

# 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

**Volume V, Issue 1**

**January-February 2007**

## Starting Over

By Leighton Bates – Ontario, Oregon

In the past, when I thought of the words "starting over" I would cringe because for me starting over was a bad thing.

When I was a child, I would cheat at my homework, usually math, and I would get caught every time. Getting caught was bad, but I would be made to start over, and that was worse because I would be shown to be stupid by all my wrong answers.

When I was in my teens and my mom divorced my father, we had to start over. This usually meant that we would have to live in a small apartment and be left with someone watching us kids at night while mom went out on dates.

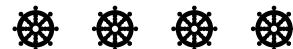
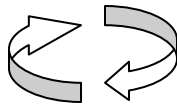
Once I found myself in the penal system, and I would receive a disciplinary report for doing something that was against the rules, I would have to start all over again to earn good time and privileges.

After a while, I started associating my bad feelings about starting over with meaning that I was a bad person and my self esteem took a nose dive.

Consequently, when I started meditation I had to face my bad feelings and fear of starting over each time that I had to refocus on my breath after my mind would wander. This was a form of starting over for me. Sometimes I had to refocus, or start over, on every other breath, and each time it would bring a feeling of frustration and ruin my meditation.

I have learned that it is at exactly these times of frustration and anxiety that we must push on and start over as many times as we need. When we do this it means that we are working through our stuff in the heat of the moment. As we work through it all, even if it means refocusing 500 times, eventually we will get to a point where we clear our minds of the things that are scarring our minds and keeping us in our world of suffering. Eventually our outlook on starting over will have turned into a happy new beginning and a clarity of thinking. Be well!

**This issue's theme:**  
**Starting Over**



## Calm of the Stream

By Anthony Bird – Licking, Missouri

As we sit back down to watch our breath, we are overcome by an overwhelming calm. Like sitting beside a mountain stream watching the leaves drift down its currents.

Think of your thoughts as being the leaves. Watch them fall from the trees into the stream. Let them float by freely. No clinging, no attachment, no desire, no more. Only loving-kindness, compassion, humility, and solitude.

We come to the calm of the stream.

*There is no meditation without wisdom, no wisdom without meditation.  
One who has both wisdom and meditation  
Is close to peace and emancipation.*

## Starting Over?

By Paul "Pablo" Graham – Cameron, Missouri

What does it mean to start over? After thinking about it for a while, I came to the conclusion that the idea is truly an abstract notion that is not so cut and dried as it would seem. Indeed it does rely upon the context in which the terminology is utilized.

For instance, say you are drawing a picture. You look at it and say, "Nah, it's not working" so you simply scrap it and get a new sheet of paper and start over (In fact, I have already started over on this article twice already, which makes it very different from the one I started with, but I digress...).

Could it be so easy to do with your life? We generally tend to think that starting over means to change your ways, to begin a healthy new lifestyle, or to resolve to be happier or more kind.

My question is, When does this new beginning start? Will January 1 automatically make you a non-smoker? Or a vegetarian? Did you start over when you were first introduced to the Dharma? Was it when the lama snapped his fingers at your refuge ceremony? Or was it when you were conceived and then born into this plane of existence?

Maybe you didn't have the choice to start over. Many of us did not even have the notion until after the manacles were clamped down behind our backs.

Some would believe that the calendar or a change of seasons mark a time of renewal in their souls; others think that each sunrise is a perfect time to start over...or even that every waking moment of awareness is in fact a starting over point.

True, long lasting change in a person can be a slow process through eons, over many lifetimes,

or a new start can come about like a flash of lightning after a moment of clarity or realization. But generally we poor humans find it quite difficult to let go of the ingrained patterns, thoughts and ideas that we may know are harmful to ourselves and others, and will only lead us through an extended journey in samsara.

It is only by practicing and doing that we can actually start over in this lifetime.

First, however, the thought must be there. The desire to change and the willingness to be moved into real bliss take exploring new ways of letting go of what we once thought were the objects of happiness and replacing these mere distractions with truly beneficial practices.

To paraphrase the Buddha, "You are wise to the extent that you can get yourself to do things that you don't like doing but you know will result in

happiness, and to the extent that you refrain from doing things that you like but that you know will result in pain and harm."

By realizing that all things are temporary, knowledge that change is inevitable will create, in essence, a perpetual starting over point. Quick fixes to what we have deemed miserable circumstances will

eventually be replaced by long term actualization of truer happiness in the forms of our own understanding and compassionate acts toward others.

Are you willing to start over now?

Good luck in your new life!

**You are wise to the extent that you can get yourself to do things that you don't like doing but you know will result in happiness, and to the extent that you refrain from doing things that you like but that you know will result in pain and harm.**



## A Touch of Frost

By Rick Miller – Farmington, Missouri

The frost arrives  
Unexpectedly,  
The lawn sparkling,  
Living crystal;  
The grass, happier than ants  
Finding an ice-cream wrapper,  
Responds to my feet  
Like a womb  
To the flutter of its child.

Even through the thick soles  
I miss not one blade  
In its yearning to meet,  
To comfort and commune;  
My steps lighten,  
Lighter, become  
Non-steps.  
As the grass sings  
I live.



## Starting Again

By Mark Roberson – Prairie du Chien, WI

I set out on a quest to build something beautiful, something for me and my family, something I would be happy with when I was done. During my building I made a mistake. I paid the mistake very little attention as it did not destroy what I was trying to build. It only slowed the process down.

The project was great and in thirty eight years I've still yet to complete it. Since then I've made numerous mistakes, one after another. Some mistakes I've even made twice. As time went on I began to reflect on what it was I started out to build. I remembered its beauty and purpose. Then I reflected on the mistakes I've made and I decided to start over.

Starting over gives me a chance to go forth with a feeling of freshness, a clean canvas to clearly create whatever I choose...and not make the same errors. I've learned new ways to create and design. Starting over means I realize that the way I was going about building something beautiful was not working, and in order to finish my task, I need to change plans and start again.



images courtesy of barrysfreephotos.com

## Starting Over

By Z.L. King - Menard, Illinois

Many Buddhist teachers  
Encourage us to start over  
When our meditation  
Has fallen off track  
Counting the breaths  
Wishing well for  
Family, friends, strangers  
And foes too

When we discover that we  
Are angry  
We should STOP, START OVER  
And look at the source  
Of anger in our minds

Should we become upset  
It is time to stop  
And start over

The problems that we have  
Are signs to stop  
Start over

As Buddhists we must  
Allow all of our problems  
To help transform us

Stop, start over  
Read, study and practice  
The noble Buddhist religion

Each day we should try  
To grow and develop  
As Buddhists

Stop, start over  
And work to set  
Noble examples  
As Buddhists

Stop, start over  
Let your light be clear  
Be the best Buddhist  
That you can be each day  
Gassho and metta to you

## Drops in the Pond

By Heath Priest - Charleston, Missouri

When we leave this earth,  
continuing our journey of rebirth  
What may we leave behind  
What may we leave for others to find  
Would it be, could it be  
Our thoughts, our dreams  
Our nightmares, our schemes  
What may we leave behind  
What may we leave for others to find  
A broken mirror of our actions  
Splintered into a million fractions  
Reflecting back the path we walked  
The steps we danced, the words we talked  
What may we leave behind  
What may we leave for others to find  
Love we loved, pain we shared  
Beauty, joy, misery, despair  
A broken mess in need of repair  
Moments of greatness forever to share  
What may we leave behind  
What may we leave for others to find  
Deeds of honor, deeds of shame  
What shall be left behind in thy name



image courtesy of concentration.org

## The Red Road

By John "Standing Wolf" Thomas of the  
American Indian Circle  
Bowling Green, Missouri

Great Spirit, Grandfather, early in the morning I  
cry to you:

Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts  
on you. I cannot do this alone. In me there is  
darkness, but with you there is light;  
Grandfather, I am lonely, but I know you will  
never leave me; I am strong of heart and I know  
with you there is hope; I am restless but with  
you there is peace; in me there is bitterness but  
with you there is patience; I do not understand  
your ways, but you know the way for me. Keep  
me on the right road, the Red Road. AHO.

In starting over we must all have a lace to start,  
a beginning. Praying and asking for strength is a  
good place to start.



## About Starting Over

By Kelsang Gelek – Cameron, Missouri

Starting over? This is not an easy process. I  
believe that being a Buddhist is one of the  
toughest ways to start over.

I started reading the literature and saw a way to  
live that did not hurt anyone, not even me. So I  
read and I meditated and I started treating  
people differently. I took refuge vows and that  
made a huge difference in my life.

Then I became complacent. My meditation  
slipped and then I started not meditating and –  
bam—in the hole. Do I renewed my vows and  
even took bodhisattva vows. Now I had to be  
more vigilant. People in the sangha were  
watching me. I had to be better, stronger, faster.  
Yeah, a six million dollar lay bodhissatva. This  
was not a good way to think.

I didn't want anyone to see the cracks. I still got  
angry, not as often, but I did. My mind still  
wandered during meditation. My level of  
compassion was not what others thought it  
should be. Ah, now you are seeing what was  
happening. I was trying to serve two master, so  
to speak.

I had the thought that I wanted to be a perfect  
Buddhist, and I wanted to appear that way to the  
sangha. My ego was one master, the sangha the  
other.

Sitting in the hole as I am now I have a lot of  
time to reflect on what I was doing. No, I was not  
being a fake, but I was caught up in the  
showmanship of being a Buddhist (I'll show  
them!). Now here is where it gets interesting.

I thought I was doing okay. I was not relaxed or  
uptight, but I wasn't even...I just was. I was in  
turmoil. I've been to that point of bliss in my  
meditation so I know what thinking and acting  
right go with meditation to create that. When I  
sit for prayers or meditation I have something  
that I added to my supplications:

Through this suffering of mine,  
May I also take on the suffering of all beings  
Who are enduring this difficulty.  
May this difficulty help me progress on the path  
to Enlightenment.

See, I wanted to be a good Buddhist without  
giving up, without letting go. I have found  
through trial and error that this does not work. I  
wanted to be a good Buddhist without taking on  
others' suffering, even though I vowed I would.  
There was no selflessness.

Now I meditate for me. I read for me. I am being  
a Buddhist for me. My lama told me to treat this  
as a retreat, and I am. I am meditating and  
praying twice a day.

Do I think that I will be perfect from here to the  
end? No. Do I think that as a human I will take a  
wrong step now and again? Yes.

I do know that life is full of lessons if we choose  
to look for them. This has been a good one for  
me. As a Buddhist, look for life's lessons. You will  
be surprised how often they show up. With these  
words, I send peace, health, prayers and  
understanding. Most of all, love. Many blessings  
of the Triple Gem. Never give up!

## Starting Over: Right Effort

By Andy Harper – Cameron, MO

With the new year, many of us contemplate what our new year's resolutions will be. One may make the resolution to quit smoking (how many times have we made this resolution?) or one may make the resolution not to indulge in intoxicating substances (one of the five precepts). Let's face it, these resolutions never seem to last more than a few weeks, or if one is extremely resilient, a few months.

In order to successfully "quit" or "give up" something, one must first lose the desirous attachment to whatever it may be that one is seeking liberation from. The first step of mental development in the Noble Eightfold Path is right effort. In its most general sense, right effort means cultivating a confident attitude toward our undertaking. This is known as enthusiasm. In addition, right effort means taking up and pursuing our task with energy and will to carry it through to the end.

The Buddha said we ought to embark on our tasks the way an elephant enters a cool lake when afflicted with the heat of the midday sun. It is only with this kind of effort that we can be successful in overcoming whatever afflictions we may have. Our effort should never become to tense, nor should it be too relaxed.

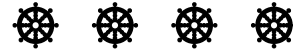
To accomplish this right effort has four steps to its completion:

1. The effort to prevent attachment thoughts.
2. The effort to reject attachment thoughts once they have arisen.
3. The effort to cultivate non-attachment thoughts.
4. The effort to maintain non-attachment thoughts.

The objective is to reduce oneself and eventually eliminate oneself from the attachment to this object, whether it be smoking, an intoxicating substance, or anything else that is detrimental to one's health and Buddhist practice, and to increase firmly a new mental state defined as liberation.

The Buddha taught that through persistent meditation practice, one may successfully reach this state of liberation.

So let's begin the new year by starting over through non-attachment by having right effort, the first step of mental development in the Noble Eightfold Path.



## Times to Start Over

By Shaun Triplett

Every involuntary breath  
Fills me with new life and  
A chance to start over

Every moment that I embrace  
Is a moment of renewal and  
A chance to start over

Every step forward I make  
Puts me in a new position, a new place and  
A chance to start over

Every person that I encounter  
Is not a stranger but a new face and  
A chance to start over

Every blink of my eyes  
Dawns a new vision and  
A chance to start over

Every tick of a clock  
Begins the motion for the next  
Time to start over



Scenes (clockwise) from the NECC Sangha in Bowling Green: The Sangha celebrates together with the Native American Group; NECC's own rock band, Blue Pearl; joining together in a Snake Dance; Victoria, Kalen, Rev. Barnhart, and the Sangha's VIC, Carol.



**Correction:** Last issue we published a photo under Lama Chuck's column on compassion, and I failed to identify the group as the Western Missouri Correction Center Sangha. The photo was taken on an evening when the volunteers from the Rimé Center of Kansas City had shared a delicious and generous meal with the group. My thanks go to Paul "Pablo" Graham for pointing this out. Lama Chuck, Chaplain Mary Stanford, and all the volunteers at the Rimé Center deserve credit for helping to establish and sustain the WMCC Sangha.

--Shoshin

### **Opportunities to contribute your talent to Inside Dharma:**

**Writers-** please contribute your article, poem, story, joke, question or idea. Our next issue's theme will be **Taming the Dragon** (learning about and coming to terms with our attachments, craving, desires or greed).

**Artists-** please draw a dragon for our next issue OR start working on some artwork for our second annual **Art from Inside** fundraiser art auction, which will take place in November.

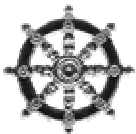
This issue is dedicated to:

**Miriam**

Your generosity will help support ***Inside Dharma***'s work for a long time to come.

We bow in gratitude and we salute your tireless effort.

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