



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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September-October 2006



Bo Lozoff visits Northeast Correctional Center

An Afternoon with Bo

by John Bradin -- Bowling Green, MO

Monday, Labor Day 2006, was a beautiful sunny day with fat, puffy clouds. Our VICs, Carol and Kalen, came down the walk with a tan, good looking man dressed in black and carrying a guitar case. Due to the holiday meal taking longer than usual, I was still in the cafeteria line waiting to eat as they came down the walk to the

chapel here at Northeast Correctional Center. They waved to me as they went in, so I rushed through my meal and hurried over to the chapel as quickly as I could.

Our dear friend and Muslim brother, Chuck X, already had our very special visitor, Bo Lozoff, getting his guitar and microphone set up. Bo (pictured above in black, center) was conducting his sound check when the rest of the large group of inmates and I came in and took our seats.

After I gave him a brief introduction, Bo opened with his rendition of Bob Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" and we sang along. Then he did one of his original songs, "Johnny and Me" about how people compared him to Johnny Cash because he has a deep voice and wears black. It was a great song, and quite amusing.

After gently laying down his beautiful, well aged Martin D-28 acoustic guitar, Bo took a few moments of silence, and then began his fascinating, illuminating talk. He began by familiarizing us with the fact that he'd spent three years in seclusion, thoroughly reading the "bibles" of all of the world's major religions and philosophies and how, in all those great books, it doesn't tell you that the Kingdom of Heaven is on sale at Wal-Mart, and it isn't available with no money down and easy payments. He said, "The scriptures say that the Kingdom of Heaven is within you," and that the great religious beings, such as Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad, found the truth by turning within, by self-examination. While Oprah says, "It's all right to say 'I want'", it doesn't say that in any of the great books. Bo said that we might feel deprived because we are not able to connect to the Internet, or because we are not caught up in buying, selling, trading, breaking, fixing, or getting rid of material things. But we are actually able to have time to turn within ourselves and get "deep" by experiencing who we really are, and changing ourselves, not to be bigger, better consumers, but to love and help our fellow human beings, and to place their well-being ahead of our own.

Bo went on to tell a story about a friend of his, Bud. After 18 years in the joint in Alabama, Bud was paroled and became an addiction counselor Freedom House, making \$27,000 a year. A few years went by, and Bud was offered a job driving over the road trucks, starting at \$70,000 a year. Bud thought about it a lot but then he turned it down because to him giving back and being able to help others was more important than just being able to buy more stuff.

Bo said that everybody on the street is so caught up in working hard and hustling to buy things that

wear out, break, or get used up, so you have to work to get new stuff...

It's up to us, the people in prison, 50,000 of whom are released each day, to be "real men and women" who are willing to help others and devote our lives to helping those less fortunate and less enlightened than ourselves.

Bo then led a lively and honest question and answer session, with many in the group asking deep, personal questions and receiving open, insightful answers. We then went into a peaceful, regenerative meditation. The afternoon ended with the jazz/rock group Blue Pearl (Rudy Hampton on bass, Willie Little on rhythm guitar and John Bradin on lead guitar) performing "Written on the Wind".

We would like to thank Bo Lozoff for his visit, and we hope he can come again. We would also like to thank Superintendent Jim Moore and Chaplain Tommy Barnhart, without whose kindness and help this would not have been possible.

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Food for Thought

In this month's Sravasti Abbey newsletter, Venerable Thubten Chodron writes:

"Two inmates whom I visited in Missouri last month had to miss lunch because our meeting overlapped with the prison's meal time.

When I wrote these two men expressing my concern, Ron replied,

'As far as your comment about James and I missing lunch, it reminds me of a line from the Noble Sanghata Dharma-paryaya Sutra, We do not have need of drink, nor do we have need of food. What we need is the Dharma itself that liberates us from suffering. The meal you provided with your presence and teachings (not to mention the hot chocolate and cookies) was truly a banquet.'

Their appreciation of the Dharma is heart-warming."

Kitchen Dharma

by Scott Darnell-- Menard, IL

Of the 3000 inmates incarcerated at Menard Correctional Facility in southern Illinois, I happen to be one of the fortunate few who enjoy the privilege of working a job assignment. Until recently, however, I didn't feel very fortunate or privileged. In fact I could honestly say that my latest job assignment was the worst I've ever had.

I work in the inmate kitchen as a line server. My duties include setting up steam tables with the daily menu and then helping to make up to 2600 trays a day for two of the four cell-houses' breakfasts and lunches. Other duties are considered "as needed", which means I do anything I'm told, from moving supplies to loading empty crates onto a semi for shipment out of the institution.

Working in a kitchen in maximum security gives a whole new meaning to the idea of food service industry. In fact, I seriously doubt you can compare it to any such services you might find on the outside where standards of quality, sanitation and safety apply.

As you might expect in a prison situation, there's no such thing as a living wage. In a good month I earn no more than \$18.00, a mere \$8.00 more than what an unassigned inmate receives in the way of a monthly stipend. I am assured by my supervisor that it's not about the money and that it beats sitting in a cell all day. I am not entirely sure whether they mean my cell on the workers' galleries or in segregation which is where

assigned inmates end up for thirty days if we try to quit the kitchen.

No don't get me wrong, I like to work, and I like to stay busy and be productive with my time. I enjoy going to bed at night feeling as though I have accomplished something with my day, perhaps even made things a little bit better in the world I'm consigned to live in. Unfortunately these feelings are difficult to come by working in a place where the food I'm about to serve half the population has been sitting next to an open garbage can for the last hour and a half...

...When my job as a paint crew worker was eliminated, I found myself with two available options: I could either be moved off of the

workers' gallery where I've spent years developing friendships and where I've enjoyed a few perks, like a larger cell, daily showers and night yard during the summer months, or I could take the only available job and work in the kitchen.

I went with option two. The question became, How do I deal with a less than positive, sometimes degrading and dangerous ongoing situation in a manner that will allow me opportunities to live with as much quality, growth and contributions as possible?

I'm still struggling to answer that question even after six months in the kitchen.

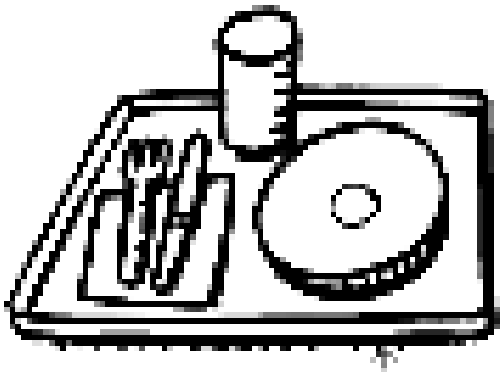
Some days of course are better than others. The Buddha was right when he said that all things are transitory. Very rarely if ever can we label our experiences as either 100% good or 100% bad. Rather, the quality we experience in a given situation is largely dependent on our individual perspectives.

(cont'd)

That which should be is often a construct of my own making, an image that can never live up to reality and can only lead to disappointment. It is only when I am willing to drop the image that I am able to work constructively with what's really there.

Keeping that in mind throughout my day affords me a certain amount of freedom in deciding how I will deal not only with my job but with every other aspect of my life as well. If nothing is either 100% good or bad, suddenly it becomes my responsibility to be open and patient enough to allow my circumstances the opportunity to manifest their nature, not in how I think they should be, but as they truly are. That which **should** be is often a construct of my own making, an image that can never live up to reality and can only lead to disappointment. It is only when I am willing to drop the image that I am able to work constructively with what's really there.

I was able to put this into practice for a few moments just last week when, after setting up the bulk of the lunch line after breakfast was cleared and the steam tables cleaned, I had the opportunity to take my breakfast tray outside and eat on the service ramp. Considering that the institution has been on lockdown status with no regular movement for nearly two months now, the fact that two other workers and I were outside at all was a treat that few others were able to enjoy.



As an added bonus, halfway through our meal we were paid a visit from one of the few stray cats that still roam freely about the institution. Despite the administration's repeated attempts over the years to remove the feline population who wander in and around the prison, still others

manage to find their way in and make themselves at home.

Some of these end up having kittens which, if found in time, are often adopted by caring staff, or if not, grow up wild along the parameters of the institution. The latter, while avoiding nearly all human contact manage to live quite well off the bounty provided in and around the institution dumpsters.

This particular stray, a young tabby by the looks of her, had not grown up wild. She was in fact familiar and comfortable enough around people that the first time we had made her acquaintance was when she had taken up position next to our kitchen line early one morning and followed us straight to work as though it were the most natural thing in the world for her to do.

We had only seen her a couple of times since then, and not at all in the last week and a half. There was speculation that she'd been scared off by some dog-loving officer who'd chanced across her path. Worse yet, we wondered if she hadn't met an all too common fate on the busy street in front of the prison. Happily neither misfortune had befallen her.

I watched as our little friend slid her way through a chink in the security fence at the front of the kitchen and proceeded to make her way almost casually to just within ten feet of us. She stood there looking at each one of us expectantly, gave out a single "meow" and sat down, waiting expectantly for what she seemed confident would soon be coming her way.

Now, this is prison, something one does well never to forget. It's filled to overflow with men who have committed some of the foulest deeds imaginable. Yet, when I went inside to find something suitable for her highness's palate, guys' eyes lit up just to hear that she was outside.

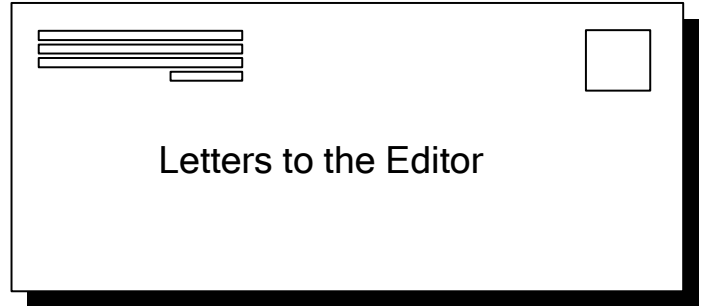
Smiles broke from ear to ear as a few workers made their way to the cooler looking for milk, left-over fish or bits of turkey. Several otherwise "hardened criminals" headed straight out the

door where their gravelly voices could be heard trying as best they could to purr and meow a welcome to our visitor.

I found myself simultaneously amused and touched by the spectacle playing out before me. For several minutes I just stood there, watching as the defenses dropped away and men serving decades behind twenty foot walls secured by armed towers and razor wire forgot all about where they were and did their level best to pamper the closest thing most of them would ever get to owing a pet again.

Once more I was reminded that deep down, even the supposed worst of the worst of us have at least a spark of that incomparable Buddha-nature left inside, a spark that no matter how dim it may sometimes appear, can never entirely be extinguished by mere outward circumstances...

(This is just an excerpt from a longer article by Scott Darnell, the rest of which we hope to print in a future issue.)



Dear Shoshin,

I remember a while back you talked about when you used to fish, and how you would smoke a pipe when you fished, and then later you said you were going to stop smoking. How is that going?

--Trying to be a Buddha

Dear Trying,

Thanks for asking. I did mention quite a while back that I grew up here in Missouri, and that my grandfather used to take me fishing. He taught me how to find my own bait, how to catch and clean fish, and how to smoke a pipe. He and I used to fish together and, much to my mother's dismay, we would smoke our pipes together by the water's edge.

When I got a little older, my grandfather passed away, and I went fishing on my own. I used what he taught me to find bait, to catch fish, and to smoke my pipe, and sometimes cigarettes. I felt like these things were part of what made me a man.

Like many in our sangha, I reached a point in my life when a lot of the things that I thought were true stopped making sense. I began to feel like a drunken dragonfly, flailing my wings, hurtling out of control, not sure which way was up...until I fell into the net of the dharma.

And now I am trying to put it all back together, this time without "me" as the center. It has been a tough path sometimes, but I have learned

some great lessons from all the other beings around me who are also on tough paths.

One of the best lessons I've learned is that, just as Scott Darnell writes in this issue in his article "Kitchen Dharma", nothing is either 100% good or bad in and of itself. That's black and white thinking. A close cousin is "all or nothing thinking", which was a big part of my unhappiness, and which still troubles me sometimes. So what does this have to do with smoking, and quitting smoking? Or learning not to lie? Or controlling my temper? Or losing weight?

All or nothing thinking is fine for children, or quitters, or cowards, but not for a determined Buddhist. All or nothing thinking was, for a very long time, my ticket to surrender, my excuse for not detaching from tanha, the thirsty kind of desire that made me crave cigarettes, alcohol, junk food, sleep, you name it.

All or nothing thinking said to me, "You cannot resist, and since you cannot resist, you might as well stop trying. You are not in charge of your own actions. You cannot even choose what you want."

What the Buddha has taught me is that all or nothing thinking is maya, illusion. What is real is that I have a choice. When I break down and give in to a weakness, I can choose to let it defeat me, and tell myself the fight is over—that I am licked-- or I can get right back up again, dust myself off, and choose to get back on track.

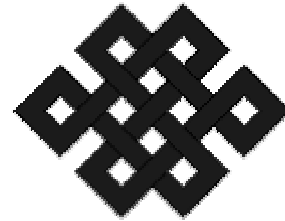
See, before, whenever I tried to quit smoking, or quit eating junk food, or quit saying unkind things, I operated by the false rule that if I messed up once, it was all over, and I did not have to try anymore, because I was a "failure". What a cop out.

These days, I know I will goof once in a while. I will forget, or give in, or just plain fall down. But I know that I am only a failure if I choose to stop trying. Every time I start over and start trying again, I am victorious. I am not perfect, nor do I

deserve any recognition or congratulations. I am just a guy who is trying.

Have I quit smoking? It is not a done deal. It is something I choose every day. Every day I try, and almost every day I am successful. Once in a while, maybe once every six months or so, I might fall prey to tanha and maya, and then I fall down. But I am not a failure. I am not helpless. I am not a coward. I am not stopping. I am a Buddhist, and I am victorious, because I get back up every time and try again.

Like everything and everyone else, I am changing.



From the Metta Sutra:

This is what should be done
By one who is skilled in goodness,
And who knows the path of peace:
Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech.
Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied.
Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm, and wise and skillful,
Not proud and demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born,
May all beings be at ease!

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the following
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\$8 per 12oz. bag

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\$9 per 10oz. bag

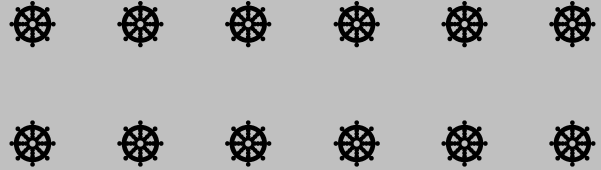
Organic Mind, Body & Soul, medium roast,
\$9 per 12oz. bag

Organic Ethiopian, full city roast,
\$9 per 12 oz. bag

Organic Breakfast Blend, sweet, full bodied,
\$9 per 12 oz. bag

Organic Decaf, full bodied and rich,
\$9 per 12oz. bag

Order from Kalen at: Kalen1@aol.com
Shipping to correctional facilities not available.



ART AUCTION UPDATE WE NEED YOUR HELP!

On Saturday, **November 11** from 7-9pm, **Inside Dharma** will hold its first ever **Art Auction & Dinner Party**.

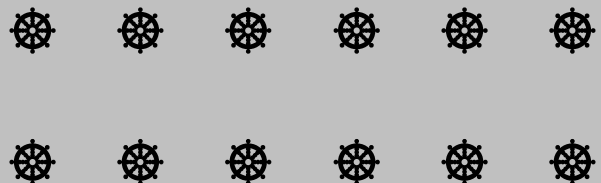
Saint Louis businessman Kevin Loida has generously offered to host the event at his restaurant, the **Natural Fact Deli** in downtown Webster Groves, Missouri.

Original art created by inmates will be offered for sale in a silent auction while visitors dine on appetizers and wraps prepared in the Natural Fact's kitchen.

Other items will be auctioned or sold, including Buddhist practice items from India and copies of *Insights from Inside*.

We need more pieces of art! If you draw, paint, or create other kinds of art, please contact your VIC or mail your work to **Inside Dharma**.

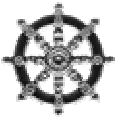
All proceeds will benefit **Inside Dharma's** work.



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All of the authors and artists
who have contributed or who
will contribute to the strength of
our sangha by submitting their
articles and art to **Inside
Dharma**. Thank you!

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