

Compassion Works for All



Dharma Friends

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

October/November 2013 issue #197 copyright 2013, a project of Compassion Works for All

The Dhammapada
The teachings of the Buddha



Verse XI: OLD AGE

146. Why is there laughter? Why is there joy when the world is on fire? Since you are clouded in darkness should you not seek the light?

147. Gaze upon this once-decorated body –it used to attract attention but now it is only festering flesh, a putrid thing. It is neither sure nor substantial.

148. This body wears out with age; it becomes a host to disease– vulnerable, fragile, decrepit, a disintegrating mass which eventually ends in death.

149. What pleasure does life hold once one has seen old bleached bones, discarded and scattered round?

150. The physical body consists of bones covered with flesh and blood. Stored up inside it are decay and death, pride and malice.

151. Passed down by the wise is the knowledge that, though what is externally impressive loses its splendor, and though our bodies will decay, the truth itself outlasts all degeneration.

152. While ageing fools put on weight like oxen in their stalls, their minds remain small.

153 -154. For many lives I have wandered looking for, but not finding, the house-builder who caused my suffering. But now you are seen and you shall build no more. Your rafters are dislodged and the ridge-pole is broken. All craving is ended; my heart is as one with the unmade.

155. Those who, while still young, neither choose a life of renunciation nor earn a good living, end up like dejected old herons beside a pond without fish.

156. Those who, while still young, neither choose a life of renunciation nor earn a good living, will end up bemoaning the past, falling like spent arrows that have missed their mark.



Some thoughts about this *Dhammapada* Verse: Old Age

Age is important to most of us. We are shocked when we first begin to feel old. Grown up men prove they are still young by showing off their muscles just like little boys! At 30, and certainly at 55, we all begin to feel more limitations. It is a challenge when our body starts to fall apart. Many of us are fearful that aging means death. But for those of us with courage, aging leads us into a vaster view of who we are. We begin to dissolve that view that we are our bodies and we wonder who we might be after death. Some with the challenges of cancer or a life threatening illness take this step early. We hear from many who say that they gain an extraordinary wisdom through their illness. They grow on a fast track. But we will all die sooner or later, so let's look at what we face.

When we take on this major life task of dis-identifying with our bodies and expanding our view of who we may be, we find a delicate balance between living in and letting go of our body. We face the reality that we will leave our bodies behind and are on the path of discovering who we are beyond our bodies. As we do this process with awareness, we are finding out who we truly are and what we will take with us when we die. To gain this wisdom while we have a healthy body and mind, means we have the luxury to grow these wisdom teachings slowly and integrate them well. We can experience the meditative transcendence at a gentle pace and we can 'practice' leaving our bodies as we meditate and when we go to sleep each night. In this way, we learn to feel safe and comfortable out of our bodies and beyond our embodied identity. We temporarily 'visit' these realms of *All That Is*.

For some though, this can be a scary process. If we follow this path gradually, we are less likely to get lost in intellect and ego. We know from our own experience what we touch as we enter more subtle states of our being. We can get support from those a bit ahead of us on the path. We can learn to prepare for old age and death as our meditation. Even if death comes suddenly, long before we are aged, this preparation will help us if we are propelled from our body. We will leave with ease because we know clearly what is happening and what is coming.

In doing these meditation practices, we transcend our fear of death. Aches, pains and our body's struggles are our constant reminder that death is coming and they become our reminders to meditate more. There is no emergency or panic if we feel we are dying. We develop the capacity for resting in our aging with peace, harmony and clarity that will be with us when we die. This will definitely be of benefit to us. In whatever way our traditions or meditations have prepared us for death, we can continue our meditation throughout the process of death.

Our bodies are a great and beautiful gift. They allow us to have many beautiful, magical, miraculous tools to know life, ourselves and *All That Is*. Of course, we should honor our bodies by treating them healthfully. But we can grow in all that we are by watching death approach.

Remember to meditate every day on the thought: I could die today.



A MEDITATION – on Old Age

We all do this meditation each and every day whenever we look in the mirror. There we see a face and a body that is very different from the one we saw ten years ago or even a year ago. Each and every day our body has many cells that die away, replaced by those that have a little less zip! Do you see a few more wrinkles, a little gray hair or less hair, or a belly that is more pudgy and saggy? How do you feel about that?

Remember our meditation where we accept "what is" with equanimity and appreciation that *All Is Perfect?* Can you say that now as you gaze at that face in the mirror?

Old age is coming. Death is coming. Soon – at least within the next 100 years – none of us reading this page will be here in these bodies. Your body will be dead too. All that we think we are now will clearly not be who we will be then. And who is that that we will be when our body is dead? When we let go of all those ideas of how we should be, who we should be, and all that we are trying in vain to be, we can know *now* who we are and who we will be then. We can know who we are right now even while we live in this body. And that is our meditation.

Ask: *Who am I? Meditate on: Who am I when I am not my body? Who am I when I am not my personality? Who am I when I am not all that I have created in this life?*

All of this will be gone shortly, but you will still be. *Who are you in that state of subtle 'being'?*



From Your Letters

Dear readers,

***** We are trying to make sure our database is current. If you want to continue to receive *Dharma Friends*, let us know as soon as possible that you are at the address**

that we have and that you want to continue on our mailing list. Otherwise, we will remove you by our next issue. We want you in our *Dharma Friends* family but we have so many issues going into mailroom trash cans that we want our issues to go to people!

ALSO - 1. Please let us know your address changes as that costs us big \$\$\$ to send newsletters to those long gone..

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 us from reading every letter before passing it on.

3. Dictionary Drop Program - we are out of dictionaries so please use your library copies so that you can keep playing. Write with your definition each month and use the word in a paragraph. After twelve letters of definitions, you will get your certificate.

OUR DICTIONARY DROP WORD for October is 'dignity'

4. ART DONATIONS - if you would like to make art for us as a donation that *Dharma Friends* can use with your permission for cards and calendars or art exhibits, we would be thrilled. This will help with our finances and it also sends a positive message to those who think of prisoners in negative ways. Your talents will open eyes and hearts and keep all those in prisons from being invisible to the world. Please write on the back of your art piece: your name, your institution, and maybe a little about yourself. If you can mail it in a way that it is not folded, that preserves the beauty of your work. Thank you so much.

5. And thank you for those who are our volunteer Quote Masters in your facility that put our quotes up each month. Who knows how many lives might be changed by a few simple words. Please put this Bulletin Board Quote up on the day room bulletin board in your prison. Thanks for your help!

Bulletin Board Quote for October:

The Highest Form of Human Intelligence is to Observe Yourself Without Judgment. Krishnamurti

from **Dharma Friends**, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, Ar. 72217-7708.

FOR THOSE OF YOU GETTING YOUR GED: The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in your area is likely running a series of tutoring classes to help you get your GED. In Arkansas, the classes are at 5 AM each Monday and Wednesday morning. They recently started a new series of 39 episodes. Tune your TV to PBS to see if your local PBS station is carrying this series. If not, a note to the local PBS will get you more information. If you have someone at home to check out this link for you, or if someone at home is doing their GED, here is the description of each class and the date they will run.

This link, http://litlink.ket.org/gedlessons_descript.htm, provides a list and description of each episode

Once you have adopted such an attitude of infinite interconnectedness, you naturally want to liberate not just yourself but all beings from suffering. The Buddha calls this 'the conception of the spirit of enlightenment.' It is the soul of the Bodhisattva, the person who dedicates him-or herself to helping all beings achieve total happiness. When you open to the inevitability of your infinite interconnectedness with other sensitive beings, you develop compassion. You learn to feel empathy for them, to love them, to want their happiness. You want to keep them from suffering, and you do so just as if they were a part of you. You don't think your behavior makes you special. You don't congratulate yourself for helping others, just as you won't congratulate yourself for healing your own leg when you hurt it. It is natural for you to love your leg because it is one with you, and so it is natural for you to love others. You would certainly never harm another being. As the great Buddhist adapt Shantideva (8th century Indian sage) wrote, 'How wonderful it would be when all beings experience each other as limbs on the one body of life!'"

- Robert Thurman, professor, Columbia, in his book, *Infinite Life*

From Bruce Shuck: ...In prison practice we came to a place, in a fashion, after a while. A place of grace, giving yet found, where everything seems anew. Anything seems possible, beyond trial filled tears and extinguished the year's meeting what came, what me. We smile at things that once would have made blood boil cold in anger, devils stand in fear. We have grown in spiritual depth. We see it. Feel it, yet dare not claim it; for this movement it arises and states. Never kill its song with form. We wait, practice in it. ..

Every passing moment is a chance to turn it all around -Penelope Cruz to Tom Cruise in *Vanilla Sky* and submitted by Bruce Shuck

From Daniel Costa: Thank you to Kristopher for responding back to me concerning the addiction recovery program I put together here called, "**Path to Recovery**". Your "input" was "right on", and I already took your suggestion of changing the program name to "**Paths to Recovery**". The program is doing well with about 20 participants! We also have had a new Buddhist sangha started here at my unit. It has about 30 members! We are blessed to have some outside volunteers from FP sangha coming in. So a lot of positive things are happening here. Sad to say though, I'm probably going to be transferred from here by July of this year. But as you very well know, "Wherever we are, there we shall be!" And I will "Be" wherever God allows me to "Be" with a smile on my face and joy in my heart! I'm looking forward to the new opportunities that a "change" can bring! Once I get to where they will be transferring me, I will surely write to let you know my new address. I would still love to continue to get the *Dharma Friends* newsletter! Thanks!

Taking Care of Things

Realization needs to be actualized. And having realized the fact that there's no separation, an imperative arises to reach out to take care of things. That's compassion. We take care of things because everything is this very body and mind itself. - John Daido Looi, "Straight Ahead"

From Jonathan Miller: Dear **Dharma Friends**, I send my love and peace your way. It has been a long time since I have written yet I have been with you in meditation. I have regained my position spiritually as a peacemaker. The gods and angels are allowing it. The Buddhists encourage me and the Christians cheer me on. Peacemaking is a habit taught to me by my parents. My mother and

my father. I truly believe the spiritual authorities wanted me to come to prison to help people who truly need help along the way and yes, it is true that some people will take advantage of my kindness as nothing more than feeding their greed. But it's the act that I'd tried to pass along more so than the product. If I could teach someone who is always looking out for himself and nobody else to help others help themselves, or just lend a helping hand, then I've planted the seed that will grow to help many people hopefully. A little bit of kindness goes a long way. California just got the three strikes law adjusted so that nonviolent offenders can go back to court for resentencing. My neighbor has been down 16 years for burglary as his third strike. All he did was steal a fake pill prescription and he got popped. Three strikes - 25 to life. Well now he gets to go back to court. Of course it's gonna take years of paperwork to get there, but when he found out, he damn near had a nervous breakdown. He's trying to deal with the shock after 16 years of believing that he would never get out of prison to "I'm going home". He went and swallowed a piece of metal. It doesn't make any sense to me. If I got good news like that, I'd be happy as the dickens, but I would be scared! I would be afraid to mess up. I would be afraid of responsibility. I would be afraid of having to ask for help for real. I would worry about where would parole have me and all the legalities but I would still be so joyous. I have a life sentence but I'm so happy to see all these guys get a chance to go home. If I could get free, I would go to an ashram in New York where my sister and her kids live. My karma changes often but for the most part it has been good lately. I cast a *spell* on a guy to be peaceful. I'm a peacemaker and I noticed that dude was a lot calmer and more quiet today than before. The angels told me to write him a kyte and try to make friends with him. He really disliked me and I never even did nothing to the guy. He just didn't like me. So I'm trying to teach him that we are a community and we need to work together to be comfortable. He is a person that only takes care of himself but never is generous to anyone else. He wants everyone to give him stuff but he doesn't ever want to give anybody else anything. He's also very violent. So my challenge is to teach him to share and be more interested in people and poetry than money and fame and attention. It seems like he is always trying to prove himself to be macho and bad. There is constant disrespect and arguments and that stopped a little today. I try to keep positive and bring hopeful, wishful thinking. I get depressed for other people and a lot of the problems in prison is that a lot of people get to the point that they really don't care about much. I mean, it's one thing to be understanding but without compassion and concern for our fellow prisoners we're fighting a losing battle because we are fighting a battle everyone is in but we're fighting alone. All we got is each other when it all comes down to it. We have to deal with each other. There's no merit in making someone else miserable. There's no gain. The last thing you want in prison is pissed-off people around you. It would be wise to try and make the people around you happy and friendly spirited than to cause problems for them because then they become one for you, or for someone else and then there's the domino effect. The criminals you meet in prison are not the wisest because they got caught. Whatever they did to get caught or whatever they didn't do to get caught, they were caught. They did something wrong or didn't do something right. A wise person slows down. He looks at the bigger picture. I'm never going home so I might as well see how many people I could help that are around here, passing through or in it for the long haul. Our paths crossed and why not be happy all the time it and make life the best party it can be all the time. I see dudes in their cell all day writing song lyrics just to pass the time and make a song just to make it. I do it myself. I wrote a love song to my ex girl. "I got life in prison and cannot be with you but why not rejoice in the fact that we are still alive, I love you and I hope things are going good!" Accepting reality doesn't mean it has to be depressing just because you're in prison. We can still have relationships with people and that's what it's all about. Relationships, dealing with people and doing for others. It says this in the Bible. It's better to give than to receive. It is a joyous feeling to know you help someone else. I think it is. I'd rather make a friend than an enemy any day. Friends make you feel a lot more comfortable. Seek guidance from the god of kindness. Compassion is kindness and kindness is the way. I am in meditation with you and I want to be a part of the circle. Your friend.

From Stephen Stoeltje in his beautiful hand-crafted card... (from a Berlin Wall remnant) "Put a wall around me and I'll make it a wall of Peace, of beauty and I'll live in it in love and in freedom!"

"I will rebel
by my kindness
I will resist not evil
- but show evil goodness"

"I will be helpful
and a blessing to
those who curse...
and return mercy for hatred!"
I will give, share and be generous.
I will be at home
I will be still

I will be grace
(for I have received much)

"This is my resolve (less than a vow as I don't live it perfectly)
Yet, thus I pray and I practice."



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 possible, a \$30 donation would cover the cost of paper copies per year and would help our budget.**

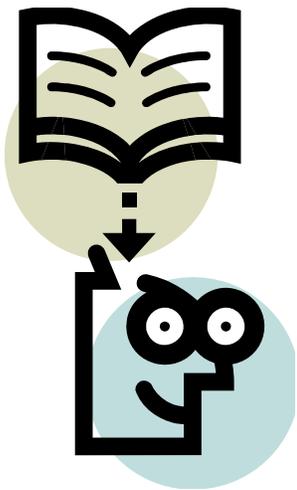
If anyone would like to make a donation that supports the almost 5,000 thousand paper copies that go out to those in prisons around the country, we are most appreciative of your help.

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.

I learned that it is the weak who are cruel, and that gentleness is to be expected only from the strong - Leo Rosten

From James Cabeen: I can see that I still have a very long way to go in certain areas in life (like being able to 'let go' and staying in the 'present moment') I was born and raised into a NORMAL AMERICAN dysfunctional school of thought. The achievement orientation and clinging to past regrets, anger and elaborate plans for tomorrow mindset. I really never experienced "the moment" or lasting peace or security. I am getting a small taste of those now with the Buddhist way and practice. I am joyfully welcoming it, even the smallest amounts. Very truly yours, a brother on the path !!!



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, CWFA is not able to offer these books)

Devil's Knot: The True Story of the West Memphis Three, by Mara Leveritt. Mara is one of our Compassion Works for All team and a magnificent investigative reporter. If it were not for Mara, it may well be that the case of Damien Echols, who was on death row, Jason Baldwin and Jessie Miskelly in Arkansas prisons would have disappeared like the thousands of others in the country when innocent people are incarcerated. Now, there is a movie about these West Memphis 3 showing at the Toronto Film Festival this week. Then it will be at theaters and soon on your TV movie stations. It is an important lesson about how it takes one person to speak out – convincingly, carefully, and again and again in order to right injustice. We are all very proud of Mara and grateful that our friends Damien, Jason and Jessie are free to live a long and happy life.

We continue to share the Path to Peace teachings of Shi Wuling written down by our dharma friend, Mr. Tron.

26. Gently and impartially comfort the uneasy, give selflessly to those who are in need, teach without reserve those who wish to learn.

27. Excessive desires lead us to put our own interests before those of others. They drain our goodness, pollute our hearts, immerse us in animosity.

28. Dreams fade, bubbles pop, dew evaporates, lightning ceases, nothing is permanent.

29. In the wise and gentle heart lies the strength to change the world.

30. Only when we have compassion for all beings will we have true peace.

My Path to Liberation by James Halbirt, prisoner

Each morning while the Earth revolves,
The light from darkness soon evolves,
My shadow lies from East to West,
And moves until I stop to rest,
Meditating along with the best.

Although this shadow does not last,
What kind of shadow do I cast,
On those who cross my path each day,
Desiring help along the way,
Keeping all manifesting evil karma at bay,
Accept it, endure it, and overcome it, I'd say.

Will taking refuge in the Life of Dharma,
Rest in the Sangha, a place safe and warm from the storm,
Will what I share be straight and true, to help others, safety,
make it through, Safe to practice for a enlightened day?

Will those in darkness see the light,
Meditating I choose to do it right,

Will the things I do and words I say,
Direct them to the only way,
To practice mindfulness, compassion and equanimity today?

When others fall on shifting sand,
Will I be there to lend a hand,
To lift them onto solid ground,
Where wisdom and constant safety can be found?

The Buddha shed his light on me, he told,
In the compassionate nature of the fold,
From a mind of ignorance and shame, he set me free,
The brightness finally cleansed and cast me fully in the mold.

Now in the nearness of my ensuing death,
I'll not be gravely concerned about the loss,
Of an Ego that caused the growth of moss,
As someone in my brightness can now stand,
You'll cross my path in the Sangha of helping hands,
Because the new brightness can overcome the darkness,
And be found in the true-self image cast by our new birth.

by Anthony Mario



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



Dharma Friends

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Additional Pages for EMAIL VERSION of *Dharma Friends*



COMPASSION WORKS

Join us for our monthly **Compassion Works** sessions if you are in Arkansas.

The sessions are the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 1 PM and the first Thursday at 6 PM at Fletcher Library.

The next sessions are September 17 at 1 PM, and October 3 at 6, and October 15 at 1.

Sessions are free, non-denominational and open to everyone.

We will add you to our email reminder list if you want information on times, dates and place, or you can go to www.CompassionWorksForAll.org/ and print out the schedule.

Compassion Works sessions offer a quiet experience of compassion. With a few gentle and guiding prompts, we will let go of the struggle, renew, heal, and send compassion into the world.

Then we head out again to live our question - How can I live compassion for myself and for all beings today?

(We also offer portions on videos and have a Compassion Works printout so that you can have an individual practice or you could start Compassion Works sessions in your locality. You can find these on our www.CompassionWorksForAll.org web site)

We also offer Introduction to Meditation Classes at the libraries.

They are free and sponsored by the libraries.

Here are the next classes on our schedule:

October 14 at the main library in downtown Little Rock at noon in the Lee Room on the 5th floor.

October 22 at 6 PM at Fletcher Library

November 11 at the downtown library at noon in the Lee Room on the 5th floor

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And we offer our 3rd Friday Night Art Walk in Argenta with art donated by our prisoners. Please come by on Friday night September 18 beginning about 5:30. We are a few doors in if you turn at the drug store at 4th and Main Street in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

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This last weekend of September, the 27-29th, will be our semi-annual Wattle Hollow Retreat.

We have a wonderful three days of individually evaluating our year's growth and self-awareness. Many participants come for each session and each time, we have new folks. This program is full but we will have another in the spring. If you want more information, check out the Wattle Hollow web site, www.wattlehollow.com, or consider doing an individual retreat at this beautiful Arkansas Ozarks setting.

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

We now have more of Linda Bessette's Mindful Money book – order here by emailing Linda. See address below...

and 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. The movie, West of Memphis is now showing and shortly, Devil's Knot (the MOVIE) is coming out too.

Email Linda (lbessette33@comcast.net) 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 available 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

Join us at our website - www.CompassionWorksForAll.com

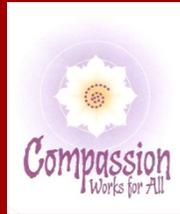
Check us out and help spread the news by emailing the site to your friends!

Along with informative and inspirational articles –

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

Compassion Works for All (formerly Dharma Friends Prison Outreach Project) is a non-profit interfaith organization that supports personal and spiritual healing for those who have experienced trauma and isolation, including outreach to those in prison. For more information, visit www.CompassionWorksforAll.org.

We teach compassion to change the world.



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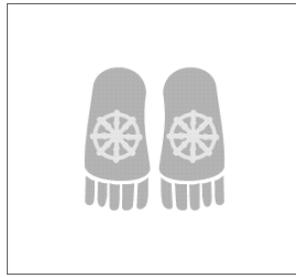
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ALL GIFTS DOUBLED THROUGH BY OUR MATCHING DONOR.

2012 Donation amount: \$ _____

2013 Pledged contributions: Monthly \$ _____ Quarterly \$ _____

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 free but donations are always most welcome. If you would prefer a hard copy, the subscription fee is \$30, but unfortunately it is not tax deductible because you receive a paper publication for your donation.



The whole of humanity is one human family. This planet is our only home. - His Holiness the Dalai Lama