms to protect our self and our life no matter how great or dire the consequences might be. This is the root of many mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorders. It is also the root of many other psychiatric illnesses such as the character disorders which can be mapped out as increasingly severe diagnosis that may or may not be very treatable. Such illnesses often go hand in hand with addictive disorders which greatly decrease instability in one's life. We now know that there is a strong interaction between trauma and stress and neurobiological development. Irreversible brain dysfunction can be the result. Other illnesses are triggered by stress and have the added difficulty of a biochemical or neurological component. The picture is multi-layered, very complex, and very hard to diagnose and to treat effectively. Many in our prisons are there because of some aspect of this complicated puzzle and they should be getting treatment instead of having their illness exacerbated by the stress of lockup.

We must consider then that this verse, **The Downward Path**, and all legal, moral, spiritual and ethical systems, offer their greatest benefit to those who have healthy bodies and healthy brains, a mature sense of self, and who live in healthy societies. Without these ingredients, we have difficulty reading and following a teaching where it says, one should "do this" and "not do this". If we are healthy, we can say, "Yes, I have the self control to not act in those ways." If not, it is like offering a government program for the homeless called **Just Buy A House**. Stress and challenge very clearly makes self-destructive and other-destructive decisions more likely. All these obstacles cause us to be more vulnerable in following the downward path. There is no observer anywhere who has the moral high ground to say: They should just 'get over it'. Or to call another a monster. There is always a story that would bring us to our knees if we knew it.

What about those who do not have the capacity to choose not to do those harmful actions?

Across the board, there seems to be little to deter those who are on the **downward path** unless they are young people with a fairly intact and healthy self who learn how to stop impulsive behaviors and to follow the rules because of harsh consequences. We have all have gone through such growth by fire as we learned difficult life lessons -- and as the frontal lobes of our brain have matured. As a result, we have hopefully grown from being one of the bad guys to become one of the good guys. So maturation is one part of making change.

There is healing for some others though. Many through meditation, anger management, psychotherapy, medication, healing their addictive behaviors, and the support of spiritual practices can enhance their chances of not being abusive, or participating in self and other destructive behaviors. But there are those who seem never to be swayed by consequences and have no ability to enter into self observing practices. There seems to be nothing that can get to their analytical brain or enhance their impulse control. They seemingly will never be able to overcome the obstacles that have handicapped them in their life. Yet they still need a compassionate place to live and thrive, that will also allow protection of innocent others from their hurtful actions.

The big picture....

As we consider justice, morals and ethics in individuals and as a society, we need to tackle these challenges from a more compassionate point of view. We need to consider how to benefit people long before these obstacles have crippled them in irreparable ways - long before wounded and affected children are unable to be healed. We need to reach those infants being parented by those unable to love and support them and give the caregivers help to save the children. We need to be on alert for all those children who need our love, support and intervention. We need to make resources available to families and children before a terrible toll is taken by poverty, malnutrition, medical problems, prejudice, violence, and poor educations. We need to support our children and teens with community resources that offer loving and healthy values. It is unconscionable to remain a society that looks aside when enormous

numbers of our children are dealing with extraordinary stress and violence and we do not step in to rescue and protect them. Our statistics are horrible. We blindly ignore them as more of our young males of color go into our prison system than into college. Equally horrible is the number of people who appear to be living in healthy, happy families but who are actually living lives of trauma, suffering and abuse behind closed doors. These stories go unreported to those who might help – but someone somewhere knows what is going on and stays silent. As a society, we need to recognize all those issues that are the feeder streams carrying all those clinging to life rafts over the rapids and flowing directly into our prisons. Our systems of laws and incarceration needs to integrate present day brain and mental health science and healing into our legal system and our programs of corrections.

The downward path for many starts at birth. When do we stop feeling sympathy for those babies who face unimaginable obstacles and start to believe that they are “bad” children. When do we begin to call them monsters?

It is all of our responsibility to report or confront or help when we see someone abusing another and to step in as we can. We all must be empowered to stop the trauma and violence to our children which leads to brain dysfunction, substance abuse, emotional illness, and a deep closing off of the heart to their/our humanness. Those who are now healing themselves but who have come from communities of violence and gangs have the most insight and power to reach out to those who are facing such challenges today. If you are one of those folks, help educate the parents as to your journey and guide them to save their children. I urge everyone to stay connected to all the children that you love so that you can help them have happy and beneficial lives – no matter what they do! Never write them off. Never give up on them. We can all address the emotional, psychological and social issues so that we can bring healing to children and families with our actions and our vote.

If we can vote to bailout bankers, let’s also bail out children in trouble in order to rescue a healthy future for all beings. Then we can have Heaven on earth instead of Hell. But, of course, that is not 100% possible either. But... we can read this verse called **The Downward Path** and agree that every being has the capacity to awaken to their highest self, but sometimes needs our support to make good decisions and to become all that they are meant to be.



A MEDITATION – The Downward Path

I often shield myself from the enormous suffering that some beings live as their everyday reality. In that way, I prevent the profound teachings that these people and events have to offer me. I do not wish for anyone to suffer, but we must let ourselves know without flinching how many do live lives of an unbearable hell realm. If we don’t look and see, then we can escape into blithely ignoring the results of our own karma. It may sound cruel and blaming to say that suffering is visited upon all of us because of karma manifesting as a result of past actions. But, this understanding of karma actually offers a pathway to peace and happiness.

The laws of karma mean that the decisions, words, actions, and even thoughts that we manifest at this moment will begin a course of flowing energies. The intention comes forth by what we do now will return to us exactly as we sent it out. An event might arise that returns that energetic intention to us immediately, such as when we punch out that guy we are arguing with and he punches us right back. That immediate consequence may slow us down a bit when we think of ever doing that again. But most of the time, the consequences take a bit longer to come back to us. We don’t always consciously remember how we laid the groundwork for the result. Because the result may not be immediate, it is harder to think: If I do this there will be consequences sometime somewhere. Am I willing to take on those consequences? If we did the deed in a past life, it is a stretch to remember and to say: This suffering is 100% my responsibility because of my previous actions.

And no one escapes suffering. I have seen some who live in lovely homes, have plenty of money, good jobs, and beautiful children and who always seem happy. Yet, unseen and unknown to us all, they are creating very tragic hell realms in their families and in their lives by making negative decisions. For them, the karmic result may be quite immediate – a divorce, a visit from the police, illness – or it may not come to fruition until circumstances bring those negative energies together in a future life and in future suffering. Then, they wonder why their lives are so horrific.

Of course, the reverse is also true. If we put out kind and compassionate energy, that will return to us as good karma. The best guarantee for a future of benefit is to begin to create it right now with our own present beneficial actions. It sure isn’t instant

gratification. And, we can't change the karma of our past actions or make it dissolve so that we are free of pain today. But, for all of us, unless we are fully enlightened, karma brings us the unfolding events that play out the dramas of our days. If we have a motivation to truly benefit others, our future will unfold in ways that bring us that same benefit. If our motivation is to cause harm to others, that same energy will write our tomorrow. Our only option then is to live through that event without complaint, and glad that that bit of negative karma that we created will be spent and never will return.

A Meditation on Creating Heaven or Hell

So here is a meditation to eliminate the dramas and self-serving motivations that write a future leading to eons in the hell realms – or to a hellish today. If there is even a tiny bit of a guarantee that this meditation will work, I think it is worth it to take a chance.

Here are the only words we need to say to our self gently and effortlessly whenever ego complains about anything that arises in our life story. ***“Ah... how lucky I am that this past karma is coming to fruition. It will never again be an obstacle to my highest enlightenment. I can now let go of this forever. Ah...”***

And that's it. Let it go. Do not react. Do not retaliate. Do not speak angrily to anyone about it. Do not analyze, discourse, debate, argue, plan, or try to fix it. Just let it go. Hmm. Is ego a little antsy because it will have to let go of its favorite whiny dramas and its favorite bad feelings? We didn't say it would be easy.

Sitting peacefully in meditation is a good time to practice this hell or heaven meditation.

Sometime during your peaceful meditation, it is highly likely that something will arise that will bring a little distress. You can easily turn that distress into the downward superslide into great suffering and HELL. Even if it is just people chattering in the background or your old achy knee, it won't take much to end up in hell, moaning and groaning and burning in fire. You might remember something that someone said to you this morning and it can take you to hell in an instant. Have fun.

Or, you can say – ***“Ah... how lucky I am that this past karma is coming to fruition. It will never again be an obstacle to my highest enlightenment. I can now let go of this forever. Ah...”***

And then let it go.

And that is your practice. It helps to start on the cushion so that you can “practice” and memorize your lines. You will build up this new habit. Then you can get up off the cushion and go on with your life. There, you can practice a lot more but it is a lot harder.

So memorize your lines and practice a lot. ***“Ah... how lucky I am that this past karma is coming to fruition. It will never again be an obstacle to my highest enlightenment. I can now let go of this forever. Ah...”*** Now, let go....

And of course, make all your present thoughts, words and actions beneficial ones so that your future will be rosy.





From Your Letters

Some things you can do to help us!

Remember to tell your family and friends that they may receive free email copies of this newsletter if they let us know that you sent them to us. And remember to tell them about JustUsFriends.org and all our on-line offerings, including many helpful videos.

Tell your prison chaplains that we are happy to send them a hard copy or an email copy of Dharma Friends so that they can stock them in their chapel library. The same is true for your prison librarian. We also might have some books on Buddhism and self-growth and healing that can offer a resource for others in your prison.

Many of you have no meditation groups or self-exploration groups in your prisons and you have no outside sponsors to lead one. There are a lot of you who are using the monthly Dharma Friends issues as a study guide or a discussion pamphlet for meditation groups. You might talk to your chaplain about starting such a group in your unit, even if there is no free world sponsor. It might be enough to just have security sit outside the door or even sit in with you, and YOU lead the group. It is very helpful to share and discuss these important issues with each other. Good luck.



"Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared." --The Buddha

From B.T.: Dear Dharma Friends, As Time continues to pass through the circle of seasons, my separation from “free” society persists. During this period of life, I search for openings toward enlightenment and grace. At certain moments while my mind is clear and heart beats calm – usually in formal sitting meditation – I sense a unity with that which I seek. As if Amitabha Buddha has replaced my circulatory system, which circulates nourishment and life, and substitutes another, more spiritual essence. My independent studies on spirituality are truly a comforting practice for me. Yet, I search for a more in-depth understanding, I feel your organization can lend a helping hand and perhaps, we may even develop a sincere correspondence. I have enclosed a piece I wrote about self-discovery, I hope you like it. Namaste,

Self Discovery by B.T.

Incarceration gives a man direct opportunities to explore his inner most qualities; at his own audacious pace. It's not something strange or unique, for every man should dive in deeply to the grand abyss of self, no matter where one resides and including all environments. But, inside prison, what else could be more productive and rehabilitating?

Putting time aside and putting effort into self-discovery enables men to manifest their full potential. Listening to our inner self, trusting its voice, gives rise to a strong foundation of self-reliance. Not being influenced by others, but growing more wise and compassionate with our own deep inner being.

The call for self-discovery is heard as gentle yet commanding voices from one's own inner-wilderness. Once recognized, it evokes enthusiasm to enter unknown woodlands and high mountainous terrains of one's own inner-nature. It starts quietly as inner yips and yaps: like small coyote pups begging for their mother's milk. Each one desperate for nourishment and warmth. These newly born inner-sounds are the awakening of an important path. A path to self-discovery.

Soon enough, the calls and cries of self discovery become a great volume of symphonic music which is echoed like howls bouncing off walls from a pack of wild coyotes, inside dark chasms and mysterious canyons of the mind.

The task set before men is to take heed and listen boldly to their inner most nature to discover its divine teachings of one divine grace inside everything. Explorer and poet, John Muir, discovered that he searched the depths of his self and wrote, “The sun shines not on us but in us, as if truly part and parent of us. The rivers flow not past, but through us, thrilling, tingling, vibration every fiber and cell of the substance of our bodies, making them glide and sing . . .” Each inmate deals with time in their own understanding. Those of us that travel deep inside, to the core of our self-seeking solace, seeking truth, seeking strength and seeking compassion will discover a whole world of inner qualities waiting to manifest in us. We all have the potential for greatness. It begins with discovering our true, independent self. Bon Voyage!

Challenge yourself to pause, center, and focus - right now.

Allow the flow of your breathing to help you to FOCUS (with the inhalation) and FLOW (with the exhalation)

FOCUS.... FLOW... FOCUS.... FLOW...

Allow yourself to vividly experience yourself as a 'continuum' of conscious, mindful presence unfolding, moment to moment, rather than as a vague shadow of a mindless life. Allow the flow of each mindful breath to dissolve the illusion of your solidity and stability into this dynamic, fluid continuum of many dimensional experience.

Challenge yourself to ride this wave of FOCUS... and FLOW... in as many moments of your day as you possibly can. Remember--21,600 breaths a day, you have the opportunity to FOCUS... and FLOW... When you forget, simply begin anew with the next breath. Allow this disciplined practice of coherent intention and mindful attention to bring your life alive with a lucid clarity and presence which enables you to 'live on purpose' and to carry a deeper wisdom, wonder, and compassion into the fleeting, precious moments of your life-work." - Joel & Michelle Levey

A Poem by E.H. (the author wishes the readers to know that the reason that he only uses his initials in his work is so that the focus is on the Dharma message)

Life

The invisible world of eternity

Manifested in the physical

Flowers and trees, grass and plains

Mountains and valleys

Streams, Rivers, Waterfalls, and oceans

Observing sunrises and sunsets

Eating, sleeping, dreaming, awakening

Never in solitaire

With self or in crowds

In silence and in speech

Failure and success

Do the impossible

Success and failure

Lessons are learned

True victory

Achieved in the present

Live where you are

Go where you desire

Limitations are unreal

Images of defiled thoughts

Clarify your objectives

Purify your intentions

See the unseen

Know the unknown

Compassion is the willingness to play in the field of dreams even though you are awake. - Matthew Flickstein, "Swallowing the River Ganges"

From J.F.: Dear Kristopher/Dharma Friends, I hope all is well in your whirl. Thank you for responding to my recent letter, and thanks piles for providing "**Everyday Buddha**." Although I wasn't expecting to have my recent letter published in Dharma Friends, but I have no problem with it, and I look forward to reading Anna's feedback should she choose to provide it.

Since receiving "**Everyday Buddha**" on the 28 of last month, I've read it from cover to cover, and now I'm reading it again much more slowly, allowing myself the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of each saying. Upon reflection, there are two verses in particular that give me pause. Verse #124 says, in part, "... There is no harm that can come to one who does no harm to others." And verse #303 says, "The good and virtuous are welcomed wherever they go." Unless I'm reading these verses from the wrong perspective, they appear to be saying that if one lives a Dharmic existence, then no harm can come to him, and he will be 'welcomed' everywhere. You and I both know that this isn't the case. Good and virtuous people are often singled-out for mistreatment BECAUSE of their goodness. Also, there are countless thousands of examples of people who have done no harm to others being brutalized or tormented in one way or another. I can come to grips with verse #124 by understanding that the true essence of who we are – our unchanging and unchangeable Buddha Nature - actually suffers no harm regardless of what happens to our physical body. "One who does no harm to others" can refer to one who has glimpsed his True Nature and is therefore no longer susceptible to the vagaries of physical existence. However, verse #303 doesn't so easily lend itself to this explanation. "The good and virtuous" can refer to myriad individuals throughout the world, and "are welcomed WHEREVER THEY GO" is pretty self-explanatory and all-inclusive. The apparent inaccuracy of this verse leaves me wondering if I have erred in my interpretation of it. Can you clarify it for me? I hope my questions don't seem impertinent, because I certainly mean no offense. I'm merely trying to understand. I know I still have a mountain to climb on the Path I am following, but I fully intend to continue the journey, and I appreciate any guidance and advice you are willing to impart. TAKE CARE and may you have peace and happiness in your life. In the Dharma,

Kristopher's response: Dear J.F.: Yes, I do think that you've been able to tune in to the meaning of verse #124. Verse #303, in my opinion, is missing the word "hopefully." It is beyond my control whether or not others accept or "welcome" me. The best that I can do is treat others with love and kindness regardless of what they think of me or, like in verse #124, what they do to me. I also find it easier to not THINK too much into the verses. They are wise words. The Buddha wanted us not to accept things because others have told us this or that, but to put the words into action to find your own truths. May you be abundantly blessed with each and every breath,

And anna adds: I will reinforce your insight that when we reach that capacity to know *All That Is* as truth, we transcend the suffering of our ordinary world. The world does not change but our view of the world is forever altered. In addition, all of our actions and words to others effortlessly bring them healing and benefit. Our very presence invites others to see their true self as a self free of suffering. To an ordinary observer, we may not look as though we are being 'welcomed' but at the level of truth, we are ONE with all beings.

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Jesus in Mathew verse 25

From L.J.R.: Dear *Dharma Friends*, I'm writing this letter in response to Gary Hallford's letter in the October 2008 issue #141.

Gary, I would like to respond to your personal views on "engaged" Buddhism. You make some very salient points on the topic of 'Our Right Effort as Buddhist practitioners.' It's important that we do not become complacent in our practice; that we just don't chant mechanical mantras or 'sit' idly. However, what does the word "engaged" mean? Is it what you say when you stated, "Unlike the vast majority, you are not simply printing the 'touchy-feely' generic bullshit . . ." Or, is it exactly that "bullshit" that fertilizes the ground we tread?

Perhaps, like Nirvana, it is easier to state what "engaged" isn't rather than what it is absolutely. Being "engaged" isn't being dogmatic, selfish, closed-minded, judgmental, angry, etc. . . . How does simply sitting seem pointless to you when that's exactly what the Buddha did in his practice? Even when the Buddha preached, he was still just "sitting." Upon His realization of enlightenment, he stated and I'm paraphrasing, that at this point in time: I and all beings are completely enlightened. Not just Him but all beings of the past, present, and future whether in a hellish realm or heavenly realm, be it a human, animal, or ghost. Is this just bullshit, Gary? Maybe.

So Gary, my point is if you want to engage in "Guerrilla Buddhism" then do so as long as you're not harming others, or yourself, in the process. However, try not to be attached to any Dharma. Keep the words of the Buddha in mind when he expounded on Dog and Ox accession. In a nutshell, if you act as a dog or an ox, you'll become these animals. Don't become a guerrilla Gary. These words just may be fertilizer, but hopefully a lotus will blossom from them. Gassho. Yours in the Dharma,

Tung-shan was asked, "The normal mind is the way; what is the normal mind?" He replied, "Not picking things up along the road."

From M.S.: Dear members of *Compassion Works For All*,

Thank you for all that you do. I am finding it difficult to be grateful today. As you probably know, it is easy to feel entitled and take things for granted. I find myself in this particular mood today. One of those things I find myself taking for granted is your **Dharma Friends** newsletter and also the Buddha statue picture. It is easy to forget who makes these things possible.

With your effort, I have learned of basic Buddhist teachings sooner rather than later. You see, I do not have any books on Buddhism. Our prison library does not have any Buddhism books, but our mental health library does. I do not, however, have access to said library directly. Even still, thank you.

Also, in the welcome packet, the article, "**Loving kindness and Mindfulness**" by Susan Stone, especially helped me develop my understanding of what love really is. Before this, it was a word I equated with possessiveness and romantic feelings (sensual, sexual, and otherwise) mostly while only marginally practicing unconditional love. Even then, I did not have the words to describe my actions. I only thought of it as "helping people." Your effort to include this article and Susan Stone's effort to write it have been so very helpful. Thank you. With unconditional love,

Response from Kristopner: I have since sent a book to M.S. and a box of books to the unit library.

Senator Robert Kennedy, addressing students in South Africa who suffered under the yoke of apartheid, understood the potency of the human heart as surmounting all obstacles. He said: "Each time a man (or a woman) stands up for an ideal, acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he (or she) sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. And crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples can create a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

From a DF: Dear Kristopher, Thank you, very much, for the reply and concern. Yours is the first personal response I have received. I have been blessed with many resources to draw from for Dharma. I must tell you though, that I have been a Buddhist all my life, I simply didn't know that I was a Buddhist until 2002 (I'm 39). Incidentally, I am incarcerated for two DUI's. I have no violence on my record and very, very, little in my life. I do, however, have an extensive history of alcohol related crimes, public intox., DUI, etc. I am also presently incarcerated for a theft that I did not commit, although I did put myself in a position to be charged with it (live and learn, I guess).

Presently, my meditation practice is falling apart. I have been in a "Therapeutic Community" program that is a meat grinder whose sole purpose seems to be to keep one off center. They hammer slogans and NA/AA meetings and values into me daily, always with the threat of termination. I've watched my meditation practice be reduced to 10 to 15 second snatches of tranquility – the crap they hammer me with and the threats of termination (which would also terminate any hope of parole) echo endlessly in my mind. I am actually doing very well in the program (I'm halfway done with the four month program), but I can't wait to get back to general population – It's so much easier to meditate there! I have done so much personal work that this program is rehashing ancient history for me – it's difficult. But – I will get through it.

There are approx. four or five other Buddhists here (out of approx. 1,000 inmates). Being in prison and seeing some of their actions make me question their sincerity. One of them is extremely argumentative and is in constant trouble. A friend of mine just went home, a man I introduced to Buddhism approx. a year and a half ago. There is no formal service for us here, and I do not know what one would entail – I like studying, reflecting and meditating on my own – but I do thirst for contact with others that understand the world the way I do. I have several Buddhist pen-pal contacts, but, I guess, I have been too . . . I don't know, maybe ashamed or scared or meek to write to one. I guess after getting the note and postcard from you, I felt more comfortable writing you. And now, this simple thank you has turned into a letter. I'm sorry, I've had very little contact with other Buddhists in my lifetime. I know that ultimately I shouldn't feel lonely on this path, but sometimes I do. It's very difficult to be a Buddhist in prison – I look at it as practice, but WOW! Most people are entrenched in ego-centrism and Samsara. It seems the world really is going to hell (so to speak).

I did originally write to thank you for your words of kindness and the postcard picture of Buddha (which now hangs on my wall). I received the newsletter the day after I received the introduction and welcome letter from CWFA/DF. It felt wonderful receiving the letter and I am very happy to see firsthand that there are people like me out there – maybe I will try one of these Buddhist Pen-pal contacts I have. At any rate, I do appreciate everything and I don't quite feel so alone as I did. Maybe we can save the world. Thanks again, Kristopher, for everything. Somehow, hearing from a Buddhist in the Bible Belt brightens my world! Walk well, brother,

Kristopher's response: Dear DF and the rest of our *Dharma Friends* family,

I feel for men and women who are incarcerated everywhere. I was in and out of jails, institutions and AA/NA for twenty years before I was ready to work the steps and develop the spiritual principles that come from doing them. I had to go to prison to get it, and that's when I found out that Buddhism is the way for me to walk a spiritual path and I don't think that I would ever have been able to make that connection had I not been sent there. However, I don't feel that "hammering" anything into a human being is going to make them get it. I suggest going with the flow with loving-kindness, be aware that they're just hoops to jump through and understand that their data shows that the twelve-step programs have the best results for changing people's lives. I simply just stopped rebelling and picked up the tools that I could have been using for twenty years and chose not to.

As far as people being and acting like Buddhists, I'm not a good example there. I'm nowhere near as loud and obnoxious as I used to be, but those who didn't know the old me, wonder if I've changed at all. I do try to live a humble life, but I have to earn a living so that I can do this work. After you've been clean and sober, you realize that there must be some reason that we didn't die out there, and so the programs show us how to give back. I have sponsor and sponsees, and give back that way, but it's the connections I make working with *Dharma Friends* and getting letters like this that keep me going. I do highly recommend reading any of the various texts that mix the twelve-steps with Buddhism if you are trying to work an AA/NA program. May you all be abundantly blessed with each and every breath that you take,

To learn the path it is important to be sharp yet inconspicuous. When you are sharp, you are not confused by people; when you are inconspicuous, you don't contend with people. Not being confused by people, you are empty and spiritual; not contending with people, you are serene and subtle. - Liao-an

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.

SOME NEW OPTIONS: I shared in past issues of **Dharma Friends** that we are trying to be mindful of \$\$\$ in order to keep publishing our newsletter, as we scramble to get additional funding.

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. Now, some have written and said that others need them more than they do so take their name off. Don't be too generous!! **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 just let us know and we will put them on the list. 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.

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.

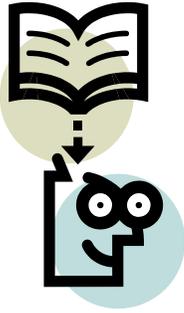
"A human being is part of the whole called by us the Universe.

We experiences ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest --a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us.

Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures, and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is, in itself, a path of the liberation and a foundation for inner security."

-- Albert Einstein



Book of Knowledge - Omar's dream:

Linda's book – Mindful Money – a gift to you

As we share excellent books with you, I wish that we could send a copy of each to everyone. I know that many of you do not have the funds to buy a copy. But – wonderful Linda (who has long done all money matters for *Compassion Works for All* and is our general manager) has offered a copy of her book, **Mindful Money**, to those of you in prison who wish to have one, as long as the supply lasts.

When you write for your copy, please put, **Attn. Linda – for Mindful Money book**, on the envelope along with our address: **Compassion Works for All, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708.**

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. Many who are in prison are there because money issues got out of hand. It may be that we did not understand money growing up and did not ever learn how to earn or spend money wisely. It may be that we were in unexpected debt even when we thought we were doing the right thing. It may be that we became desperate because of medical bills or needing food for children and we did something foolish.

With this gem of a little book, we can start from scratch learning about money, how to think about money, and learn to plan a wise money future. This is a pretty handy tool if you are getting out of prison! Even if not, you still have money challenges, PLUS you can guide your family, friends, and children in their money education and future with your deeper understanding. Isn't Linda wonderful? Thank you Linda.

"As you practice these holy teachings, slowly the clouds of sorrow will melt away, and the sun of wisdom and true joy will be shining in the clear sky of your mind." -- Kalu Rinpoche

Compassion Works for All/ Dharma Friends

PO Box 7708

Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708

Webpage: JustUsFrieds.org

RELIGIOUS MATERIAL

**Permit NO. 160
Non-Profit organization**

US Postage PAID

Little Rock, AR.



If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. –

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Dharma Friends

January 2010 issue # 156

copyright 2010, Compassion Works for All



A Joyous New Year to you all

Additional Pages for EMAIL VERSION of Dharma Friends

"I first believed without any hesitation in the existence of the soul, and then I wondered about the secret of its nature. I persevered and strove in search of the soul, and found at last that I myself was the cover of my soul. I realized that in me which believed and that in me which wondered, that which persevered in me, and that which found, and that which was found at last, was no other than my soul.

Since then I have seen all souls as my soul, and realized my soul as the soul of all; and what bewilderment it was when I realized that I alone was, if there were anyone; that I am whatever and whoever exists; and that I shall be whoever there will be in the future. And there was no end to my happiness and joy."

-Hazrat Inyat Khan (Sufi Teacher)

A little update on Compassion Works for All –

Louise Terzia has joined the fold as our part-time, non-profit organization developer and fundraiser. WELCOME LOUISE.

As long time readers know, our other workers and volunteers include:

Linda Bessette, who has been our managing director and handles all things financial and meticulous! Kristopher Davis works tirelessly to offer letters of support and guidance along with books and others resources that we can provide to our readers in prison. Chelle Moore helps Kristopher with letters and sends each new prisoner a letter of welcome and a welcome packet. They both help to transcribe letters from

prisoners so that we may read them in the pages of Dharma Friends. Even though Mara Leveritt was our brilliant creator of the JustUsFriends.org web site and is still energetically a part of the group, her focus is now on other wonderful efforts. I am trying to maintain that site, along with writing these Dharma Friends issues, but fall far below what Mara offered with her expert skills and artistic eye for publication.

We also have a wonderful and long committed board of directors who offer support, time and ideas – Sandra Pope, Robynn Zinser, Manal Ivie, and Kathy Downs (Ani Thendron).

And those are our workers apart from the times when all our friends gather to help with a special project.

We aren't very big but we sure do a lot!!

As you can imagine, these little projects take a lot of effort. I am very grateful for all of your kind support. We could not do it without you. Your participation in the Compassion Works for All/Dharma Friends community allows us to energetically embrace those who need to know they have a healing family. No one is left alone. This is crucial. Together we are changing the consciousness design of our 'criminal justice' system. Now, we want to do more to manifest the 'real world' changes of the social, legal and correctional structures that could be more humanitarian and beneficial to our future generations.

We want to contribute to new ways to conceptualize and implement the transformation that must take place in society to help save those on the path to incarceration and to help heal and bring a life of value to those who are already behind bars. We can do it.

I know you all share our vision of treating all beings with compassion and developing humanitarian and just solutions to society's unjust systems.

In this new year, Compassion Works for All will be holding workshops, webinars and get-togethers for study, growth, exploration, and for volunteer training for those who want to offer hands-on help.

Right now, we could use someone with some web site computer skills though. ☺ sigh...

We have had a wonderful response to our fundraising efforts this fall and are good to go with our long-term vision to benefit all beings everywhere. Thank you.



A wonderful event connected to Buddhism

A Weekend with Anam Thubten Rinpoche

Author of **No Self No Problem**



Friday Feb 5th will be a public talk at the Unitarian Church in Little Rock

The workshop will be on Saturday the 6th and Sunday the 7th

Location: EBS, Little Rock, AR

for information and times - contact: Karen Wisdom at yesjewisdom@gmail.com

At Compassion Works for All - We have BOOKS FOR SALE:

MINDFUL MONEY by LINDA BESSETTE

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 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 Mara Leveritt's books!

The Boys on the Tracks: Death, Denial, and a Mother's Crusade to Bring Her Son's Killers to Justice

And

Devil's Knot: The True Story of the West Memphis Three

Email Linda (above) and she can give you more information about prices, mailing, etc. for all books.

And 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

for a free download – but donations are always appreciated! Or you can order a hardcopy book for \$15 plus shipping (\$5) at my email address: anna@aristotle.net

www.JustUsFriends.org.

Check us out and help spread the news by emailing the site to your friends!

Along with informative and inspirational articles –

there are many videos in our video archive to lend a little support in difficult life issues.



INSIGHT. ACTION. HEALING.

JUSTUSFRIENDS.ORG

JOIN US at www.JUSTUSFRIENDS.org

"There is an important link between deep change at the personal level and deep change at the organizational level. To make deep personal change is to develop a new paradigm, a new self, one that is more effectively aligned with today's realities. This can occur only if we are willing to journey into unknown territory and confront the wicked problems we encounter. This journey does not follow the assumptions of rational planning. The objective may not be clear and the path is not paved with familiar procedures. This tortuous journey requires that we leave our comfort zone and step outside our normal roles. In doing so, we learn the paradoxical lesson that we can change the world only by changing ourselves. This is not just a cute abstraction; it is an elusive key to effective performance in all aspects of life." – Robert Quinn in Deep Change

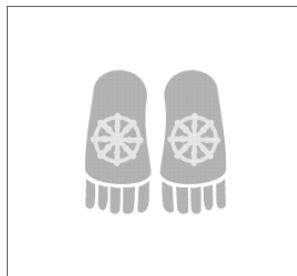


***If you would like to host a Compassion Works for All fundraising lunch,
Please let us know and we will plan details with you!!***

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.



If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

- His Holiness the Dalai Lama