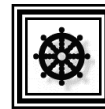


INSIDE DHARMA



"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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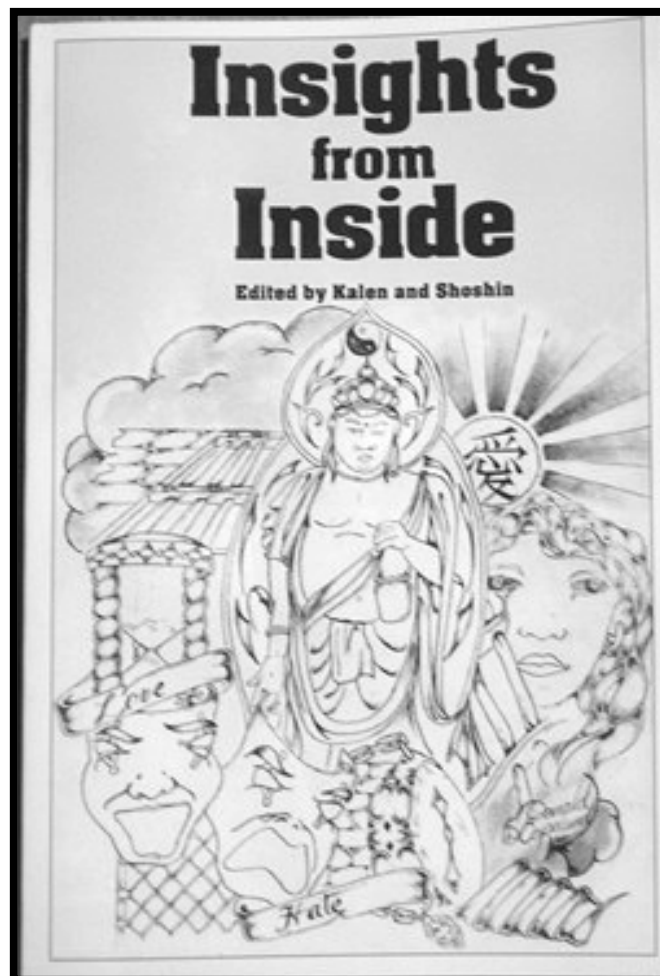
Published from Prison!

Inside Dharma has passed two significant milestones in the last few weeks. With the publication of its first anthology of writing by prison inmates and volunteers, and the successful attainment of 501C3 status, *Inside Dharma* has established itself as a conduit of dharma teachings and compassionate service.

Insights from Inside, a collection of essays, poems and stories by prison inmates, volunteers and friends, is the product of the inspiration and persistent hard work of Kalen and her many friends and helpers.

Kalen says, "This is a beautiful small book (about 140 pages) which examines what prison is, what's it like inside, and what Buddhist practice looks like inside and outside of prison. Articles were written by the prisoners themselves, but the book also includes articles by Rosan, Shoken, Victoria Fortner, Vickie McKenzie, Venerable Chodron, Venerable Robina, Tonen, Zuiko and others. The art work is mostly done by prisoners but the back cover was done by our own Carol Corey."

Insights from Inside may be purchased by contacting Inside Dharma at P.O. Box 220721, Kirkwood, MO 63122. If you are an inmate, the cost for *Insights from Inside* is a green check for what you can afford. For family members and friends of Inside Dharma,



we are selling them for \$10 and it is costing us \$1.70 to mail each one. These are suggested prices, but what is most important is that these books find their way into the hands of our supporters. Any donation in any amount is appreciated, and for those who wish to contribute beyond the price of the book, their donations are now tax-deductible thanks to our 501C3 status.

What that means is that Inside Dharma is now a non-profit organization recognized by the Internal Revenue Service. All donations are now tax-deductible, and that has had an immediate effect, according to Kalen. "We are getting support from old and new friends alike, and people have requested

copies of the book from as far away as North Carolina and Oregon."

Gratitude is due all those who lent their time, effort, expertise and encouragement to *Insights from Inside*. May all of our efforts contribute to the cessation of suffering for all sentient beings, and may this be one more step forward toward enlightenment for all.

It Is What It Is

by Terry "Nasr" Rucker--Bowling Green, MO

I remember last year I met the Venerable Robina and was amazed by the way she answered my questions with straightforward answers and didn't have to think about them. She made a lot of sense, and a phrase she kept using made sense at the time, I thought, but only recently have I come to understand it really.

It hit me while I was lying in my bunk not really thinking about anything. My cellie started yelling to some guy downstairs. I'm in the hole, so I can't leave, and I am too passive to say anything, because he stays on the verge of hostility, and I don't want to fight him and then have to stay down here longer...even though at one point in my life I would not have had a problem fighting him.

All of that went through my head as he continued yelling, and it hit me like a ton of sticks: It is what it is. I was expecting something out of my cellie, not understanding why he did not have the respect to be quiet. Why did he have to yell all the time to somebody else, but he did not talk to me? I wanted to fight him and yell and snap out on him, but again it hit me: It is what it is.

...A lot of people get mad or accept opinions because that's what they thought they had to do...

I had this whole inner dialogue going on with myself. What is "what it is"? He is a loud obnoxious person who does not have respect, or maybe his idea of respect is different from my own. What does that have to do with "it is what it is"? Just think about, I told myself, and that was all it took to realize that he is what he is, not perfect, and I have looked at him in a different light ever since.

He still yells, but I think to myself, "it is what it is" and a smile creeps across my face because, despite all the things I am supposed to hate about the hole, I enjoy myself down here. I hear people cursing each other, and I hear racist remarks, and I think how far I've come, and I am only 21!

Which brings me to another point. I've learned that a lot of people get mad or accept opinions because that's what they thought they had to do. For example, I am half black and half white, and anytime

somebody made a racist statement I thought I was obligated to get angry, but now I don't.

I no longer do things based off of other people, because I know that "It is what it is."



Stain-Free Mind

by Kunga Gyurme--Licking, MO

In Buddhism, the mind is frequently likened to a mirror. This is because the fundamental, true nature of the mind is clear, aware, spacious and reflective. A clear mind absolutely reflects what is before it, but as human beings we are given to smudging and streaking our "mental mirrors" due to lifetime after lifetime of wrong thought, speech and action, with all these ridiculous projections that obscure our perception of the absolute.

Through eons of negative karma, we have built up this flawed view of the people and things around us. We're attached to things we see as positive, and we have a deep aversion to the things we see as negative. How many times have we killed an insect simply because it annoyed us?

The same is true of how we treat people. We fight, insult, judge and kill other beings because they look, act, talk, or do any number of things in ways we don't like. Where is this coming from? Can we really make summary judgments like that? Well, we do.

Our problem is we don't see the emptiness of the object of our aversions, be it a person or a thing. These things are not what they appear; our view of them is obscured by a veneer of past karmic projections. A good example is a person who has done horrible things, and who is considered by most a "monster". Is this person truly a monster, from his own side? No, we project that label onto him. If a person were truly a monster, every being would see him as such, but because he is not inherently a monster, he has friends, lovers, family who loves him...

Just as karma causes us to see people as "bad", their karma has produced the projections that caused them to commit the acts which seem so terrible.

Some of the other inmates and I have just finished a three month Vajrasatva retreat (Vajrasatva is the

Buddha of purification) in conjunction with Venerable Thubten Chodron and Shasta Abbey, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to share this experience with them.

While my participation pales in comparison with that of the outside retreat participants, I have had a very positive experience. I have unloaded a great heap of mental junk that was taking up space and weighing heavily on my mind. I feel better about my situation—not just my situation, but the fact that we are all in the same boat and something can be done about it. We don't have to be samsaric beings. We can liberate ourselves and others. So I can see the positive and potentially positive aspects of a lot of the things we as sentient beings experience.

I've heard the phrase "turning obstacles into the path" and I am starting to understand. A really good example for me personally is the fact that I will most likely be going to the hole this week, and at first I was angry (it was a small infraction and my first in over a year) and felt that going to 2 house would be a terrible and boring thing, but I have decided it is only another chance to deepen my practice. I won't have to worry about work, count, etc. and so I am looking at it as a 30-60 day retreat, and I will be grateful for the solitude.

I hope I have made some sense here, and I hope that each one of you will work on removing superimpositions from your mindstreams.

*May all beings have happiness and its causes.
May all beings be free from suffering and its causes.
May all beings never be separated from supreme happiness.
May all beings abide in equanimity, free from passion, aggression, and ignorance.*

Buddhist Practice at Menard and Pontiac

by Z.L. King-- Pontiac, IL

My study and practice of Buddhism began at Menard in 1998. I was attracted to Buddhism in a very strange way. I had been active in the Civil Rights movement. I was involved in rallies, marches, and meetings with Bernard Lafayette, James Bevel, Al Raby, Jesse Louis Jackson, Andrew Young,

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others. In February of 1998 I learned that Dr. Martin Luther King had nominated a Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, for the Nobel Peace Prize. I was shocked and stunned, but was determined to learn more about Buddhists and Buddhism.

At Menard I attended Buddhist worship service for about six and one half years, and from time to time I was in different cell houses, namely: north (PC), east, south uppers and south lowers. Each cell house would have a Buddhist service one day each week for 90 minutes, plus one day at the end of each month. The inmates to attend Buddhist service were six or seven.

For the most part, we conducted our own services when I was in north (PC), east and north cell houses. Most times I would be the only one there. I would always pray, meditate, and do some spiritual reading. In south uppers and lowers there were four or five of us who attended Buddhist worship service each week, two whites and two blacks.

The only Buddhist teacher I have met in person is Tricia Teater, and she is a Buddhist priest. She came to Menard at least three times and conducted Buddhist worship service by chanting and using incense and a bell. This

was when six or seven inmates were present. Incense was used only when the priest was there.

At the chapel, Buddhists had their own section and library of books, magazines, tapes, etc. There was a small statue of Buddha and a large book, almost a foot thick. I believe the large book was the Dhammapada, but I am not sure. Someone stole the large Buddhist book and some of our cassette tapes. I asked the chaplain to lock up the tapes, and he did. The large Buddhist book was recovered, and after that incident it was kept locked up, along with the Buddha statue. The chaplain, Steve Keine, told me I could take out the large book and the Buddha statue, but I told I there was no need, because most times I was there by myself. The chaplain at Menard was a real friend to Buddhists. This man did his best to assist all inmates with the practice of religion. All major religious groups had a library within the chapel, including Catholics, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Moorish Americans and Black Muslims.

August 4, 2004 I was transferred to Pontiac from Menard. August 5, wrote the chaplain and asked to

I have decided it is only another chance to deepen my practice.

be placed on the list to attend Buddhist worship services. The acting chaplain, Reverend Eldon Kennell, promptly wrote and told me there were no Buddhist services at Pontiac. I submitted a proposal, and my proposal was accepted by Chaplain Kennell, pending approval by the Assistant Warden of Programs, Michael Melvin.



For the most part, our Buddhist worship services were meetings or discussion groups. Our first meeting was on August 22, 2004 and it was supervised by Acting Chaplain Kennell. For the first meeting, there were six white inmates, Ray, Shank, Whistle, Vincent, Junior and Rick, and four black inmates, Mr. Johnson, Charlie Brown, Sweets, and me, Z.L. King.

Junior and Rick attended only the first meeting and never returned. At the first meeting we learned that all of us came from different Buddhist traditions. Ray and Shank were Tibetan Buddhists, and appeared to be the most knowledgeable. Mr. Johnson was a Nichiren Buddhist. Both Mr. Johnson and Charlie Brown were members of Buddhist temples on the streets. Sweets was simply trying to learn about Buddhism. Whistle and I were Buddhists who were students, reading and studying books from all the major Buddhist traditions. Vincent was attracted to Buddhism because of psychology.

By the third meeting, two more black inmates, Muti and Oliver, and an Egyptian joined our Buddhist discussion group. Muti was a Muslim who was studying both religions at the same time. Oliver came from a Christian background, but he was ready for deep study of Buddhism. The Egyptian had been a student of Buddhism for over 50 years, and he had studied in Buddhist temples in Japan and India.

His passion was to get everyone to know and practice the Four Noble Truths. "Egypt" could speak 12 languages and he had scientific training. He was the senior in our group at age 64, and he had lived in Egypt, Moscow, Japan and India. Many of our meetings were supervised by volunteer chaplain Wendell Wardell.

Ray, Shank, Egypt and I all tried to get a Buddhist teacher to come to Pontiac and teach us. As of September 26, 2005, we still did not have a Buddhist teacher at Pontiac, so we continued to teach and share among ourselves.

At an early meeting, everyone was asked to bring our Buddhist books so that the group could select books for our class. Whistle, Vincent and I were the only ones to bring books. It was decided that all Buddhist books were good, but that we would use the first book that we had ample copies of as our textbook. I was able to get 12 copies of *Right Understanding in Plain English: The Science of the Buddha's Middle Path* by David N. Snyder, PhD. The second book was *A Basic Buddhism Course* by Phar Sunthorn Plaminier, PhD. We had finished the first text book just before I left Pontiac. Next the group was to begin a discussion of the Four Noble Truths for the next two to four weeks.

I considered the eight and a half months I worked in the prison library as a major part of my Buddhist practice.

Oliver took control as secretary, and he was gung ho about order. At the meetings, he came up with our Buddhist Information Package, which was eleven pages long. Ray answered all 20 questions, and I compiled a resource list and did all the typing. Oliver asked everyone who wanted to learn about Buddhism to request our Buddhist Information Package from the chaplain. Whistle and I worked in the library. Oliver and Egypt worked in the Dining Room. Ray and Shank were in school. Shank attended four or five meetings, and then never came back. Ray attended about ten, and then never came back.

Vincent and Mr. Johnson each gave one dharma talk. Charlie Brown, Muti and Sweets never gave a dharma talk. Most of the dharma talks were done by Egypt, Whistle, Oliver and me. Several times our meetings became very heated.

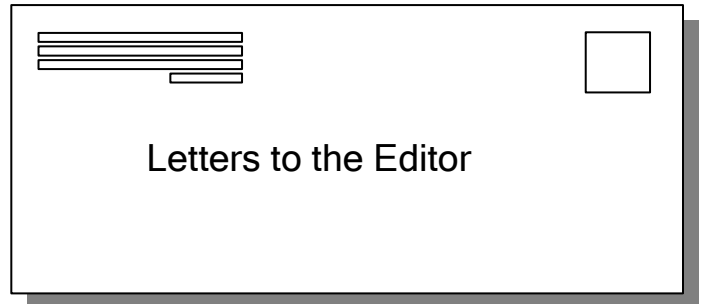
One of my Buddhist teachers, Tricia Teater, sent me six pages of Buddhist writings to share with our sangha and everyone was given a copy. Egypt and Whistle and I also provided Buddhist and other spiritual writings for our sangha

Later, others became members of our sangha, including Marcellus, Wilson, Jenkins and Reggie. I gave each member of our sangha at least one Buddhist book.

I tried my best to get everyone involved, but many would just come and have nothing to say or share. Oliver pointed out that we had to accept whatever contribution people were willing to make. Ray's contribution was to answer the 20 questions in our Buddhist Information Package. Egypt, Whistle, Oliver, Mr. Johnson, Vincent, Muti, Charlie Brown, Sweets, Jenkins, and Marcellus' contributions were in sharing their knowledge and insight verbally. My contribution was to donate over 500 Buddhist books to the Pontiac Prison Library. Most of the books were Buddhist, but some were Christian and Islamic.

I considered the eight and a half months I worked in the prison library as a major part of my Buddhist practice. Even now I am preparing a prisoner resource list, and I plan to write a book about my library experiences at Pontiac Prison. This writer has been blessed to read over 200 Buddhist books since February 1998. Some of these books have been read several times. My life has been filled with corruption and ignorance. Today, I simply do my best to be a good Buddhist. Buddhism means life to me. Each day my love for the Buddha grows. Buddhists are wonderful and loving people. Gassho and metta.

When we sit zazen, we are united with every person on the Globe. Truly, we are then brothers, united with universal power, peace, harmony, laughter, and love. Only then we unknowingly bless ALL LIFE! ---Dedie Fries



Letters to the Editor

Namasté, Shoshin,

My name is James Tyndal, and my new life name is Kelsang Gelek.

I have been a practicing Buddhist for about two years and some change. I have taken my Buddhist vows and my Bodhisattva vows. These are very important to me. The more that I have let go of, the better my life has become.

The former person was a thief, a liar, a conman...I could go on, but the picture it would paint is ugly and unwanted.

Right now I am in ad-seg. I was given a conduct violation for escape (a lock-picking device). This was a homemade screwdriver. I was the staff barber at Crossroads Correctional Center, and this was just a tool in the staff barber's toolbox. It had been there before I even went to work there. Anyway, here I sit for maybe a year or more. But I am not mad. It amazes me how far I've come.

Not so long in the past, I would have been yelling and kicking my door at being wronged. Wow, this boggles the minds of non-Buddhists.

My family believes the Department of Corrections about this, and so does the woman I am married to. They all think that because I was given a conduct violation for this, it must be true.

As strange as it may seem, I too would believe that if I had never dealt with the D.O.C.

My point is that I have been practicing the art of letting go, and it has become easier. I'm not saying I don't care. I'm just saying that I don't have to hang on to the negative attachments. I do care that my family is suffering because of this. It is getting easier to find the equipoise that Buddha has shown us. My life is better for finding that balance. I hope through my practice to keep growing in awareness of these attachments, to come to a place where I can have a balance for my feelings and my thoughts.

I look forward to each issue of *Inside Dharma*. I gain insight with every issue. I go back through them from time to time and reread them. They do help me in my daily practice.

Thank you for showing us this love and caring through this publication.

I don't use Buddhism to escape life. I use this gift to embrace life. Even as Buddha converted the murderer Angulimala through loving-kindness, I have converted myself through this same practice.

Thank you for your compassion, and to my brothers I say, "Get some cushion time."

Namasté,
Kelsang Gelek

Snake Lessons

By Kalen

On Friday, Roger and I were working in a yard weeding and mulching. Suddenly Roger turned to me and said "Hey - you're a Buddhist, right?"

I replied yes and he then proceeded to ask how I felt about snakes. "I think they're O.K." I responded.

"Well, you'd better come here 'cause this one is in big trouble," he said.

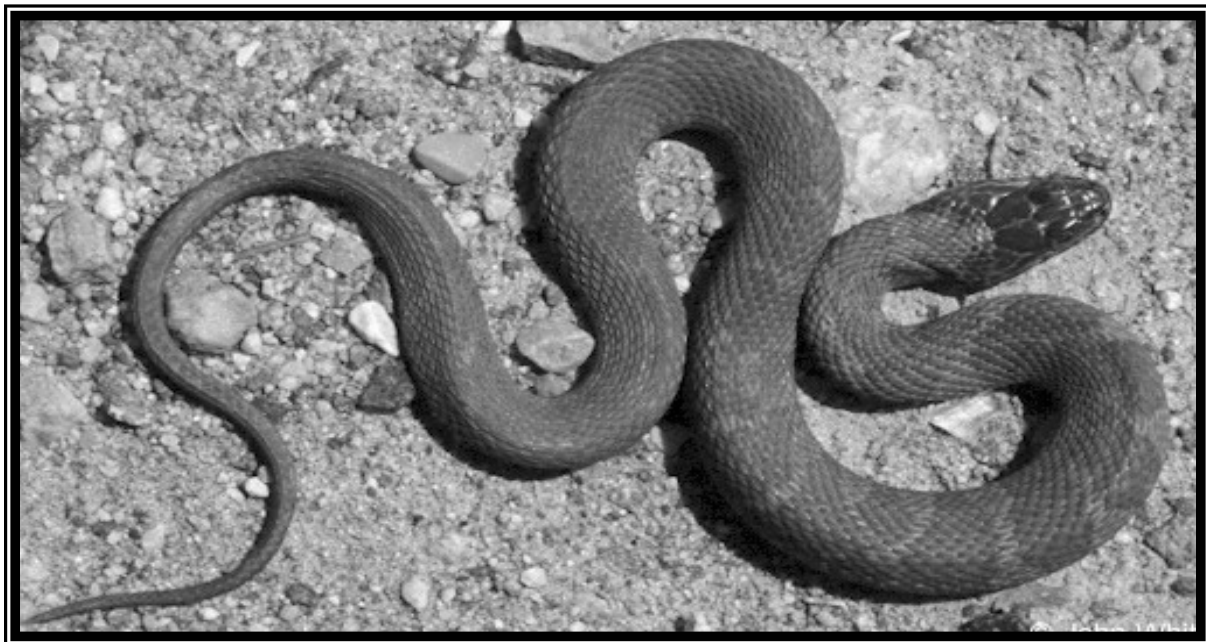
I went to where he was standing by the water garden. The waterfall had been covered with plastic

bird netting to keep the leaves out. Up near the top, this 6 foot long black snake was tangled to the max in the netting.

From his head down about 9 inches the netting as woven tightly around his body. He could no longer move but was still alive. I went to the truck and got a pair of hand trimmers and cut some of the netting. But as I cut, the netting around the snake's body pulled into its body tighter. So I stopped. Roger and I looked and finally found a little scissors. I suggested we cut the main netting and then pull the snake into the opening where we could see better.

About that time the tail moved and Roger jumped. He confessed he was deathly afraid of snakes and spiders. He said he was O.K. but to make sure the body of the snake didn't touch him. So I wrapped it around my own body and grabbed the head and held the back with my other hand. The warmth of my own body seemed to calm the snake and he lay quietly as Roger cut away the bulk of the netting. Once free, we took the snake out to a small gazebo where Roger had to do micro- surgery, cutting slowly the strands of the nylon netting that had imbedded itself into the snake's skin. The snake seemed to understand and stayed calm and wrapped around my body.

About that time the customer came home and was so happy to see we were helping the snake. He went and got us a better pair of scissors which made the work go faster. Once totally free, he took a picture of me holding the snake. I then put it on the ground and it stretched and then moved quickly towards the water garden. We all yelled "no" but it went into the netting once again.

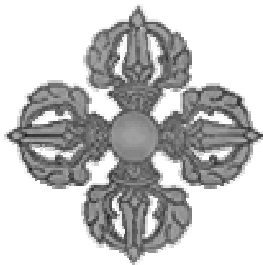


Roger and I ran and found it had only gone through two holes so we quickly cut it loose and I took the snake to the woods and let it go. The customer said to get rid of the plastic netting which we quickly did and threw it away.

I do think the snake understood our intent as it was quiet. Not once did it try to strike me. I figured it would but since it was not poisonous, I would be O.K. But it didn't - even when I put it down and its head was free.

If I got up in the morning and knew I had to do this, I don't know if I could. But when it's there in front of you, you just do it...Roger is recovering fine from his encounter with snakes!

[Editor's Note: This story makes me wonder how many things in my life I can really do--how many "snakes" I can face with courage and compassion--even though I may not wake up in the morning thinking I am capable of doing so. I bow to Kalen for this wonderful lesson.]



Announcement: Last issue we advertised meditation tapes available to prisoners by contacting Inside Dharma.

While we mailed as many as we could, please know that if you are in a correctional center in the state of Missouri you MUST MAIL A GREEN CHECK, no matter the amount, in order to receive any item such as a tape through the mail.

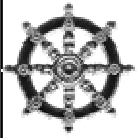
I apologize for omitting this information in our previous issue. The error is entirely mine. -- Shoshin

Answers from Last Month's Buddhist Crossword Puzzle:	
ACROSS	DOWN
4. Not Soto, but Rinzai	1. Prajna Paramita Sutra
5. Tibetan name for Avalokiteshvara, Kannon, or Kuan Yin: Chenrezig	2. The Buddhist monastic code: Vinaya
7. A Buddhist "rosary" or string of prayer beads: mala	3. His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama
8. His first name before he became the Buddha: Siddhartha	6. Gatē, gatē, paragatē, parasamgatē , bodhi svaha!
11. Being who foregoes enlightenment until all others are saved: bodhisattva	7. Phrase repeated over and over as a meditative technique: mantra
12. "Great Vehicle" form of Buddhism: Mahayana	9. Cycle of birth, suffering and rebirth: samsara
14. He brought Buddhism from India to China: Bodhidharma	10. Sanskrit for "giving" or "generosity": dana
15. I take refuge in the Buddha...	13. Literally "extinction, blowing out, or ceasing to burn": nirvana
16. The community of believers: sangha	
17. Day of celebration of Buddha's birth, Enlightenment and parinirvana: Vesak	

**This issue is dedicated to our
generous supporters**

**Scott Darnell,
Dedie,
Shoken
and
Deborah.**

Inside Dharma is a bi-monthly Buddhist newsletter published by **Inside Dharma**, a not-for-profit organization based in St. Louis, Missouri. *Inside Dharma* publishes Buddhist articles, stories, humor, and other writing submitted by current and former residents of Missouri state correctional facilities, local prisons and jails, as well as friends, supporters, and spiritual teachers. *Inside Dharma* is dedicated to the free giving of the Dharma. There is no charge to offenders or ex-offenders for subscriptions. If you are part of an organization that would like to distribute *Inside Dharma* to members who are not current or former residents of Missouri, please write the editor of *Inside Dharma* to be added to the mailing list. *Inside Dharma* may be reproduced, whole or in part, for free distribution. Prior permission from the editor of *Inside Dharma* is required for any use of *Inside Dharma* for which a charge is applied. All submissions will be subject to editing, and *Inside Dharma* will have the right to publish submissions, in whatever format and by whatever means it deems appropriate, in its own or other Buddhist publications. The monies from any for-profit use of materials submitted will be distributed equally between the author and *Inside Dharma*.



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