

"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is tied up with mine, then let us work together."

Lilla Watson, Aboriginal activist



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The Dharma of Death

When Siddhartha Gotama was a young man, he was sheltered from the unpleasant realities of life. One story relates that on the occasion of watching men plow a field, the young prince was disturbed greatly by the sight of birds swooping down to devour insects. This was one of the first times young Siddhartha contemplated suffering, but it was not until he witnessed the Four Sights that he was so moved that he set out on the path that would lead ultimately to his Enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree. One of those Four Sights was death.

How often have we stopped to consider that without death, we might have no Buddha...that without the knowledge of loss we might never find salvation?

As awful as the death of a loved one can be for us, as Buddhists we owe a debt of gratitude to death for motivating Siddhartha Gotama.

The Buddha spent most of his life helping others toward salvation from all manner of suffering, including the suffering that accompanies death. The following parable is often repeated in Buddhist circles:

Kisa Gotami had an only son, and he died. In her grief she carried the dead child to all her neighbors, asking them for medicine, and the people said: "She has lost her senses. The boy is dead. At length Kisa Gotami met a man who replied to her request: "I cannot give thee medicine for thy child, but I know a physician who can." The girl said: "Pray tell me, sir; who is it?" And the man replied: "Go to Sakyamuni, the Buddha."

Kisa Gotami repaired to the Buddha and cried: "Lord and Master, give me the medicine that will cure my boy." The Buddha answered: "I want a handful of mustard-seed." And when the girl in her joy promised to procure it, the Buddha added: "The mustard-seed must be taken from a house where no one has lost a child, husband, parent, or friend." Poor Kisa Gotami now went from house to house, and the people pitied her and said: "Here is mustard-seed; take it!" But when she asked Did a son or daughter, a father or mother, die in your family?" They answered her: "Alas the living are few, but the dead are many. Do not remind us of our deepest grief." And there was no house but some beloved one had died in it.

Kisa Gotami became weary and hopeless, and sat down at the wayside, watching the lights of the city, as they flickered up and were extinguished again. At last the darkness of the night reigned everywhere. And she considered the fate of men, that their lives flicker up and are extinguished. And she thought to herself: "How selfish am I in my grief! Death is common to all; yet in this valley of desolation there is a path that leads him to immortality who has surrendered all selfishness."

Putting away the selfishness of her affection for her child, Kisa Gotami had the dead body buried in the forest. Returning to the Buddha, she took refuge in him and found comfort in the Dharma, which is a balm that will soothe all the pains of our troubled hearts.¹

There are few lessons harder than this, and Kisa Gotami is courageous. She resists despair, anger, denial...she is a very human character in this parable, and she shows us that even in the darkest hour there is potential for realizations that can set us free, that can defeat delusion, that can conquer death, if only we will remain open to them.

-Shoshin

¹ Internet Sacred Text Archive. 15 March 2006. <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/btg/btg85.htm>>



Recollections of Dan Sealock, Our Brother in the Dharma

by Kalen

I. Who Dan Sealock Was:

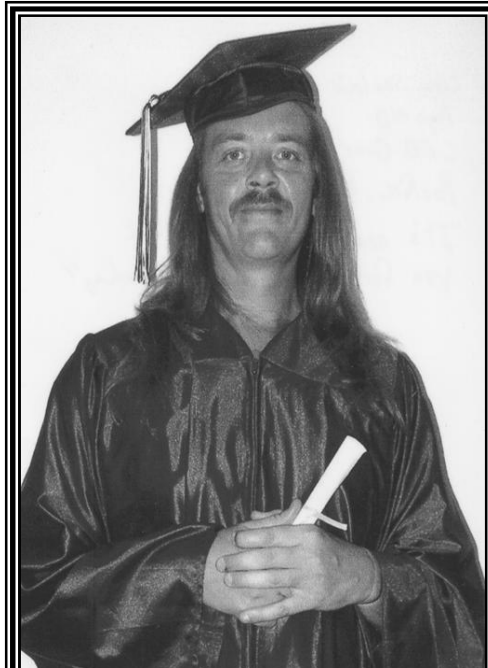
This is a story about Dan...There was a problem at his apartment building - at the other end from where he was living. A huge water leak caused the electric wires to spark, etc. The fire department, police, etc. came. They stopped the water but had to condemn that side of the building. The only one living there was an old blind man who had lived there "forever". The new owners of the building apparently had been working with social agencies trying to get him help and letting him live there rent free. The police, fire department, etc. wanted to take this man to a homeless shelter for the night.

Dan stepped in and offered his apartment. This is incredible but is even more incredible when you think about this older blind man who confessed to Dan that he hadn't had a bath in five years. Dan reported that he smelled awful. His apartment was filled with trash bags as this man couldn't take them down to the trash. The bathtub had trash bags stacked over 6 feet high as well as the kitchen. The building inspector said he would have condemned the apartment if he would have seen this beforehand. It was really bad.

Dan took this man to his apartment and gave him his bed for the night. Dan plans on cleaning his apartment from floor to ceiling after the man leaves. The next day the social agencies finally showed up. The landlady gave this man a newly renovated apartment and the social agencies are "still working on it."

In the meantime, Dan showered the man and gave him some of his clothes, towels, etc. and moved him into the apartment. He called Inside Dharma to ask for some furniture which we will donate to him.

I don't know if I could have put someone in this condition in my very own bed. Think about it! I might have got some money and took him to a hotel, but I don't think I could have dealt with it as Dan did. Hats off to Dan!



Last September *Inside Dharma* published this picture of Dan Sealock after he had earned his GED. We quoted Dan as saying, "It's never too late."

II. Dan's Passing, February 24/25th:

When Dan came to our group at Bowling Green prison he had cancer and expected to die. However, through his sitting practice and change of views, he suddenly was in remission. When I first heard he died, I thought he probably had a heart attack. He's been working very hard trying to do everything to earn money and make a new start.

Then, after the police examined the body, they found that he probably died of an overdose. He was shooting up again, apparently.

My tears turned to anger for a few moments. How could he possibly destroy that wonderful person he was! And then I thought - I am clinging - desiring something to be other than what it was.

He seemed to be doing so well. His apartment was fixed up nice - he had a job he was starting next month - he had worked some and had spending money - he was actually enjoying taking care of "his little buddy (the blind man)".

And yet, Dan was obviously in very much pain. And he turned to something he felt could immediately eliminate this pain. He didn't see other choices or felt like he couldn't bear the wait. Like all of us have done, he returned to something he knew. I feel the overdose was an accident and not the intention.

The last time I saw him he was full of life and eagerly planning the future.

I will miss Dan very much. I can still hear his voice and see his funny half-laugh. He touched me deeply as he did the old man, and probably many others. He was from New

Orleans - odd this happened on MadiGras. His life gave to many others so it was a good life indeed.

A reminder that we all suffer so much! And isn't Buddha's teaching about "unconditional peace"?

III. Lessons

Usually we want to run away from something hard. I felt that way about cleaning Dan's apartment today. But in Zen teachings, you're supposed to "embrace" whatever it is in front of you. Spending time going through Dan's stuff really helped with finding a closure for me.

For one thing, it confirmed that he didn't intentionally kill himself - it was an accident. He was in process of cooking dinner - oven was on all weekend. Rice was cooked and ready to serve, etc.

But also, I saw another side of this person, a side that couldn't give up drugs and would go to any length to stay high.

Like everyone, he was an iceberg - a little showing above the water, and the largest mass unseen.

I understand how painful it is to lose someone because they are in such pain. I understand how such pain can color their world and they don't even see how they are harming others.

I also see the child that is suffering and trying to just get by. The years of hurt.

I saw the pride he had when he received his G.E.D. - many pictures of him in cap and gown, and his tassel was very prominent in his life.

I saw the lies he lived and how he passed many off to others. How these lies hurt others and continued to ripple outward.

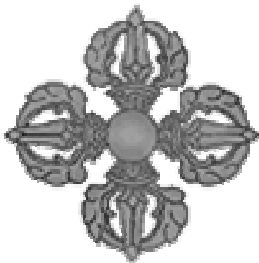
I saw the beauty in the friendship he formed with the blind man he rescued.

I saw the sadness in this loss for the blind man. I saw Julia step in to help and this ripple continues outward.

Like everyone, he was an iceberg - a little showing above the water, and the largest mass unseen.

How precious is life and how short sometimes. I bow to all of you!

Kalen



Doubting my Buddha Nature by James Pate, Farmington, MO

I am in an institution, alone, practicing to be awakened to my inner nature. Almost every day I pose a simple and profound question to myself: Do I really trust I am a Buddha? My usual response is "Absolutely....sometimes."

I slip off in this trance when I realize I am among others who practice different spirituality, and they are more in the company of each other, while I practice alone, so there is no one to give me feedback about where I am, and about what I am doing to make change.

I am a judgmental person running a constant commentary in my mind about how others appear and behave.

Wishing to become more mindful of this persistent illusion of being a small self, I periodically ask myself: Who am I taking myself to be?

While not always intense, some feelings of fear and separation are always present.

Acknowledging and allowing the very immediate pain of self-doubt, I begin to feel more real and awake, and as minutes pass, I feel myself returning to a caring and open awareness.

Stephen L. Cardwell of Wildmind Meditation Services would like to announce:

We have produced tapes (specially designed for prisons) on guided meditations for donation to prisoners.

We have produced 500 tapes for donation.

These guided meditations tapes have **Mindfulness of Breathing** and **Development of Loving Kindness** (metta bhavana), which are led by and produced by Bodhipaksa, founder of Wildmind Meditation Services.

The tapes are free. Simply contact Kalen, or write to **Inside Dharma** at

P.O. Box 220721
Kirkwood, Missouri
63122

We Are Who We Are Now

by Robert Kirk, Bowling Green, MO

I've heard the expression "I think, therefore I am," but I don't believe it. Maybe it's true for the present moment, but the present comes and goes in seconds, or less. Some say that our actions and the choices we've made in the past define who we are now, but I don't believe that either. We aren't what we want to be in the future because it hasn't happened, nor should we think of ourselves as what we have done in the past because it already happened. What is happening, though, is now.

In all actuality we don't need the past, nor should we dwell on it. For one reason, it's a bad habit, and for another, it is not essential. We don't even need the past for wisdom. For example, if we were to experience something with an outcome we didn't like, we would learn not to do it again, or anything to the effect of that again, and that lesson would stay with us until the day we die. So there's no reason to dwell on the experience of the past. Besides, the past is nothing more than a reflection. If somebody wanted to learn something about you from some time ago, there's no harm in telling your history, but it is not necessary. In fact, speaking of the past for a casual conversation is fruitless talk.

Quotable:

"If a person doesn't change inside, it doesn't matter where they go. They can go to the moon, and if they haven't changed inside, they'll be the first person on the moon in jail."

Darnell Jackson
Wisconsin Secure Program Facility
Contributed by Tonen

Letting Go of Attachments

By Leighton Bates, Ontario, Oregon

For several months now I have been watching how the attachments in my life affect me from day to day. I have also reviewed how those attachments have had an effect on my past and my future.

I have been in prison most of my life, having come to prison at the tender age of eighteen, very miserable and frightened and full of attachments. I remember my first day in prison, and how my attachment to food almost killed me!

I had been living in the county jail for six months prior to coming to the state prison. In the county jail all of the food was either cooked to a mush or a fine paste. There was hardly much solid food, so I had grown used to gulping down my meals.

The day that I arrived in prison they just happened to be serving chuck steak, potatoes and gravy, along with rolls and apple pie. I remember them rolling in the food cart to where I was being processed. The food looked and smelled so good that my mouth started to water like Pavlov's dog!

As soon as they served me my tray I started shoveling food into my mouth and cutting up that chuck steak. As soon as I had a piece cut, I shoved it into my mouth and swallowed it...Well, I tried to swallow it, but it became lodged in my airway and I could not breathe!

I really had not been thinking about the eating habits that I had picked up in the county jail. Rather, I was only concerned with the wonderful food and getting as much of it in my belly as I could.

I started to panic. I stood up and pointed to my throat and pounded on my chest while looking at the guard, who was looking at me like I had gone insane and was going to attack him. He did not realize that I was choking!

Just about the time that I had decided to run myself into a wall to try to dislodge the meat stuck in my throat, I swallowed it!

I stood there for a minute or two just breathing in deeply and enjoying the fact that I would live. After a bit I started in on my meal again, but I was so cautious about choking again that I really did not enjoy the rest of my meal.

For nearly six years we had the same meal on Wednesdays. I always made sure that I chewed my steak thoroughly so as to avoid choking. I was constantly reminded how my attachment and greed around consuming food nearly cost me my life. Even today many years later, I find myself trying to bring solace into my life by consuming food, and it is usually food that is not good for me. I keep thinking that if I full my belly with good tasting food that I will be happy, yet once my belly is full all I feel is a bellyache.

It may just be my perception, but those of us in prison seem to be so much more attached to things than those on the outside, be it canteen items, mail, or loved ones who visit, we attach ourselves and hang on to them as though our very lives depend on them.

I remember times in the past when my entire mood for the day was set on whether I had received any mail from my wife. Oh and if my wife did not tell me that she loved me in her letter, I would be devastated. I would go around for days at a time angry at anyone and anything that stepped into my world.

Even today, many years after, I find myself anticipating each day as to what kind of mail I will get, who has sent it, and why. I am not discouraged by this. I realize that it

is attachment, but I am working on that. I am no longer devastated to the point of anger, and I always remind myself that I don't need mail to be happy. When I am able to let go completely, I pat myself on the back and move on. More often than not, though, I find myself rocking back and forth on me feet, anticipating mail call when it comes around each day. However each time I let go of something that I am attached to, I reinforce that good quality of non-attachment, and the more I let go, the stronger I will be to let go quicker the next time. Eventually I will not be attached to the mail, the persons I care about, or anything else. I will have found that equipoise, that balance that Lord Buddha teaches that is all-important, where I am not attached yet not disinterested, where I am balanced in my feelings and thoughts toward all things.

I often wonder when I am looking at my attachments and things of that nature about how it all begins. How does a person become attached? How do we get those wrong views and distorted beliefs? If we are not born with them, where do they come from?

I am sure that it comes through our thoughts and from our experiences. Our views and beliefs become distorted. Our perceptions become warped and we attach attributes and beliefs to things that are not true.

For example, there are a lot of people in the world who believe when they grow up that Santa Claus is real, until they are told he isn't or until they figure it out for themselves. But for years as children we are told that Santa Claus is real, and each Christmas we wake up to find toys and other gifts under the tree from Santa. In our minds he is so real, and yet he does not exist. We have a strong belief that he is real, but it is a false belief, not true reality.

I also like to use the story of the snake that is not a snake to show how our perceptions can be wrong, thus distorting views in our minds. You are walking down a mountain trail at dusk when you see a long snake lying across the trail. Your mind sees the scales on the snake, its beady eyes—you may even think you hear it rattle, and fear pumps adrenaline into your bloodstream. You are getting ready to fight or run. Then you turn your flashlight on it and you see that the scary is really just a braided rope lying across the path. It's only a rope, and yet until you shined you light on it, it was a deadly snake. So too are the wrong views and perceptions that we have in our minds about our lives, our surroundings, and beliefs, and they cause us to become attached to things, to put false traits into them that cause us suffering. We need to shine the light of understanding on our wrong views.

I like Lama Thubten Yeshe's example of chocolate cake that shows us how wrong beliefs can bring us attachment and suffering. He says, "When we are children and we want chocolate cake, we think that when we grow up we can have all the chocolate cake we want

and then we will be happy, yet when we grow up and have all the cake we want we are not happy. All we have is a bellyache!

Most of us put false views on things our entire lives. We put false attributes on things, come to think they will be a certain way, and then we suffer more. What we need is to look at things deeply, take them apart in our minds and see how they really are—see how impermanent they really are, and see their true nature.

We do this through introspection and meditation. We do this by seeing how we first believe things to be, seeing how they turn out to be, and then asking ourselves, why?

I find it very hard to change the beliefs that I have, and the thought patterns I've formed over the years. It is painful to remove them or exchange them for new patterns or beliefs. The process is very slow for me.

I try not to be discouraged by this. I try to remember that it all comes in little steps that eventually lead to right views, right thinking and right actions. If you can be present in the moment (mindful), you will not worry whether your progress is large or small, just that it is and that is enough. By taking those small steps each day, by looking into the true reality of things and by being in the present, we can let go of our attachments and realize happiness.

Poem 39

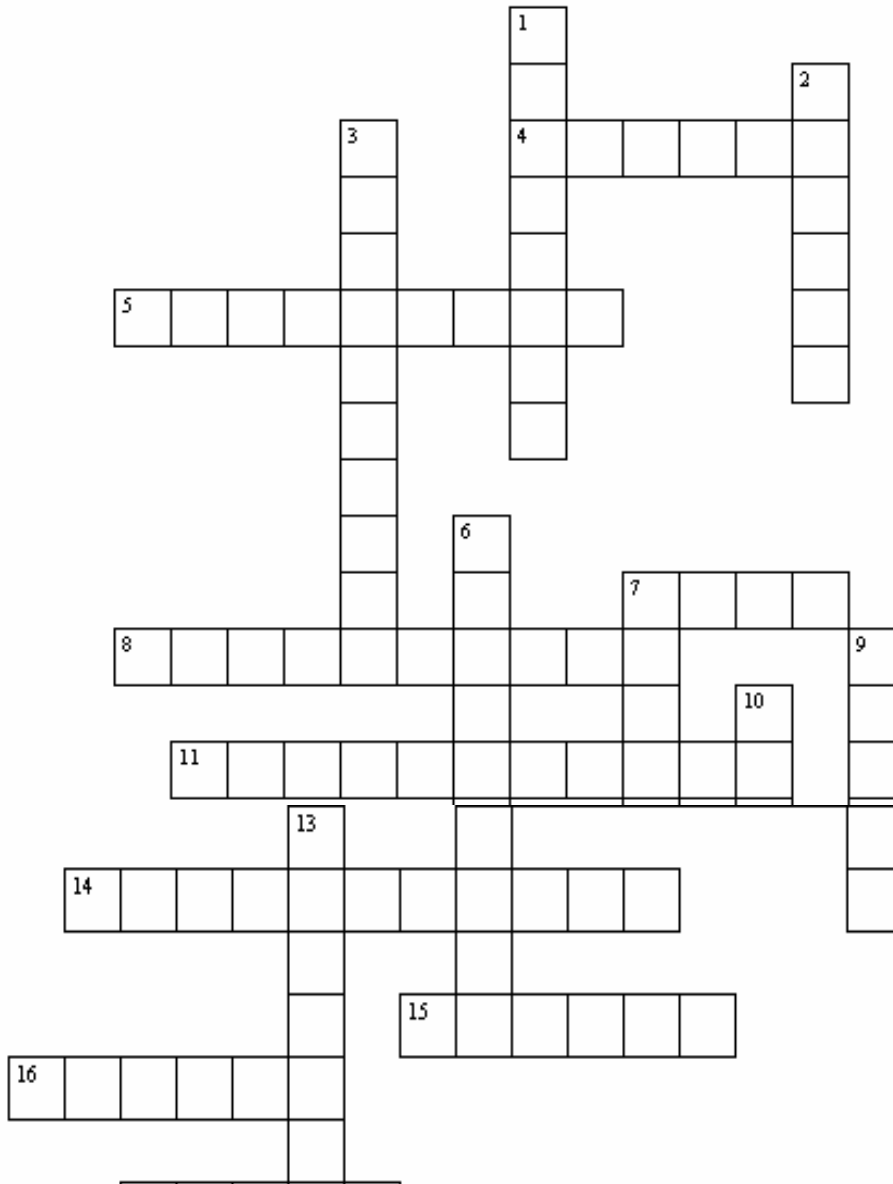
"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing
and rightdoing,
there is a field.

I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language,
even the phrase "each other's"
doesn't make any sense.

-Rumi

Buddhist Terminology Crossword



ACROSS

4. Not Soto, but _____
5. Tibetan name for Avalokiteshvara, Kannon, or Kuan Yin
7. A Buddhist "rosary" or string of prayer beads
8. His first name before he became the Buddha
11. Being who foregoes enlightenment until all others are saved
12. "Great Vehicle" form of Buddhism
14. He brought Buddhism from India to China
15. I take _____ in the Buddha...
16. The community of believers.
17. Day of celebration of Buddha's birth, Enlightenment and parinirvana.

DOWN

1. Prajna _____ Sutra
2. The Buddhist monastic code
3. His Holiness the _____ Dalai Lama
6. Gatē, gatē, paragatē, _____, bodhi svaha!
7. Phrase repeated over and over as a meditative technique
9. Cycle of birth, suffering and rebirth
10. Sanskrit for "giving" or "generosity"
13. Literally "extinction, blowing out, or ceasing to burn"

Recognizing My Teacher

by Shoshin, editor of *Inside Dharma*

In July of 1997 I went camping in the Latir Wilderness of northern New Mexico with Keith, a buddy of mine from work. We drove out there at the height of summer, pitched a tent outside Santa Fe the first night, and then drove north to Questa and into the wilderness. We hiked up through pine forests past crystal clear mountain lakes to around 11,000 feet, meditated and soaked up the rugged silence, and then visited a couple stupas and explored Santa Fe and Taos before driving back home.

As we drove east across the Texas panhandle the sky grew darker and darker even though it was only mid-afternoon. Soon we were coming up on the backside of a massive black bank of towering thunderheads, dark as night. As we drove on toward Oklahoma, we started catching up with the storm, and when we stopped for gas we noticed that the wind was almost whipping flags right off their poles, billboards were missing panels, and tree branches and leaves littered the roadway. It was a big, big storm and we were in tornado alley at the height of twister season. We decided to pull in at the next motel and let the storm get ahead of us.

We finally pulled off somewhere in western Oklahoma, where the flat land was scarred by deep red gullies, the live oak were twisted by the constant wind from the north Texas plains, and cattle egrets speckled the pastures like little white ghosts. Ahead, jagged spears of lightning took turns lighting up sections of the inky sky. The Motel 6 was not much to speak of, and in fact it was the only building around for as far as the eye could see, which is pretty far in that billiard-table landscape.

With no place to eat supper, Keith and I scoured my car for loose change and raided the vending machine, found a baseball game on tv and eventually drifted off.

The next morning we woke up hungry, but when we went to the lobby to enjoy our complimentary continental breakfast, we found an empty plate next to the coffee machine. My buddy Keith went looking for the manager while I filled us two Styrofoam cups of joe.

Keith came back with a middle-aged Indian man—not an Oklahoma Osage or Cherokee but instead a man from India, the country. He was very apologetic about there being no breakfast and he quickly pulled some frozen donuts from a freezer and popped them in a microwave. While he fiddled with the preparations, we struck up a conversation with him.

His name was Mr. Patel, and he was a Hindu. He told us lots of motels were owned by Patels in the United States. He had many cousins and other more distant relatives all over the country. He was very proud of his little Motel 6 in the middle of tornado-alley-middle-of-empty-horizons, Oklahoma, and we complimented him on it. We slept

very well, we said. Very glad to have such a nice place to get in out of the storm, we said.

We chatted with Mr. Patel for a while as we ate our semi-defrosted donuts and drank our weak, metallic coffee. He asked us what we did for a living. High school teachers, we said. Oh yes, education is very important, said Mr. Patel. He sure was a friendly fellow, but we were anxious to get back on the road, so we started saying our goodbyes and thank-yous and settled our bill.

As we headed out the door toward the car, Mr. Patel followed us out onto the parking lot.

“One more thing!” he called after us. I was worried we’d left something behind.

“I just have a question for you,” explained Mr. Patel as he caught up to us. “You said you are teachers, and so I must ask you this important question.”

Keith and I looked at each other. This was a little odd.

“You are walking along the road, and you recognize two figures in front of you. One of them is a god, Vishnu, and the other is your teacher. To whom do you bow?”

Keith and I smiled and looked at each other again. This sounded like a koan, and as Buddhists Keith and I had some experience with such questions. Knowing I would regret my answer I said, “I would bow to Vishnu, of course.”

“With respect, sir, you are wrong,” smiled Mr. Patel. “You would only bow to Vishnu after first bowing to your teacher. You would bow to your teacher to express your gratitude. For without your teacher how would you ever have known anything about Vishnu?”

Mr. Patel grinned broadly, turned around and waved without looking as he walked back toward his Motel 6.

Poems from Prison

Leighton Bates is putting together a book of poems by prisoners.

Send your poems directly to

Leighton Bates
Oregon Dept. of Corrections
777 Stanton Blvd.
Ontario, OR 97914

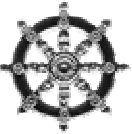
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This issue is
gratefully dedicated to

Ven. Thubten Chodron

For being such a constant
supporter and loyal friend to
Inside Dharma and all of its
projects.

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P.O. Box 220721
Kirkwood, Missouri
63122