



Compassion Works For All Dharma Friends

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

The Dhammapada the teachings of the Buddha Verse VII The Awakened One

90. There is no tension for those who have completed their journey and have become free from the distress of bondage.

91. Alert to the needs of the journey, those on the path of awareness, like swans, glide on, leaving behind their former resting places.

92. Just like birds that leave no tracks in the air, there are those whose minds do not cling to temptations that are offered to them. Their focus is the signless state of liberation, which to others is indiscernible.

93. There are those who are free from all obstructions; they do not worry about food, their focus is the signless state of liberation. Like birds flying through the air, trackless, they move on their way.

94. Like horses well-trained by their owners are those who have rightly tamed their senses; having freed their hearts from pride and pollution they generate all-pervading delight.

95. There are those who discover they can leave behind confused reactions and become patient as the earth; unmoved by anger, unshaken as a pillar, unperturbed as a clear and quiet pool.

96. Those who arrive at the state of perfect freedom through right understanding are unperturbed in body, speech or mind. They remain unshaken by life's vicissitudes.

97. Those who know the uncreated, who are free and stilled, who have discarded all craving, are the most worthy beings.

98. Whether in a forest, a town or open

country, delightful is the dwelling place of one now fully free.

99. Beings free from addiction to sensual pleasures know a unique form of delight. They seek quiet in forest retreats which worldly beings would avoid.

A teaching on the Awakened One

By Ellis Widner

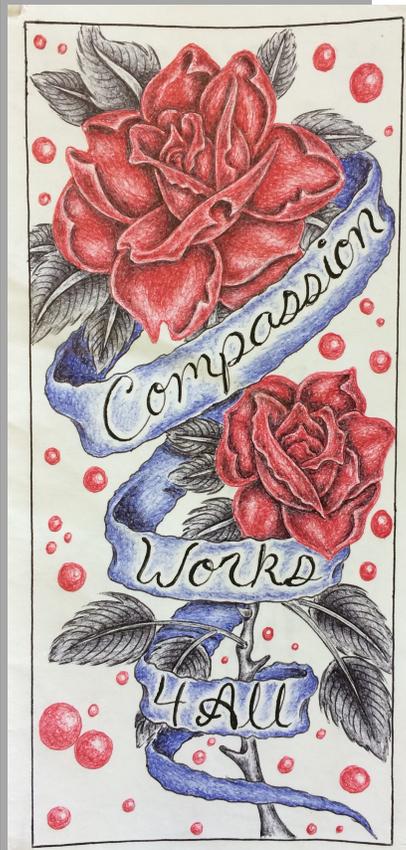
“Homage to Gautama, who, out of his compassion and mercy, taught the holy doctrine so as to eliminate all wrong views.” — Nagarjuna

As we read the verses of The Awakened One, we see, laid out before us, the result of the path to enlightenment and what we will be like when we become a conqueror of our self. We see what it is like to be truly free.

So this pure vision is laid out there for us and to our muddled mind, it can feel a little intimidating. OK, for me and maybe you, a lot intimidating.

We might think: Wow. This is really cool, really wonderful. But how am I gonna get *there*? ... especially when we consider who we are and where we are on the path — or if we're about to start a spiritual path.

But the Awakened One also shows us who we *really* are, who we can be. Still, the distance from our present self to that



Jonathan Martinez,
Arkansas

enlightened self seems to be so very far. Yet the teachers tell us it is our birthright — we can do this — because our pure nature is identical to and inseparable from the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Gautama Buddha (aka Shakyamuni Buddha) showed us just how true that is through the example of his human life and his very real struggle and determination to find the true nature of reality. We also see this time and again in the stories of Milarepa, Yeshe Tsogyal and many others.

So we have Buddha nature. The Buddha and the teachers say so. Then why aren't we enlightened?

We are stuck in our wrong views, rampaging emotions and habitual negative thoughts and behaviors. We cling to our hurts, our anger, our judgments and our fears for dear life. We tightly grasp the delusion of having an independent self that is separate from our wisdom and other beings. It is this delusion that gives birth to greed, envy, desire, anger, hatred.

“The Buddha is a powerful role model and inspiration for all of us.

His human life and his example became his teaching. The Buddha's story and the stories of all the enlightened ones show the path to liberation is one that takes faith, patience, courage and dedication.”

These are the very poisons that distance us from seeing and embracing our Buddha nature.

How do you get to realization? The Buddha and other enlightened beings didn't get there by just flipping a switch marked “enlightenment.”

They meditated, they prayed and they generated vast amounts of merit, which they dedicated to all sentient beings. They purified their negativities, overcame their own doubts and fears and realized their true nature ... the ultimate wisdom of enlightenment. So can we.

The Buddha is a powerful role model and inspiration for all of us. His human life and his example became his teaching. The Buddha's story and the stories of all the enlightened ones show the path to liberation is one that takes faith, patience,

courage and dedication. We have to have an aspiration for enlightenment.

In his quest to understand his own nature and the true reality of life, Shakyamuni Buddha left a very sheltered life and practiced many austerities, such as fasting to the point of nearing death. Through his experience, The Buddha recognized that the path free of extremes — the middle way — leads to true liberation. It is through his humanness, the power of his message comes through. This very compassionate seeker not only revealed the way to attain enlightenment, but also the way NOT to attain.

And, in these particular passages of the Dhammapada we read now, we can see the fruits of that path. The Awakened One shows us who the Buddha is and who we truly are by showing us the qualities of the enlightened nature and its presence in this world.

The teachings of the Buddha, many of which are contained in the pages of *The Dhammapada*, are the wish-fulfilling jewel of enlightenment.

And, as we continue the path, fully aware of our past and the consequences of the negative karma we've generated and determined to purify all our obscurations, we find hope and inspiration in this verse from The Awakened One:

“Those who arrive
at the state of perfect freedom
through right understanding
are unperturbed
in body, speech or mind.
They remain unshaken
by life's vicissitudes”

Just as Shakyamuni Buddha and others have done before us, we have to take each step ourselves. But each time we meditate, do our practice, pray for the happiness of all beings or do acts of kindness for others, we keep moving forward, getting closer to our true self. We feel our compassion for all beings grow. In our daily life, there are opportunities to be of benefit, to be kind. The merit we can generate is immeasurable. As we become more intimate with our true self, we can become as vast as the sky ... “patient as the earth; unmoved by anger” as we move toward “perfect freedom.”

So rather than feeling intimidated, let us feel encouraged and inspired. Like the lotus, which grows in mud and manifests

About the Author



Ellis Widner (Pema Dorje) is a student of Lama Dechen Yeshe Wangmo and Lama Tharchin Rinpoche. He is a founding member (along with Lama Wangmo) of the Jnanasukha Foundation, currently serving as vice president. Ellis leads the Daikini Heart Essence ngondro practice, assists with the Dudjom Tersar ngondro and co-leads the monthly Sakya practice at the Ecumenical Buddhist Society. He works as a features editor at the Arkansas Democrat Gazette.

a rare beauty and purity, let us boldly walk the path as we take responsibility to manifest our spiritual growth. The lotus is a metaphor for being in, but not of, the world. We can be in the world, not of it; know the truth of the world, the truth of our being and be of great benefit.

Through it all, the The Buddha is there for us. He is still in this world, lighting the path. As the Tibetan master and Nyingma scholar Mipham Rinpoche (1846-1912) wrote in *The Treasure of Blessings of the Ritual of Buddha*: “Whenever we think of Buddha, he is there.” And, “Whoever imagines Buddha, Buddha is sitting there, always giving blessings liberated from obscurations.”

A meditation from Ellis

Now, how do we get to that level of perfection? Through meditation and the blessings of the Buddha.

Begin with a few deep breaths to center yourself. As you breathe gently, feel the air flow in and out. Stay focused on your breath as you relax your shoulders and your entire body.

Visualize the Buddha sitting on a lotus in front of you, looking at you with love and compassion. Ask the Buddha to bless you. Feel the light of love and compassion radiating from the Buddha fill your body. Feel your connection to this supreme wisdom.

As you look at the Buddha, you are also seeing a reflection of your own pure wisdom nature. Say to yourself: "This is who I am."

Sit with this for a few moments, being mindful of your breath and staying relaxed.

The light from the Buddha's heart of love and compassion continues to shine to you. See that light of love and wisdom cutting through the darkness of your ignorance and delusion. Release your anger, your frustrations, your negative thoughts and see them dissolve into this healing light.

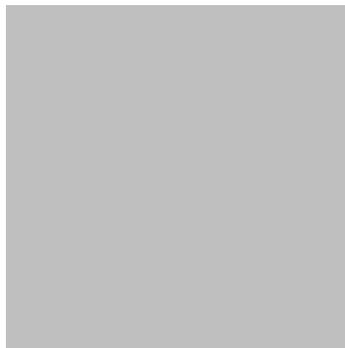
From your heart, the light of your pure wisdom nature begins to shine toward the Buddha. See the Buddha reflect that healing light back to you and to all beings.

Sit with this for a few moments as the light flows between you and The Buddha.

Then, your hands in prayer, bow your head toward the Buddha to express your respect and appreciation and ask that his blessings flow continuously to all sentient beings.

And so we continue our journey to liberation. We haven't realized our Buddha nature yet, but with meditation, our aspiration for liberation and the blessings of the Buddha, we begin to purify our obstacles and our negativity. We pray for the happiness of all beings and that they will be free of suffering.

Our Buddha nature will shine ever brighter as we continue to practice, to meditate, to pray for the well being and happiness of all sentient beings. Yes, we too can realize our Buddha nature and attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.



From your letters...

Justin C., Dayton, TX

Thank you very much for your response! I am so grateful for your kindness and generosity. I enjoy meditating on awareness; it truly brings its own unique calming essence. I can't begin to tell you how needed that is in this environment.

I have picked up on studying and practicing Buddhism over the past 2 months. With what bits and pieces I've been opened up to, I've come to believe I've found a wonderful thing. I've practiced a few faiths thus far, having good experiences, and meeting some loving individuals. This faith, this way of life, brings comfort to my heart. It is as if I've found something to align with which rests naturally and comfortably within my very being.

Through my recent studies I've discovered my biggest limitation, that being, lack of self-love. I have consciously and subconsciously put myself down most of my life. Deep down, I have been denying myself love. So now, I am working on removing that barrier. If I am to refuse unconditional love for anyone or anything, then I am refusing existence itself.

Please accompany and support me on the journey of this physical manifestation. Help me to look beyond the veil.



Davis Carpenter, Arkansas

Compassionate Communication Column

By Morgan Holladay

Unfortunately in our world, most people have experienced harm in their lives. For some, this can mean very serious traumatizing experiences like being sexually abused, neglected or physically abused. War, gang violence or growing up in violent neighborhoods, loss of a caregiver or close friend, physical injury like a car accident and drug or alcohol abuse are all examples of situations that can seriously harm us and cause us to build walls to protect our inner wisdom-self.

Our society tells us to apologize when we commit harm or to receive an apology if we are harmed. Saying, "I'm sorry" recognizes that one person was right and one person was wrong. This harks back to our **moralistic judgment** where we see the world as good or bad. Saying, "I'm sorry" is a quick and pretty painless way to admit fault and move on.

When one person apologizes for harm committed, this does not connect us to our shared needs and deepest inner wisdom. Remember that we each make decisions in every moment based on the resources that are available to us. Therefore, we must figure out a way to openly connect to others if we cause harm, rather than disconnect from them in a display of moralistic judgment, guilt, blame and sense of 'badness.'

Marshall Rosenberg – father of nonviolent communication – says that when we connect with our needs that drove us into a behavior that harmed someone, we can *mourn* for the ones we harmed and for ourselves. When we connect with our needs, we learn to feel deep compassion for our circumstances and the circumstances of others. We find patience and healing in this space of understanding, that we extend to ourselves when we harm and to others if we are harmed.

Likewise, when someone harms us, we can give them the opportunity to mourn and sit with the magnitude of the pain and

suffering that manifested, without expecting an apology or some form of "I was right and you were wrong" statement.

12.12.12.

By Brotha Knowledge-of-Self, AR

12 Years
12 Minutes
12 Witnesses.

Midnight is *upon* us
Death *becomes* us.

Suitable
Appropriate
Pleasing to the eye it may *seem*.
The State of Arkansas wears death like a fad, busting loose...at the seams.

A judge on a gurney
Protesters journey
Candle light vigils overcome by the darkness of death's yearning.

Midnight is upon us
Death *becomes* us.

Dark is the magic of Capital Punishment -- the state sanctioned sacrificial feeding of souls to the insatiable "Angel of Death."
Dark is the magic,
The beginning of woes even
For the "Angel of Death" is *never* full -- *always* hungry -- *eternally* eating.

12 *long years* coming to naught in just
12 *short minutes*?
12 citizen witnesses watching with widened eyes,
As Ledell Lee maintains his *innocence*...and closes his *own* eyes for the very last time?

A judge on a gurney?
Protesters journey?
Candlelight vigils overcome by the darkness of death's yearning?

Suitable?
Appropriate?
Pleasing to eye it may seem.

Midnight is upon us
Death *becomes* us.

Dark is the magic of Capital Punishment -- the state sanctioned sacrificial feeding of souls to the insatiable bowels of the Never Full -- Always Hungry "Angel of Death."
Dark is the magic,
And these are the signs of the time...
12.12.12.

Sending and Recovery

By Charles Y.,
Lucasville, OH

Breathing in,
Oxygen I consume
Which loving plants exude.
Breathing out, carbon-dioxide sent
For loving plants to use.

And so we dance
To the delight
Of the sun giving life
From all its radiant rays.
We give and take
Each and every day.

The purpose
Of our existence
Is reliance and assistance
To and from
All that is around us.

In this beauty
That surrounds us,
We are not alone
But all one.
Parts of the total sum.

If we wish to remain
From our harmful actions
We must refrain.
Contemplate and reflect
All of the effects
And their cause.
There is no immaturity
From natural law.

So please take heed,
Using only what you need
Leaving very little waste.
Mindful of every step you take
And the footprints left
In their wake.

"Illuminated," inspired by draw your feelings homework, issue 218



From: **Darren T., Tabor City, NC (art by Darren T.)** I wanted to write a quick thank you for the newsletters and offer you this drawing for the "Draw Your Feelings" homework.

The image of a seeing heart spontaneously occurred to me while meditating and it has recently come to my attention that the mantra: OM MANI PADME HUM, means "the jewel is in the lotus." The image of a seeing heart as the jewel of compassion rising from a blossoming lotus seemed appropriate for this mantra.

I chose the feeling, "illuminated" because this all came together in a flash of inspiration. A deep understanding of the importance of practicing compassion has stayed with me since. Thank you for the homework.

From: **Austin E., Norton, KS.** . . . I have always been through life very open-minded to religions and beliefs and have always found Buddhism quite interesting, yet sadly, I never looked deeply into it until my imprisonment. I was introduced to your newsletters over a year ago by a friend that shared his subscription with me and it caused me to gradually begin reading and studying more and more Buddhist literature. Finally, I have come to a point in my life where I am amazed and astounded at how much I see and feel Buddhism working in my life, and I wholeheartedly thank you for the role you played in helping me find my path!

Through my Enemy's Eyes

By Troy Chapman, MI

Sentenced to die in prison 16 years ago, I set out on a path to find and live within the truth. Having just turned 21, I had spent the past nine years on an insane roller coaster of addiction, violence, and despair. The death of another human being in a bar fight and my sentence of 60 - 90 years were the tragic and too-predictable end of the road I'd been traveling. In passing this sentence, the judge said, "There's no hope that you can ever be rehabilitated."

No hope. If he was right, there was no point in going on, and I quite logically considered taking my own life. But in the end, I determined that the judge could not be right and I would live. I don't mean I decided merely not to die, but to really be alive from the point on, to embrace life and find some meaning and truth I could live by and for. That was the beginning of a journey that would take me to a place I think of as the "third side."

It began with me. I had to honestly confront and condemn what I'd become,

what I'd done, and my whole perception of reality. I became obsessed with the question of what went wrong and how to set it right.

Over the next few years, I began to read - the Bible, Dostoyevsky, Gandhi, Camus, Dickens, Steinbeck - anything I could get my hands on. I took up meditation, began observing others and myself and writing down anything that seemed important.

I was being pulled by the future, but also, pushed by the past. My crime, and later my sentence, stood at the center of all my examinations. Slowly, I came to understand my need for redemption and true atonement. I realized that nothing could atone for what I'd become better than simply turning away from it with my whole being, and this is what I did. I repented in action. I changed. This decision opened up a new turn in my search for truth. I began to look outward again, to re-examine the world around me, but now I looked from this new place within myself.

It sounds as if these are two different pursuits - looking in and

looking out - but really they're not. Understanding community and my role in it was simply the next step in my own healing.

I wanted to know if the origins of my insanity were completely within myself or was I, at least in part, a product of a sick culture? Having confronted myself thoroughly, I could now ask that question objectively, not looking for excuses or trying to diminish my own accountability, but simply and sincerely, I looked for the truth.

I looked at many fellow prisoners, the insane things they'd done to get here. I looked at the prison itself, our "solution" to violence, and saw it to be just more of the same thing it was designed to respond to. I looked at the growing insanity outside prison, the despair, rage, addiction, denial, lies, and deceit.

more on **9**

Being with death

By Morgan Holladay

Many readers are following the news about the uptick in executions, especially the 8 scheduled executions in Arkansas over a 10 day period in April. Some of the people scheduled or executed are in our sangha, and all are part of our one human family. Compassion Works for All is based in Little Rock, Arkansas. Because of our connection to these men on death row, and our connection to sangha members around the country on death row, we want to honor and support this experience

Morgan spent the last day with Jack Jones and Marcel Williams, who were both executed on April 24, 2017. Jack Jones was a practicing Buddhist, so Morgan served as spiritual advisor to him. Here is what she wrote about that experience:

May this reflection bring peace and healing to those who read it. It is not my intention to cause harm or undermine anyone's experience. I am writing from my own heartfelt experience as a spiritual advisor to Jack Jones.

Jack was sitting on his bed at 10:30am when I arrived. He was taping a picture of his daughter into a carefully curated scrapbook. Jack is a phenomenal artist, and immediately I noticed all of his things were splattered with paint and transformed from the mundane prison-issued objects into works of art. Jack didn't look up when I arrived, but greeted me with warmth and told me he wanted to keep working on his photo project while I settled in. He was so casual about the whole thing, almost like I'd been with him all morning, and I'd just returned from a coffee break.

He looked a little sleepy, but was in good spirits. Jack began telling stories about his life - his childhood vacations, his cherished daughter who he just met for the first time in person the day before, his wife and boys, and a little about his Buddhist teacher Roshi. Sometimes Jack talked about the pain he

suffered as a child and young adult, but mostly he reflected on his gratitude for the kind and supportive people in his life. At some point Jack opened a bag of BBQ flavored sunflower seeds. He told me he preferred unflavored sunflower seeds, but broke into a huge smile as he recalled the times in his past that he chewed seeds while driving down country roads with friends. Each memory delighted and inspired him, and he took me through moments of his life steeped in lessons and friendship.

It was like this for some time - we had no agenda and nothing to do. We just sat with each other, Jack shifting positions on his bed, while I shifted my vantage through the vertical and criss crossed bars so I could see his face as he told me story after story.

The head chaplain came into our cramped nook to play a 12-minute recording from Jack's teacher, Roshi. I stood in the doorway, watching Jack while the chaplain sat in a chair, propping his phone as close to Jack's ear as possible, so he could listen to his teacher over the cacophony around us. Roshi made the recording days before, because he was unable to be with Jack on his last day. The recording was in Japanese, and Roshi's gruff, graceful cadence brought tears to Jack's eyes. I would later read Roshi's words out loud in English, but I didn't really need to. Jack was deeply stirred by the energy of his beloved teacher's voice, beyond cognition.

Periodically, Jack would holler at his cell-neighbor and friend, Marcel. He would say things like, "you got any more coffee?" and Marcel would happily respond, "pass me your cup!". The two exchanged coffee, sodas and candy bars all day. They teased each other, and then Jack would fondly reflect on his friendship with the person on the other side of the wall. The wall didn't seem to bother either because their entire friendship unfolded with a steel door between them.

Two things that I learned about Jack

over the two-day period that I met him and said goodbye - he was serious about taking responsibility for the harm he caused and he was intent to do no more harm from the moment that he came to prison. I didn't know Jack long enough to say whether this was how he lived his life while incarcerated, but I believe that it was his intention to practice nonharming until he drew his last breath.

One of the ways that Jack demonstrated accountability was to have a procedure before his execution to put stents in his veins. Because of his health conditions, prison administration was concerned that it would be difficult to find a vein while he was on the gurney. I waved goodbye to Jack at 2:16pm, he and I both expecting to reunite within an hour. Unfortunately, the procedure did not go as planned, as staff struggled to properly place the stents. I wouldn't see Jack again until 5pm, with only an hour and half left before he was wheeled to his execution. Jack's last hour was a flurry. He was heavily medicated, which made everything challenging. Being pressed by prison officials, Jack was told to eat quickly, put on his freshly starched whites, and write out his last words that would be given to the Press.

He wasn't allowed to eat his full meal. He was given a small portion of potato wedges and a melted cup of chocolate ice cream. Jack was disappointed, but he seemed to go with it. He shrugged and made his very best effort to eat and reflect on all that he wanted to say in his last moments to the world and to his victim's family about their loss. Jack continued to fade in and out of consciousness, and I'd gently and firmly call out his name to carry out these final tasks. Moments before I would be escorted to the witness room of the death chamber, Jack handed me his two beautifully decorated scrapbooks and the last of his commissary snacks with instructions

about who would receive each item. Jack's last words were succinct and lucid. Given the tremendous effort it took to keep him awake for more than 20 seconds while we prepared remarks, he clearly made tremendous effort to speak from his heart for two minutes. Jack Dainin Jones was pronounced dead at 7:20pm.

I came to Cummins to be the spiritual advisor for Jack Jones on his last day, but Jack underwent an unexpectedly long medical procedure the afternoon of his execution. While he was away, I poked my head in to say hello to Marcel. Like Jack, I had never met Marcel except for a brief interaction 4 days prior, but we had a profound experience that I'd like to share.

I heard Marcel long before I saw him that Monday. He and Jack were exchanging sodas and snacks (via the guards) and would banter back and forth. Jack would recall a memory once in awhile about a shared experienced living on the row, and Marcel would chime in with his version of events. Marcel had several visitors throughout the day, including his spiritual advisor. My understanding is that he is a longtime Catholic, and while I don't know his spiritual advisor, he appeared to be a wonderfully kind and caring person who sat vigil with Marcel diligently throughout the day.

Marcel was meeting with one of his attorneys when I decided to say hello. His response was something like, "I'm so happy you came to see me!! I've been hoping all day that you would visit!" He was genuine and cheerful, with a booming and vibrant voice.

After exchanging a few pleasantries, he jumped into the question: "I know you. How do I know you?" This was the same question he posed the week before, when we exchanged smiles and a few broken sentences through the cracks between the glass and steel walls of his cell.

"Have we met before?" I shook my head and told him no. He began crying, and described the experience that he was having. I cannot prove this or quantify it, but I believe that Marcel was having a deep spiritual awakening. I think he was seeing a reflection of himself as an openhearted, loving, compassionate person. As he settled, I suggested to him that he was falling in love with his own compassion-nature. Awestruck, he said to me, "I will meet you in another

lifetime." The *you* in his case, was himself. Marcel's past trauma has come to light through the diligent work of his attorneys and investigators. He endured pain and trauma that are unimaginable, and spent his childhood in fear, far beyond safety and security. Yet, in this moment, hours before his death, he tapped into an awakening that some of us may never experience. He experienced pure essence in his being, and he was totally alive!

To those who say that there are some people who are beyond repair or rehabilitation, I will simply point to Jack and Marcel - two humans who suffered unspeakable pain and committed extraordinary harm, yet they carried on, having both ordinary and transcendent human experiences. Jack's and Marcel's lives illustrate for us that pain and awakening are not mutually exclusive. We have each caused suffering for ourselves and others, yet we have potential for liberation, and for falling in love with our own compassion nature at any moment.

People with dates set on death row

Arkansas

Ledell Lee (executed April 20, 2017)

Jack Jones (executed April 24, 2017)

Marcel Williams (executed April 24, 2017)

Kenneth Williams (executed April 27, 2017)

Don Davis (on hold)

Jason McGehee (on hold, recommended for clemency)

Bruce Ward (on hold)

Stacey Johnson (on hold)

Ronald Phillips, Ohio (scheduled May 10, 2017)

Tilon Carter, Texas (scheduled May 16, 2017)

JW Ledford, Virginia (May 17, 2017)

Ivan Teleguz, Virginia, whose sentence was commuted to life

A prayer that you can say after someone's death, or to practice for your own death. If chanting in Tibetan, say the person's name at the end of the prayer. If chanting in English, you may substitute a name for "me" in the last line.



Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain Prayer

SANG GYAY KÜN GI NGO WO KA DRIN CHEN

Kindest one, essence of all buddhas

ORGYEN RINPOCHE LA SÖL WA DEP

Orgyen Rinpoche, to you I pray:

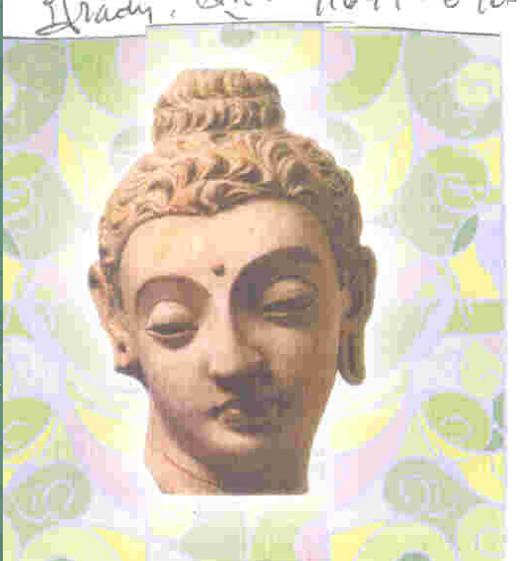
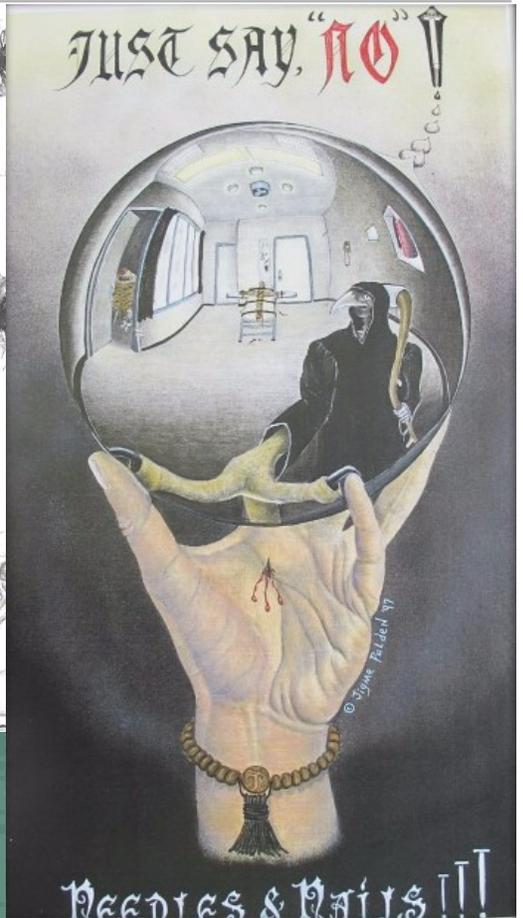
NAM SHIK TSAY DI NANG WAY NUP MA TAK

At the very moment when the appearances of this life fade

PLAY MA ÖD DU KYAY WAR JIN GYI LOP

Bless me to be born in the pure realm of Lotus Light

Written by Jnana (Dudjom Rinpoche) ©2017, Jnanasukha Foundation



Artists:

- Top left: Jack Jones, AR, executed 4/24/17
- Bottom left: Freddy Howell, CA
- Top right: Gene Perry, AR, executed 8/6/97
- Bottom center: Marcel Williams, AR, executed 4/24/17
- Bottom right: Jack Jones, AR

Enemy's Eyes cont...

And I knew that I couldn't maintain the integrity of any search without admitting that while something had definitely gone wrong in me, something was also very wrong in our culture. To deny or overlook this would be like finding hundreds of three-eyed toads in a pond and never thinking to check the pond for its contribution to the phenomenon. The individuals who are going spiritually insane in droves in our culture are not coming out of a void. As I began to wake up, I found myself concerned for these individuals and for us as a whole. I was developing social consciousness, which soon turned into social activism.

My activism was an extension of my spirituality. When I stood up for some cause, such as prisoners' rights, I felt it was an expression of morality. I "fought the system" by writing grievances, filing things in court, and writing the media. When my jailers retaliated by tearing up my cell, destroying my work, or transferring me to another prison, it wasn't something I liked, but I considered it a mark of my success and evidence of why I was fighting. I was a warrior on the "right" side of the matter.

This view served me for a while, giving me a sense of moral order. But my continuing inward growth demanded a corresponding outward growth - a change in my view of the world. It started with the recognition that my activism wasn't very different from my earlier anger. In fact, my anger had crept back in, only now it was wrapped up in the sense that I was doing good and fighting evil. I hadn't gotten rid of my anger at all, only justified it. I still had enemies, was still locked in opposition to them, and I still wanted to win, to destroy them. I'd moved from seeking my enemies' physical destruction to seeking political, intellectual, social, and philosophic destruction, but it was still about enemies. My activism, like my previous thinking, was very dualistic.

Over time, this dualism gave way to my hunger for simple goodness. The catalyst for this change was nothing more noble than exhaustion. I was simply tired of being angry all the time, tired of waking up every morning to a battle. I needed some rest. This need led me away from easy moral certitude. I developed the ability to see things through the eyes of my enemies. I saw in them the same fear that

had so long governed me. The same confusion, the same grasping for security, the same hunger for love. I saw their humanity, and this ruined me as a warrior.

When a warrior begins to see the enemy as a human being, he begins to hesitate, to wonder if there's another way than war. He is no longer fit for battle and if he doesn't leave the field, he will be taken from it by the very people he sympathizes with.

But is this the end of activism? For a while I thought it was, for who can be an activist without decisively taking sides? How could I fight against prisons when I empathized with the jailers?

I knew that if I'd been in their circumstance I would probably have done the same thing. If things had been different and I'd ended up being Joe Citizen instead of Joe Criminal, I would not have exhibited any more wisdom, foresight and sense of the big picture than these prison builders. I knew that in some sense, they were me.

I had arrived at the third side.

I had spent most of my life splitting the world up into two sides, then fighting to defend one against the other. It was a game in which there were strategies, a clear objective, a field of play, and an opponent. The game has rules and no matter which side we're on, we're bound by the rules. The poet Rumi pointed to something beyond this game when he said, "Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing, and right-doing there is a field. I'll meet you there."

When I began to see myself in others - even in my enemies - I found myself heading for Rumi's field. Here the game is not a game. No one wins unless and until everyone wins. The line between victim and perpetrator no longer runs between "I" and "Other." It now runs right through the center of my soul. I am both, as we are all both.

What then is left to fight for? Where does an out of work activist go? God is hiring, and God is on the side. Not the prisoner's or the jailer's side. Not the pro-choice or the pro-life-side. Not the Left or the Right.

The third side is that little-represented side of healing. It's the side that cares as much about the enemy as the friend, that says love is the only justice, the only victory there is. It does not want anyone

destroyed. It does not want to win if someone else must lose. It wants something much larger than winning and losing.

But what's larger than winning? Especially when we're fighting for the "right" cause? Well, I've watched the game of winning and losing from both the inside and the outside. From inside, each win seems like a step forward, but when we get outside the game we see that it's circular. People have been playing this game forever, yet good isn't any more pervasive in our world than it was a thousand years ago. "Activists" back then certainly thought the "big win" was just around the bend. They believed we're moving forward, just as a hamster inside a wire wheel believes he is moving forward.

But where is the evidence? Do our Right/Left debates ever produce anything useful to Humanity? Is it really the "enemy's" fault that the world is in the shape it's in, or is it partly our fault? What's the motive behind our activism? Is it truly a love of goodness or do we engage in battle in order to distract ourselves from the hard work of love, from the bitter pill of looking at ourselves?

Asking myself these questions, I realized that enemies always serve a purpose.

The war relationship is a symbiotic one in which the enemy on one side serves some need within the enemy on the other side, even while both protest this fact and claim they only fight because they have no choice.

I realized I do have a choice. *Indeed, the freedom to choose how to respond may be the only total freedom we have.* The world outside isn't within our control, but this freedom always is.

One of the first times I exercised this control, a man was trying to walk me off the sidewalk. This is common in prison as scared and angry young men try to show how tough they are.

Having dealt with similar situations for years, I'd always seen them in terms of two choices: back down or go on the offensive. This time another option suddenly occurred to me.

I still remember the confusion in

the man's eyes as I stepped off the sidewalk, touched his elbow, and said, "How's it going?" I stepped aside, but I didn't back off. I engaged him, but on a different playing field. He was at a loss and simply mumbled some reply and kept walking.

But I had told him in a language we both understood, "I have no need for an enemy," and I've been telling the world that ever since. Whenever I catch myself thinking of someone as an enemy, I ask, "What in me am I trying to avoid or distract myself from?" Inevitably I find my own impotence, my own frustrations, my insignificance, my sense that nothing I do will ever really matter. Ultimately, I find my own mortality and the seeming futility of most human endeavor. I find my own self-absorption, my resistance to setting myself aside and truly caring about the other.

Does this mean that I have no work to do but inner work? Not at all, but it does mean that I must face myself. Part of facing myself is responding to the injustice and destruction of our world. Why? Because it's mine, and that is really the essence of the third side, we must truly own it. To step to the third side we must truly own those aspects of our world that we hate most.

Will war, violence, injustice, greed, and all the rest magically disappear if we own them and embrace this kind of activism? I can only say this: they will end in me. I will continue to step off the sidewalk, but I won't avert my eyes. Quite the contrary. I will confront you with a bigger vision of your own humanity. I will throw hope in the face of the enemy, and I will subvert anger with sanity and humor.

I have no delusions that pie-in-the-sky "love" will change our world. If I know anything from my years in prison, it's that evil is a real thing. However, we explain theologically or philosophically, there is behavior that is toxic to the planet and to other human beings and it must be dealt with. I'm not talking about giving those who act out this behavior a hug, then calling it good. That's old-style "liberalism," and it's been as destructive to our world as its now popular counterpart, so-called conservatism. These two represent a

false choice between ineffective permissiveness and arrogant intolerance.

We can and must move beyond such false choices to a place where love and justice not only balance one another, but are, in fact, one thing. A place where confrontation and good will even good humor sit together comfortably; where holding people accountable is considered a compliment not an opposite, to helping them. The only conflict between these many "opposites" is within our own minds, and that is where reconciliation must occur.

With each inner reconciliation we create a new option, a third option where before there were only two, locked in eternal conflict. We create, then are able to stand on, the third side.

About the Author

Troy Chapman, is a writer, artist, and songwriter currently incarcerated in MI. Troy has committed his life to showing love, giving unconditionally and to justice. Troy published a book called "Stepping Up: Wholeness Ethics for Prisoners and Those Who Care about Them."

To my brothers and sisters @ Compassion Works For All, NAMASTE !!! It has been a while since I have written, but because of my laxness does not mean I have not thought of you all. I am getting ready for the streets. I came in just when the internet and cell phones. I am completely ignorant, but this one thing that I do know about is my health. And all of you should know too! One of the things I want to say is: "forget the tv, forget cards, and put down that book once in awhile."

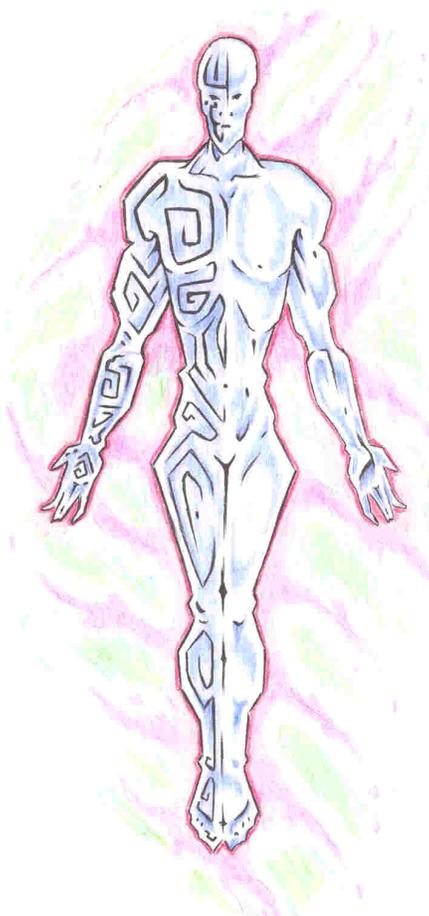
I just had a big scare! I was in a fight ended up w/ a ruptured spleen. While I was in the hospital that injury repaired, the doctor came in and told me that he "had some bad news." When I was a younger man, I was a very big drug consumer. Now, I'm an older guy, and have cirrhosis of my liver. I'm stage II and I also had a mass

in my right lobe of the organ - cancer.

The one thing we need to do is to be vigilant about our health-care. As we get older, our bodies start to break down. We need to eat healthier, exercise, and be proactive in our health care. Don't just believe what the unit doctor says, if there is a problem, we need to let the "RIGHT" people know. We are a Dharma group and need to be there for all of the others who are part of the Sangha. Stay strong and know there are people who care about you & I will keep in touch w/ the Sangha in the future. In the Dharma, **Losang Tharpia, Stockton, CA**

A resource to keep up with your health while incarcerated:

**Prison Health News
Philadelphia FIGHT
1233 Locust Street, 3rd Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107**



Art by Eric Nance, executed November 2005

A letter you can send to your loved ones

Dear

Here in prison, I receive a bimonthly 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 emails that will bring you ***Dharma Friends*** newsletter and other news about prison issues. There are lots of healing videos on the website 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,

If you write to us, here are a few thoughts:

We greatly appreciate your art donations! If you would like to send art to us for calendars, art exhibits, cards, or to be displayed in *Dharma Friends*, we will cherish it. Know that you are giving us permission to use your art, and we cannot return it. There is great benefit for us, and you are contributing to letting the world know the talent and sensitive beings who live behind bars. We want to help make you visible to society! **Please write your name, title of the art, and address on the back of your art piece.**

ASK TIM - Tim answers letters asking for help with those things that we know

you cannot do in prison. Tim looks up resources, but there are a few things he cannot do: Tim is not qualified to counsel about personal and/or relationship problems. Money or 'things' will never be given to any writer. We will not provide addresses of individuals in the free world to anyone. We cannot provide information obtained from Facebook or other social media websites.

Become the **Quote Master** for your unit! We offer a quote in each *Dharma Friends* to post on your bulletin board in your barrack. Who knows who might be inspired?



Iris of Spring, by Scott Arends, CO

Subscription information for *Dharma Friends* newsletter

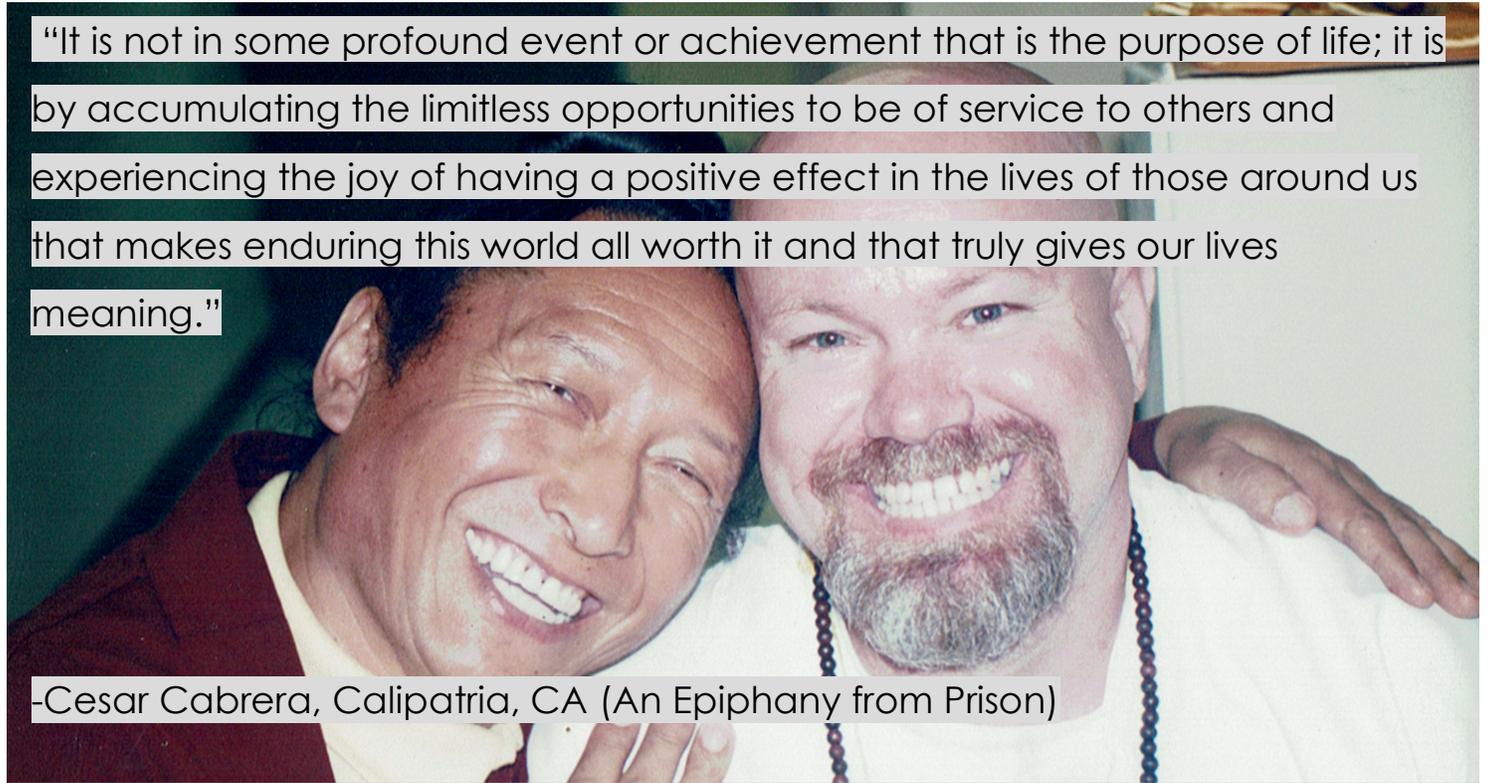
We are encouraging people to sign up for this newsletter free of charge to those in prisons and jails. Please write to us at:

Compassion Works for All, attn.: Dharma Friends Subscriptions, PO Box 7708, Little Rock, AR 72217-7708 to join our mailing list. 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 life 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 mholladay@compassionarkansas.org.

*** Please let us know if your address changes ***

Include your old and new address

“It is not in some profound event or achievement that is the purpose of life; it is by accumulating the limitless opportunities to be of service to others and experiencing the joy of having a positive effect in the lives of those around us that makes enduring this world all worth it and that truly gives our lives meaning.”



-Cesar Cabrera, Calipatria, CA (An Epiphany from Prison)

Photo: Lama Tharchin Rinpoche (left) with Jusan Fudo Sifu (Frankie Parker), executed 1996

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