

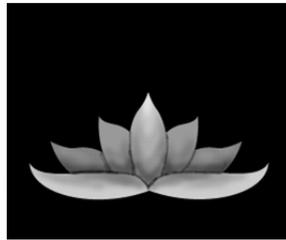


Dharma Friends

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

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The Dhammapada The teachings of the Buddha



Verse II: Awareness

21. Appreciative awareness leads to life; heedless avoidance is the path to death. Those who are aware are fully alive, while those who are heedless are as if already dead.
22. The wise, being fully alive, rejoice in appreciative awareness, and abide delighting in this capacity.
23. The Awakened Ones, firm in their resolve, vigorously apply themselves, and know freedom from bondage: liberation, true security.
24. Those who are energetically committed to the Way, who are pure and considerate in effort, composed and virtuous in conduct, steadily increase in radiance.
25. By endeavor, vigilance, restraint and self-control, let the wise make islands of themselves which no flood can overwhelm.
26. Those who are foolish and confused betray themselves to heedlessness. The wise treasure the awareness they have cultivated as their most precious possession.
27. "Do not become lost in negligence, do not become lost in sensuality." Heeding such council, the contemplative discovers profound release.
28. Those Awakened Ones, who have tasted freedom from all distraction by cultivating awareness, view all who are suffering with compassionate perspective, as one on a mountaintop is able to view the plains.

29. Aware among those who are heedless, awake among those who sleep, the wise go forward like strong young horses, leaving the exhausted behind.
30. By way of diligent awareness the god Magha won his realm. Diligence is ever rewarded, negligence is ever scorned.
31. The renunciate who delights in vigilance and shuns heedlessness advances like a grass fire, consuming obstructions great and small.
32. The renunciate who delights in vigilance and shuns heedlessness is protected from regression: such a one approaches liberation.



Some thoughts about this *Dhammapada* Verse: Awareness

22. *The wise, being fully alive, rejoice in appreciative awareness, and abide delighting in this capacity.*

Last month and in many past commentaries, we have covered the topic of mindfulness and practicing awareness in meditation and in life. As I read this line above though, I realized that one piece that we have not been stressing is that mindful awareness is not dry. It is not a neutral and dispassionate noticing of what arises. This line in our verse, ***Awareness***, says:... ***rejoice in appreciative*** awareness and abide ***delighting*** in this capacity. These words put an energetic quality into our practice and it urges us to remember that our meditations can be full of rejoicing, appreciation, and a delighting in life. We are not like little mindful machines watching what arises. We are alive, full of great appreciation and delight as we enter 100% into the great and magical NOW. In that fullness, we see the miracle and we feel bliss and joy.

The other side of the coin...

I will report on my observation of some others, knowing it is a bit critical of them. How many people do you know that delight in noticing what makes them mad. They collect angry incidences as though this is their mindfulness practice. They pay attention to every slight, self-righteously to every time that someone is wrong, and exalt in every opportunity to point out when someone else is a villain. Always, they are angry and feel justified in retaliating or in punishing others. If they had the realization that this is their meditation practice, they might really make some progress towards achieving great accomplishment! That however, is likely not their overall goal. Their life view is justified by counting and collecting events to be angry about. With this process, they fuel their justification for rage, their favorite bad feeling. What is a favorite bad feeling? It is a basic emotion that we are most comfortable with.

But there are disastrous effects from a constant focus on anger.

We know that our emotional life affects our biochemistry, including brain function and our overall health. If one is mad all the time, their body is constantly spewing out cortisol to rev up for a fight against all those perceived enemies. This tires out the body and brain and exhausts the immune system, making one more susceptible to disease. Of course, it also destroys relationships. After driving everyone away, such a person usually feels alone and abandoned - but that is then another reason for them to feel angry at all of those who left them. Interestingly, the latest research says that such personalities may be more susceptible to dementia later in life. That is a pretty horrible picture: a sick, angry, demented old person that no one wants to care for! I hope this isn't you or me!

How do we introduce *rejoicing, delighting and appreciating... into our awareness meditative practices?*

These are fabulous qualities to add to our life, but a challenge if we are even a little bit addicted to negativity. The first step is to ask ourselves the question: Am I addicted to negativity, anger, hostility, the power of bullying, scaring others, feeling protected by anger and violence, and, at the root of all these defenses, afraid of my vulnerability? If the answer to any of these questions is YES, we need to start by examining negativity as our suit of armor. We need to come to terms with whether or not we can take it off. It may take a while but I think we can. We must become courageous enough to be joyful.

Shedding our addiction to negativity

Back to our verse: *The wise, being fully alive, rejoice in appreciative awareness, and abide delighting in this capacity.*

We can and must lift the obstacles to these innermost feelings and let them arise to the surface of conscious awareness. These fears all come with life! They are in us all, even though they may have been buried long ago. So, the first step is to notice that we are focusing and fueling these negative thoughts and feelings.

One way to practice awareness is to notice what we are noticing. Are we noticing that critical assessments often arise judging whatever someone else does for us or how we do something? Is there nothing good enough for us? Do we notice when someone else lets us down or doesn't measure up to our expectations? **If we notice that we are focusing on a stream of negative thoughts and feelings, WE MUST STOP.**

And then we replace the negative thought with five positive thoughts. This is not meditation. This is deliberative, corrective action to install a new focus in our brain. This is to build a new habit before we go it alone trusting our old patterns. This is growing new neuronal connections. Just being aware of old habits is often not enough to build these new neuronal pathways and to challenge the original psychological needs that built a dependency on negativity for our survival. So step one is noticing our negative thoughts. Saying **STOP**. Then deliberately coming up with 5 positive thoughts to replace that negative one.

I would add an additional assignment to what is truly a long list of many possible tools. Choose just one of our words like *rejoice, appreciate or delight*. Keep a tablet handy in your pocket. Make a list. Three times a day stop and write down 5 things that caused you to rejoice, feel appreciation or to feel delight. That is 15 things by the end of the day. If you did not get your 15 things one day, be more vigilant the next. You will find yourself looking for things to feel positive about if you hold this goal. At the end of the day, if you did not complete your list, you can't go to bed until you do!

If you are aware that you are feeling negatives, or even just noticing neutral thoughts, just let them go as they arise. Don't contribute to the negatives by being mean and critical of yourself for feeling negative. You will grow in your focus on the positive. As you feel safer being happy, you will be happier. Little by little, you will grow more positive. As you do this process, old memories may come to you revealing why negativity and anger were safer for you as a kid than **delight**. That is our meditation for this month. Read on.



A MEDITATION – on Awareness

Meditation is truly about developing focus, stillness, and awareness of our inner obstacles so we can purify them. Only when we have found stillness and purify the big obstacles, can we awaken to much more subtle sacred awareness. Until we have focus, stillness, and awareness, it is very hard to rest in periods of sacred awareness and to know profound joy. During those meditations of focus and stillness, it is not unusual to gently lift the veil on old and painful memories. Our own inner wisdom knows that those old wounds cause obstacles in our life. We continue to replay old traumas or self-destructive patterns as we are truly trying to draw attention to our past so we can find healing.

It is like an inner guide that keeps saying: *This is the root cause of why you are destroying your life. I want to keep showing you this picture so you will heal.* Often, that inner guide will make the event more and more visible if we ignore the wound. At first we are shown patterns that cause us suffering. When we do not pay attention, most of us escalate and escalate some more until we are being run over by the Mack Truck of negative consequences. The wisdom guide is not trying to wipe us out. We are! Our inner wisdom wants us to look at these early wounds and messages so we can replace them with love and healing. Wisdom wants us to walk a different life path where our highest self can manifest. For many though, our lives are in such chaos and we are so defended from our inner pain and wisdom, that we do not pay attention. Meditation and learning to focus and find stillness is a perfect place to start. Don't be surprised though if pain

arises. Don't run away if memories come up. You may find tears flowing for the suffering child that you once were. This is all good - but I know it is hard. What to do? Offer compassion to yourself.

The meditation

We are going to plant a seed. It is that as you sit in meditation, you will say a prayer that asks for healing of all beings everywhere – and you are one of them. In that, we ask that the obstacles that lie in the way of your healing will come into your awareness. So begin by sitting comfortably and just focusing on your breath. Say your short prayer in your own words. We are doing this healing for you and for all beings everywhere.

Focus on your breath and just let go of any thoughts if they arise. It may be that in any one sitting, no old memories will peek out. But if they do, let them play out your story like an old movie and you just watch. See what wants to reveal itself to you. Be aware of the suffering of you, that little child in the midst of the drama or trauma. If feelings arise, notice them. When the movie completes itself, send lots of compassion to you as that little one who suffered through those days. Then, let it all go. See the story, the emotions, the horrible circumstances, all lift from your heart, from your body, from your mind, and from all that you are today. Let it all dissolve into the clouds of the sky. See it all dissipate into the universe. Feel free and cleansed. This movie may come back again and again, or other stories might come. The process takes a while and is usually not a onetime releasing of old obstacles. Be patient and kind to yourself. You might even feel a bit unnerved as those old feelings are more present in your life. Take extra time to meditate and, each time, let go of the old experiences. Then, take time to fill yourself with compassion and love.

End your meditations with a focus on a healing suggestion, and our words in this verse are wonderful for that. Choose a word or phrase like *fully alive, rejoice, appreciative awareness, and abide in delighting*. See that word as a seed that will grow and fill your heart. Let spiritual teachers, beloved people, images that bring you delight, anything that feels nurturing in this sacred way, fill your whole being with these energies.

Cleansing the old wounds can happen. Know you are on a path to finding true, deep sacred fulfillment as you become all that you truly are.



From Your Letters

Dear readers: Change happens.

Of course that is what we hear all the time. The one thing we can rely on all-ways is change. And we have some good changes to relate to you and a loss that affects us all. **The good news** is that we have some new volunteers and workers joining our Compassion Works for All efforts. Jane and Eileen are officially on board along with new volunteer workers. **And the sad news** is that our wonderful Kristopher who has been with us for over a decade is leaving. We appreciate all of his efforts on your behalf and we encourage and support him in developing a new program to benefit all! Thank you to our new CWFA workers for offering so much to us, and thank you, Kristopher, for living your life as a gift for others round the clock for all of these years.

Here is a reminder of some of our on-going programs for you with a few refinements!

The Dictionary Drop program – although we are no longer (for a while) able to mail out dictionaries, please use your library dictionary to continue to play the **Dictionary Drop** game. For each word of the month, read the dictionary definition and then write a short essay about how it applies to your life. Then send it to us. Put **Dictionary Drop** on the envelope.

OUR DICTIONARY DROP WORD for October is *NURTURE*

Jeff's Kids is our program where you are invited to write a letter to kids in juvenile detention telling them what you wish someone had told you when you were a teen. The letters are read to the kids in group therapy by their counselor, Jeff. If you want to write a letter to Jeff's Kids, put **Jeff's Kids** on your envelope when you mail it to us and then we pass the letters on to Jeff. We are also putting the letters on our web site.

ASK TIM: Ask Tim is a god-send for some of you that have very important things that need to be researched or you need help with but have no one else to ask. Write to us with your question and put **ASK TIM** on the envelope. Tim will help you as he can, but there are some limitations as to what Tim is able to do. These are the limitations:

1. Tim is not qualified to counsel about personal and/or relationship problems.
2. Money or 'things' will never be given to any writer.
3. Tim receives so many letters that he will probably only be able to answer one letter per inmate every 6-8 weeks.
4. We will not provide addresses of individuals in the free world to anyone.
5. We cannot provide information obtained from Facebook or other social media websites.
6. Tim cannot research or give legal help.

Here are some ways you can help us in being more efficient and saving us money to offer our programs to you.

1. **Please let us know of all address changes as that costs us big \$\$\$ to send newsletters to those long gone.** We have recently cleansed our database and hopefully found some of you that moved - surprise! We welcome you back! But, we might have made a few mistakes. So if you have not received an issue of **Dharma Friends**, first consider if your address has changed in some way and let us know. Then check with your mailroom. If all is ok, then check with us if you think we made a mistake.
2. **If you are a new subscriber**, please put that on an envelope. Also put on the envelope the person you are writing to, if you know, or what you are writing for. For example: **NEW SUBSCRIBER**. That saves reading every letter before passing it on.
3. **NO MORE BOOKS.** We are so sorry that for a while we have to suspend sending out free books. For one thing, we have run out of some of the books we were offering. So please don't write for any of the books that we offered in the past or for the books in the **Book of Knowledge** program, which we were not able to offer anyway.

Thinking of our Jewish and our Islamic friends throughout their holy days

Jewish Holy Days - September 16 begins Rosh Hashana and September 25 begins Yom Kippur for our Jewish friends. These holy days are a time to actively and authentically confront oneself and look deeply into their relationships with each other and with Spirit in order to refine and renew these relationships for the coming year.

Muslim Eid-al-Adha or Feast of Sacrifice – October 26

Eid al-Adha or Feast of Sacrifice is the most important feast of the Muslim calendar. It concludes the Pilgrimage to Mecca. Eid al-Adha lasts for three days and commemorates Ibrahim's (Abraham) willingness to obey God by sacrificing his son. Muslims believe the son to be Ishmael rather than Isaac as told in the Old Testament. Ishmael is considered the forefather of the Arabs. According to the Koran, Ibrahim was about to sacrifice his son when a voice from heaven stopped him and allowed him to sacrifice a ram instead. The feast re-enacts Ibrahim's obedience by sacrificing a cow or ram. The family eats about a third of the meal and donates the rest to the poor.

The United Nations Day of Peace – hold a vigil for world peace wherever you are, by yourself or with others, on September 20.

From Alan Jay Cotton: Dear Linda,

I've put together a facilitator training course based on your book, *Mindful Money*. One of my co-facilitators, Robert Fitz, has added your book to a re-entry course he teaches (inmates with 6 to 12 months left before release). The chaplaincy is allowing *Mindful Money* to be taught in the interfaith chapel, but only once a year for 12 weeks and one day a week for 3 hours. The facilitator training course is four weeks.

I am going to discuss *Mindful Money* with Dr. Dawn Addy, PH D, labor center director, Florida International University about a student sponsor. This way we could have three programs a year. Dawn and I wrote: 1. Alternatives to Violence, 1 & 2, and 2. Dialogue Circle, and 3. Gender Awareness.

The Florida diocese is stressing programs to keep prisoners out. But it will take time to get the personnel with this agenda. The chaplain will be issuing certificates at the end of the courses. Knowledge is a great tool. If prisoners have the tools to budget and save money even a small amount for the future no one will be able to rip them off:- and just maybe they will do the right thing. No one should ever want to return to this abject failure environment. For a world of peace. Alan

A poem sent by K. R. and written by Annie Johnson Flint

" His grace is great enough to meet the great things-
The crashing waves that overwhelm the soul.
The roaring winds that leave us stunned and breathless.
The sudden storms beyond our life's control.

His grace is great enough to meet the small things-
The little pin prick troubles that annoy.
The insect worries, buzzing and persistent,
The squeaking wheels that grate upon our joy."

From C.C.: I've read a lot of stuff about MBSR (mindfulness based stress reduction) and Jon Kabat Zin, but never came across contact information. I think MBSR programs are especially sort of "custom fit" to a few different specific groups, i.e. different business execs, people in various high stress positions in life. Prisoners seem like an obvious group, but I gather that there's nothing yet specifically tailored to us. Anyway, if you can find any addresses I could try, that would be good.



Here is a resource!:

www.PrisonMindfulness.org **Our mailing address is:** Prison Mindfulness Institute, 11 S. Angell St. #303, Providence, RI 02906

And more from C.C.: **This part you might put in the newsletter:** I noticed in the February newsletter a plea from Michael Shane Hale asking for help with getting a proper vegetarian or vegan diet in place in his system. We are in the same boat in Texas. They do offer a really low nutrition "meat free" option with every meal which means extra beans (pinto, northern, or navy) some sugary, processed peanut butter, mixed with high fructose corn syrup "jelly", the occasional egg, or two slices of "American cheese" on some days. I've been unable to get any outside help with it thus far, but have managed to find some information in our library on nutrition. Protein is maybe just barely sufficient in the diet if you combine all your beans with bread. That said, with no soy, this is a tough way to keep the pounds off as the diet it is very high in carbs. The most important thing after protein is vitamin B12. You need this, or you'll get nerve damage! Irreversible nerve damage! Eggs have enough B-12, but milk and cheese, I'm not sure about, but maybe? Vitamin supplements do work for B - 12, so if you're vague and you need it, at least take a multi vitamin. Our commissaries regular daily vitamin contains it, but always read labels. Iron is pretty important too. We get a lot of cooked greens here, so we might get enough that way; not sure. I'm a guy and I guess it's not as big a deal for us, but women need to pay extra attention to iron intake as I understand it.



One strategy that might work for us is that, with the exception of eggs, all of the "meat substitutes" they offer us contain hydrogenated oils which are known carcinogens and contribute to heart disease far more than any natural fats. Also a lot of what they serve us contains high fructose corn syrup, a major contributor to the development of Type Two diabetes. I know that for the saccharine in the beverages, they are required to post a health warning in the chow hall and to offer an alternative beverage (water). I think we should be allowed to at least decide for ourselves whether or not we choose to eat potentially life threatening chemical concoctions. Also, all the added sugars are the main cause for tooth decay.

Beyond all that, cooked veggies are missing a lot, and I know that here they often add extra water and drain it all off. This takes a lot of vitamins out. Also a lot of our food is overcooked. So the stuff we eat may have all the daily FDA requirements for "macro nutrients" (carbs, protein, fat and fiber), but all the damage caused from being canned or cooked and then drained, wipes out many of the micronutrients (vitamins and such) Also, Omega 3 oils are mostly in green leafy vegetables and fish, Omega 6 oils are largely in seeds, and too much Omega 6 likely blocks the Omega 3 uptake, from what I understand. So all that peanut butter is not very good. Omega 3 is what myelin is largely made of. This is the fatty substance that coats nerves and is what makes all the "white matter" in your brain white (most of your "higher" brain functions are handled by this type of brain tissue, so that's why Omega 3 is likely to help brain/cognitive functions).

One thing I really recommend either way, vegetarian or not, is that we all could greatly benefit from reading up on nutrition and food in general. Michael Pollan has some great books on the subject written for regular people. I just read "In Defense of Food"

by him; highly recommended if you can find it. Even if we can't get access to the best foods in here, we can (most of us) make some decisions that might greatly impact our health, and perhaps more importantly help us become more responsible consumers. The food we eat affects not only us, but the world around us in more ways than we might imagine. Modern agriculture perhaps is wreaking more havoc on our environment and our bodies' than the worst aspects of our chemical and energy industries. There's a lot of great info out there these days, even in the mainstream media, like popular science and even some cookbooks like "The Joy of Cooking" which will teach you a lot about the food you eat so you can make more informed, mindful decisions. Even if we can't do much about what we eat in here, we might be able to plan ahead for how we will live when we get out (for those of us that are) and even if we're not, if we might relay what we've learned to those around us, and perhaps even get some things changed in here.

My favorite quotes sent in by Rick Best: *Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within the reach of every hand.* Mother Teresa



Book of Knowledge - Omar's dream - our friend Omar dreamed of educating ourselves as much as we can so that we all can become all that we can be. (Remember we are not able to offer these books)

A recommendation from Roy – I want to recommend a book for everybody to read; "*Awakening to the Sacred*" by Lama Surya Das. Awesomely, truly spiritually uplifting book with so much coolness in it. I mean, one of those books you read but just dig it so much you read it again just to make sure you didn't miss anything. It will totally energize ya Bro and will Benefit anyone who reads it.

Another book you will learn from and be impressed by the teachings is, "*The God's Drink Whiskey*" by Steve Asmas. An awesome book that will teach you.

The greatest achievement is selflessness.... unknown

From Daniel Risher: A response to Jason Baldwin's comment about the justice system

The problem with the criminal justice system is bigger than the system. It goes to the fundamentals of the way we think as a society. We have a phenomenal tendency to believe the worst about people without question, and without anything to support that conclusion.

It is going to take more than compassion to make a difference. You can have compassion without action. It's going to take compassion in action. Check out history. Those who have words carved in stone took a stand when no one else would. A good example is the West Memphis 3. For years, all everyone talked about was Echols. But when Jason Baldwin said what he said, "This is injustice," the face of the West Memphis 3 changed forever. Now people think of Baldwin who acted on the compassion when the West Memphis 3 comes up. We must learn to speak what is right no matter what the majority says or the politics involved says. We have to be the change we want to see in the world. It begins with us. Every single one of us, And not just those in the criminal justice system.

My favorite quotes sent in by Rick Best: *Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.* Dr Martin Luther King Jr

From D.M.: Howdy there Dharma Friends, I thank you for all you do. You worker bees are delightful! I appreciate your compassion and understanding. I feel your presence and open my heart to you and the entire Dharma Friends community/sangha. I have made 68 turns around the sun. Some of them were lonely. Now though, I no longer feel alone. It is as if you are always with me. I now feel like the perfectly balanced wheel with its need to be spun. Spin me.

In this place where I repose, I see many guys that are so afraid of being attacked that they pretend to be tough and cruel to protect themselves. Not for me. Me, I see compassion in your eyes when I receive a letter or anything from you; how could I act tough or cruel towards others when I am so understood by folks like you?

Sometimes it may seem like I ramble in my letters. It is so. In certain ways I have mental abnormalities, but not at all times. But no matter what, I feel liberated from certain suffering. Although, I work on the uncertain suffering daily with mindfulness and meditation. I truly want your insight to pass along to the other 178 guys in here. I am free here, now and all ways

Choosing Inner Peace

If we had to make a choice between outer pleasure, comfort and peace, and inner freedom and ultimate happiness, we should choose inner peace. If we could find that within, then the outer would take care of itself.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, "Invisible Realities"

From L.G.C. Sr.: Dear Dharma Friends, I've had the pleasure of reading one of your most wonderful publications and I really enjoyed it from the first page to the last.... If you have the time to read more, I have a very important question: if someone has been abused (really abused) most of their life, will this (publication) work for them? I know it's a dumb question, but I have to know. I understand that Buddha came from a rich and powerful family. No worries, no problems... No abuse... So, can it work for someone that has suffered for so long? I pray that it will, because I need to move on to my next stage of life.

Thanks in advance-"Dum Spiro Spero" (while I breathe still")

A few thoughts from Anna: Dear L., We are glad that you found your way to our **Compassion Works for All/ Dharma Friends** community. As you read letters from others in this **From Your Letters section of Dharma Friends**, you will read many from people like yourself that are sharing their journey. Many started out right where you are now. Of course, **Dharma Friends** is not the answer. We give support and encouragement to you to go into your history and your pain, to find your quiet mind. That is where the *working* happens and that is where we find our own answers to healing. Start with a few minutes of meditation a day and also start to practice compassion towards all as best you can – and of course *ALL* includes yourself first of all and most of all. There is no magic or quick solution to a life of trauma and struggle. But, there is a path that unfolds in your unique way, at your right time, and with your wisdom guiding you. Know that we all share that path with you in our one heart. Many blessings on your journey.

When you see a truck bearing down on you, by all means jump out of the way. But spend some time in meditation, too. Learning to deal with discomfort is the only way you'll be ready to handle the truck you didn't see.

- Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, "Mindfulness in Plain English"

From MD: Dear Dharma Friends and Compassion Works For All: I, along with other inmates, study Zen and Buddhism and we desire to start a meditation group. I personally come from a Christian background, but I've been into these other studies for almost three years.

I'm glad to see that Tucker has a meditation time and we shall be joining that effort at that time here. In being honest, I am more unlearned/uneducated than others here in matters of dharma and meditation. But, I have the focus and wherewithal to work at making a group time happen. So, I'm actively writing to find a "free world" person to come in once a week for an hour to facilitate and/or lead such a group. (This is the arrangement that a chaplain has said they'll need, along with at least three inmates each week coming to group)

I currently am in a Christian based program called PAL (principles in application for life) and I keep up my studies as well as meditation on Zen and Buddhism. I would like to see them support a multifaith (and even an atheist) ministry. Maybe that's my "big picture" as I seek a "true kinship of all faiths", as per the title of a new book by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

I have a pen pal through the San Francisco Zen Center and I desire their instruction from a skilled/knowledgeable teacher. In talking with other like-minded guys, I'm finding there is quite an interest in pursuing unity through diversity. I speak again of the multifaith aspect I seek to encourage here.

So finally, my question is this: is there any information you could find for us to help us start a meditation group? We do need a "free world" volunteer or volunteers who could come each week. (The date to meet is still to be determined)

We collectively have found addresses to some publishers, centers, even chaplains in other states, but our questioning of volunteers to date has been unproductive.

I can only ask "please" spread the word of our interests. I would also like for someone to share with the guys at Tucker that there are some here who will be joining them for their third Monday night of each month's meditation time. Thank you for all you do for prisoners. I am not completely indigent and can try to help with costs when I get money. Most of my money goes to books and writing materials. Please write back even if you cannot help us. I feel happy to be your dharma friend. Bowing in Gassho/ Namaste, Michael

A note back to Micheal – the hard part is finding a volunteer with the time and capacity to offer a group in a prison. But if you find a center or an individual who would like to help you, do let them know that we have some materials that might help. They can go to our web site:www.compassionworksforall.org and email us and we will happy to lend our guidance as we can.

What does the spring wind have in mind, coming day and night to these groves and gardens? It never asks who owns the peach and damson trees but blows away their crimson without a word. - Ch'i-chi, "Clouds Should Know Me By Now"

From P. M.: To Compassion Works for All/Dharma Friends-

Hello. I hope this letter finds you and everybody at **Dharma Friends** in wonderful spirits and in great health!

Thanks for all the years of "dedicated service". All these years spent inside prison wouldn't have been the same without you sharing dharma words. I have shared every **Dharma Friends** with our Buddhist collective here at the prison and everybody loves reading them. Thank you very much! Your kindness has opened the hearts of a lot of people here behind bars... And we are all grateful :-)..We are a small group of Buddhists who meet once a week to share dharma knowledge together. Next week will be 10 years since we had our first meeting here inside the prison. We discuss Buddhist subjects and how to change our daily lives together. We have all come a long way and hope to continue our journey for many years to come. I really appreciate your kindness and thoughtfulness. We here send our love and blessings. from Thubten Kunga Norbu

The one who is very attached to the cave of the body, that one finds detachment very difficult. Those who constantly crave for pleasure are hard to liberate and certainly cannot be liberated by others, only by themselves. Sometimes it is only death that brings a realization of endings, and then the sensual person, deeply immersed in the body, will shout: "What will happen to me after death?" The way toward liberation is to train yourself to live in the present without any wanting to become anything. Give up becoming this or that, live without cravings, and experience this present moment with full attention. Then you will not cringe at death nor seek for repeated birth. - Sutta Nipata

A letter from "Snake": Greetings friends. Thank you once again for another excellent issue of **Dharma Friends**. As always, Anna's insights on the **Dhammapada** were quite meaningful. What you said Anna; "to not let ourselves know the shadow, or the dark, our own evil, is to be caught blindsided when it manifests." This was one of the most truthful things I've heard expressed in a long time. To be unaware of it not only causes one to be blindsided by it when it manifests, but it causes folks to let it run rampant when it manifests because they never look to the root of its existence, therefore never feeling the need to stop its continuance. That's why we have some any evil scum bags running around on this planet. As far as "help" goes, I'm quite familiar with that subject, also. For decades I used to create my own hell and then carry it around with me 24/7. I was an extremely angry, bitter person. I made myself very unhappy and also most anyone who was around me. It's only been in recent history that I've turned all that around (with the aid from stuff I've learned in groups, Buddhist teachings, and the **Dharma Friends** newsletters and other stuff I've gotten from you all at **Dharma Friends**) and I'm a much happier person for it. I'm no longer living in hell (though I'm still living in prison at the moment.)

Anna, I also received that "certificate" that you sent to acknowledge my letters to Jeff's Kids. Thank you. It's always nice to hear when someone appreciates your efforts. :-) Speaking of Jeff's Kids, I'm in the process of writing a book that includes what I've been sharing with them, with a lot more in depth explanation. I'm hoping that I will find someone to publish it in the not too far off future. When I do, I'll make sure that Jeff gets lots of copies. :-)

I also have a couple of important questions (to me, anyway) that I'm wondering if someone could and would give me some insights on. (If you don't have the time to write, maybe you could address this in a future issue?) It's about forgiveness. I know that Anna got into this a couple issues ago, but I have some questions about the subject. (I wrote to Tim about it last month but he said he didn't feel qualified to answer.) When changing one's life around for the better, I always hear/read that forgiveness - especially of self - is a huge part of it. I've done things that I'm not proud of, and I could easily just forgive myself, if I believed it was/is what you see. What/who (in the universe) makes it all right for me to just forgive myself for anything? I wonder about this because, for years, I've watched total scum bags - child molesters and abusers, in particular - come to prison, start going to church, "get saved" or whatever. Then, as far as they're concerned, everything is just peachy now because "Jesus forgives them." I could understand this to a point, if any of them were actually going to change. But 99% have no intentions of stopping, ever. What gives them the right to feel all good about themselves because they are "forgiven"?! And I'm not a Christian. I'm a pagan, so I don't have the Jesus angle. I believe in the creator, but I don't believe that the cosmic consciousness gives forgiveness, or does forgive anything. So what gives me the right to forgive myself?

This goes with the subject of compassion and "judging". They are all tied up together. I've done a lot of work forgiving others and showing them compassion - at least a very tiny bit - in order to stop being such a bitter, hateful person like I used to be. "So," everyone says, "stop judging." There's the problem, and that's where I've been able to see eye to eye with Christians or Buddhists. I believe that "judging" is an extremely important part of survival and part of the battle between good and evil. I'm very judgmental and I believe 100% in my heart that I'm right. I've toned it down for my benefit, as I said above, but those that I believe are total scum bags are total scum bags. This includes child molesters, women and child abusers, rapists, those who are raping and destroying mother earth all in the name of greed, most reporters - who live off the pain of others, most lawyers, and just about every politician. Can anybody tell me that any of these aren't total pieces of dung? I work my compassion and forgiveness

by knowing and understanding that most of these people are like that because of emotional wounds that were inflicted on them. But that doesn't make them any less evil.

(ANNA'S THOUGHTS: Keep Meditating and the answers to your questions will come to you. No one else can give you these answers!)

My other question is about karma. I've often wondered, if I do something good or nice just to consciously rack up positive points in my karma, does that still count? I mean, you did something good, so that should count for something. But you consciously did it just to rack up good karma points, thereby lowering the altruistic value of what you did. Is it still good karma?

I hope someone will take the time to give some insight on these questions, especially the first part. It's been bothering me for a long time. In the end, I need to figure out my own answers on the subject, but I need insight from those who have been in there for a while to help me formulate my own beliefs. That's it for now. Take care all of you and keep up the good works. Bless it be, Snake

And here is a wisdom quote just for Snake!! *It is not by the amount that giving is productive of reward but rather by the generous impulse behind it. Therefore even so little as a handful of rice flour given with a pure heart becomes something that will bring great reward.* - Vimana Vatthu

Subscription information: We have gladly been offering this newsletter free of charge to those in prisons. We are 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*, please email annacoxar@gmail.com and we will put your name on our email list. If you need a paper copy, and if you are a family member of someone in prison, we will put you on our paper copy list. Send your information to **Compassion Works for All, Dharma Friends subscriptions, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, AR. 72217-7708.**

If anyone would like to make a donation that supports the almost 5,000 thousand paper copies that go out to those in prisons around the country, we are most appreciative of your help.

We 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.

From T.M.: Anna and Dharma Friends,

Peace unto you, yours and the rest of you who make up **Compassion Works For All**. Thank you for the tokens of appreciation for my letters to **Jeff's Kids**. Now, stop it. The only form of appreciation you need to show me is for Jeff to continue using them to offer a guiding hand to our future. Two very good reasons are to save resources you would spend on me as I know for a fact that CWFA has plenty of demands for the donations you take in. One example is the Spanish/English dictionaries. Because Texas is a predominantly Hispanic "minority majority" state, the ability to communicate in Spanish is of great value and my ambition for successful release includes self taught Spanish by exposure in the short time that is spent behind bars. The other good reason goes to the 'pleasure meditation' of a short while back. And I greatly enjoyed the Christmas card (ironic because you are Buddhists and I am Jewish) you sent thanking me after only my first letter, which includes everyone's signature.

I made a contract with myself to join in on the Dictionary Word Drop game, meaning a commitment of 12 months' worth of words. I also made a contract with myself to be a regular contributor to the Jeff's Kids outreach program. For that reason, since my first Word Drop exercise in January, it has been central to the theme of my Jeff's Kids letters, including what the dictionary has to say about it and how it has been used in my life, per rules of the Dictionary Drop game.

I greatly appreciated your plea for reduced hatred, profanity and other demonstrations of bitterness. ..(In writing to Jeff's Kids) I made it my mission to not only let them know that others of us have experienced various forms of abuse, been through foster and children's homes and horrors, but that some of us survived it, used our ability to survive to gain inner strengths such as patience and resolve, and provide them with hope for a better future rather than a prison cell. I also tried to pass on some of my methods of doing so, such as taking advantage of the library and being individuals, as opposed to joining into street and/ or prison gang mentalities.

My goal of the Dictionary Drop game is to simply complete another commitment. Until recently, fulfilling obligations was not too often expected out of me. My idea of a commitment was "I'll see about it" or "I'll try to". Lots of wiggle room there. If I get a certificate saying thank you after nine more entries, that is cool, but not too important. The fact that I have gone from a ninth grade dropout to notable essayist, motivated to peacefully shape society into one of responsibility, and that I picture a bright, wage earning future for myself, in spite of this life sentence for murder, is proof enough that I am a winner already.

I look forward to the April drop word to challenge my skills and my effort to help at least some of Jeff's Kids discover the joy of being a winner.

A final thought, I'm also a selling illustrator and kicking around an idea of donating that talent to a 'Thought for the Month' Jeff's Kids calendar for him to distribute to his charges. As I am perpetually indigent, it would have to be sent in installments. I can include three sheets worth of ready to copy, black and whites with some of my letter. Miscellaneous Thoughts would be a huge inspiration. I'll look over it again next week. May your days be diverse, T M

You are joining with other recent letters, T, where many offered various ideas about donating your art to help CWFA. THANK YOU. Many of you say that you are excellent artists and you would like to help **Compassion Works for All/Dharma Friends** and **Jeff's Kids** make some money. This would be great. LET'S GO FOR IT! If you have artwork that you would like to GIVE US with permission to sell it to fill our CWFA begging bowl, we would welcome it! Please send pieces that fit into an envelope without bending your work, if possible. SIGN your work, and include a paragraph of information about you such as your age, what prison you are in, how long you have been in prison, when, and if, you will get out, and any other information you would like to share. We will then feature your pieces with your name on our web site, show them at local art shows, or use them on cards or calendars. We thank you in advance for all of your donations.

the cartoon was sent by DY



From S.B: Thank you so much for the services you provide. It is especially wonderful that you recognize the unique needs of women. We are often overlooked, since we are a minority as an inmate population. May you be greatly blessed. With deep respect, S



Here is a letter that you can send to your loved ones if you wish. Hopefully, this invitation will benefit your important relationships and your families. It might be a drop starting off ripples and changing your family and maybe even dysfunctional communities.

Dear

Here in prison, I receive a monthly newsletter from Compassion Works for All called Dharma Friends. It offers support from ancient wisdom with which we explore our spiritual path, no matter what tradition someone follows. We learn meditation teachings, psychological and emotional healing, and we build a community between those in prison and those out in the world through letters.

Compassion Works for All encourages communication and healing of old family patterns and relationship issues with those I have left behind - like you. If we are both reading Dharma Friends issues, one way to support such discussions between us is to use the issues as a basis for our discussions. I welcome this opportunity to share such healing and growth talks and letters with you and would like to ask you to go to www.CompassionWorksForAll.org and sign up for the twice monthly emails that will bring you Dharma Friends newsletter and also the Compassion Works for All web site updates. There are lots of healing videos on the web site as well, some especially for those with family members and friends who are in prison.

I greatly regret that we are spending this time apart and the challenges that it imposes on our relationship. I also look forward to being able to use all of these traumatic events as a way to grow beyond the issues of our past and find a stronger healing that will benefit not only me and you but all those that we love.

Thank you for considering sharing Dharma Friends and this part of my life with me. I hope it helps you as much as it has helped me.

Love,

Compassion Works for All/ Dharma Friends
PO Box 7708
Little Rock, Arkansas 72217-7708
Webpage: www.CompassionWorksForAll.org

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photo by LO

A kind donor has offered to match all donations to Compassion Works for All.

If this doctrine is not understood thoroughly, the conception of an I prevails, hence come virtuous and non-virtuous actions which give rise to good and bad rebirths. Therefore, as long as the doctrine removing the conception of I is not known, take heed of the practices of giving, ethics, and patience. - Nagajuna, Precious Garland

Prison mailroom: Please return issues if inmate is no longer in your institution