



"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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Art Auction a Success

On Saturday, November 10, Inside Dharma held its second annual Art from Inside auction and sale. More than thirty pieces of art, all created and generously donated by inmates of state and federal corrections institutions, were bid on in a silent auction. Other items offered for sale included free trade coffee, Inside Dharma t-shirts, meditation shawls, copies of Insights from Inside, and custom-made chocolate buddhas.

The event was held at Eve's Garden, a new gallery space in south St. Louis owned by our dharma benefactor and friend, Henry.

Entertainment included live classical guitar by Austin, amazing feats of skill (including fire juggling) by Joe the Juggler, and incredible hors d'oeuvres by Kathy. Close to \$1000 was raised by the event, but expenses may reduce that figure some, according to Kalen.

The auction would have been impossible without the generous donation by current inmates of many works of art, including pen and ink handkerchiefs from

Crossroads, hand-painted birdhouses from NECC, and numerous paintings, drawings, photographs and even some miniature sculptures.

The proceeds will go directly into programs and services to assist current and recently released prisoners. These programs and services include reading materials, practice items, this newsletter, visits by VIC's, penpals, basic clothing, personal hygiene items and referral services.

Much gratitude and respect to all who participated.

Kalen Ordained



Our dear friend, mentor, motivator and prison bodhisattva Kalen is now a fully ordained Zen priest in the Soto lineage.

After a long period of study and preparation, Kalen took her final vows and received ordination from her teacher, Rev. Shoken Winecoff of Ryumonji Zen Monastery in Decorah, Iowa on Saturday, November 3.

Many of Kalen's friends and dharma brothers and sisters made the journey north to attend the ceremony, which was held in the meditation hall at Ryumonji. As part of the ceremony, Kalen's head was shaved, an ancient tradition symbolizing her relinquishment of the attachments of ordinary life. *(cont'd)*

According to the Soto Zen Buddhist Association of North America web site,

Soto Zen emphasizes the practice of "just wholehearted sitting" as an unparalleled way to realize universal buddha nature, and as a great teaching on how to live. It is sitting without a personal goal, letting go of the mind's usual clinging to ideas and identities, and returning endlessly to full engagement in the present moment. Soto Zen also teaches through koans, classic Zen teachings presented in dialogue and action, through the words of Zen masters, and through study of Buddhist sutras.

Soto Zen pays particular attention to making your best effort in all you do, not separating spiritual practice from the rest of your life, and thus to taking the best care you can of the daily realities of family, work, and community. Ethics in Soto Zen are based on the sixteen bodhisattva precepts that are a guide for one's practice and an inquiry into the best way to live. Ceremony and ritual observances are further ways to express people's joys and sorrows.

Inside Dharma, the Shinzo Sangha, and all of our dharma brothers and sisters, on the outside and in prison camps across the country, join together in congratulating our friend and teacher Kalen. We bow in reverence.



Sitting With Difficulty

by Scott Darnell - Menard, IL

After 13 days inside a cell all I wanted to do was look up at the blue sky when I got outside. It would have been nice to enjoy a passing cloud, a bird in flight or the wind rustling through the leaves of the trees on the distant hill.

But looking was forbidden. As we filed out of the cell house, one hundred plus inmates cuffed behind our back and followed every two inmates by a tactical team member dressed in riot gear and carrying a heavy stick, we were given strict orders to "look at your feet", or "keep your eyes on the ground."

We were paired up just outside the cell house and escorted through a gauntlet of even more tact members stomping a black booted march down front street all the way to chapel at the far end of the institution.

Just ahead of me I could hear the labored breathing of my fifty eight year old celly as he half shuffled half limped

along trying to keep up with the line. I could only imagine the pain he was in, forced as he was to keep his eyes glued to the ground despite a broken neck for which the institution had done little to nothing for in the past five years except give him some Ibuprofen and a neck brace. Would he actually make the walk to chapel? I wondered. And what if he didn't? Would he be dragged off to the side of the line or left where he lay for the rest of us to step over? There was no telling.

Once inside the chapel we were led single file into the main auditorium and ushered row by row into our waiting seats. Once more the bellow of tact team officers came echoing around us with warnings to keep our heads down and sit back in our seats.

The last part I thought a particularly sadistic thing to order as it meant the steel cuffs binding our wrist would now begin to dig in mercilessly as we leaned against the backrest. Since the cuffs had not been double locked I quickly realized that as powerless as I was to loosen them, it was regrettably easy to tighten them when I sat back too quickly.



For the next thirty five or forty minutes we sat there uncomfortably in our seats, the fans placed around the chapel conveniently pointed away from the inmates and toward the clusters of officers supervising the crowds. Within minutes my shirt was soaked through with sweat. The poor guy next to me was so bad off he was trying to

wipe his eyes with a raised knee. It was an exercise in acrobatics that did not go unnoticed by the officers who belted out an order for him to "sit the f*** back and don't move again!"

There were several thoughts rolling through my head by then. First, of course, was the fact that neither I nor anyone else being put through this ordeal had actually done anything to warrant this treatment. This was nothing more than DOC grandstanding in response to an incident for which those responsible had long since been taken to segregation or transferred out of the institution.

The second thing I thought which I often think at times like this was that directly deserved or not, the very fact that I had committed a crime that landed me behind bars meant that from time to time I would have to go through things like this. Like it or not, this was part of the life I had earned for myself. Welcome to karma.

Lastly, I thought to myself that as part of the life I had earned, as part of my life period I had an obligation to live it as fully and completely as I could for what it was. At the moment, what it was happened to be rather difficult. So, I decided to sit with difficulty, opening myself as fully as possible to my situation, whether that was the cuff related numbness growing in my fingers, the almost jovial banter of officers as they picked several inmates out of the crowd for a strip search, or the groans, coughs or covert attempts at shifting positions that everyone was making around me.

So, I decided to sit with difficulty, opening myself as fully as possible to my situation...

The irony of being forced to sit motionless in the chapel with eyes downcast to a spot on the floor was not lost on me. Without the cuffs and a bit of shifting of my own, I could have been sitting in lotus position over in the chapel's sangha room. I quickly realized in fact that as difficult as the situation was for everyone around me, my years of practice in meditation was making this particular exercise in "sitting" far more tolerable for me than it otherwise could have been.

I at once found myself empathizing with the plight of those around me who hadn't had the benefit of practice. Not hampered by an overt physical discomfort or getting lost in the mental and emotional chaos often engendered by such discomfort left me open to experience more fully what everyone else was going through.

I was once again reminded that the pain and suffering of others is my pain and suffering as well. None of us are separate from each other which means we can't be separate from each others trials and afflictions either.

The question was, what could I possibly do in my present state to ease the suffering I was privy to? If I had my way everyone's cuffs would have been off. People could have moved freely in their seats and talked quietly amongst themselves. Unfortunately, my cuffs were as tight as theirs. My way was not going to happen.

My vow as a Buddhist had always been to save all beings. And yet here I was, powerless to do anything more substantial than try to acknowledge the situation for what it was. But then I thought, wasn't that enough?

When I first came to the adult division of the Department of Corrections I attended a group therapy program that,

at least for me, was life changing. One of the first things we did in therapy was learn to take responsibility for our criminal behavior and accept the fact that because of that behavior we now owed a tremendous debt both to our victims and to society as a whole.

While part of that debt was being paid in the time we were serving behind bars, that in itself could never fully repay what we owed. The obligation was greater than that. Part of that obligation meant that we realize the impact of what we had done to others as fully as we possibly could, and by extension, acknowledge the humanity of those harmed and that they deserved none of what had been done to them.

This was especially important because every person, whether it's a child being harassed at school, a valuable employee passed over for promotion or the victim of a violent crime inevitably asks the same question - "why me?"

"Why me" is inexorably linked to the formative years of our lives when concepts like fairness, right verses wrong and self worth are just taking shape and being tried out in our daily lives.

Who hasn't heard that familiar protest from a couple of four or five year olds at the diner table carefully examining each others plate? "Billy's got more than me," comes the pout. Even at that age the idea of fairness has taken hold. Children learn young that if they're good, they get rewarded, if bad they get punished. If Billy gets more, fair play calls for the tantrum to balance things out.

Maturity brings an end to the tantrums of course but not to those basic ideas of fairness or right versus wrong. When something terrible happens to us, on some fundamental level a part of us reverts back to our childhood, wondering if perhaps we didn't do something to deserve the injustice perpetrated.

I could do nothing physically to alleviate the pain or discomfort of those around me. But what I could do was face this moment for and with them, exercising clarity, awareness and compassion.

Of course no victim of abuse or injustice ever deserves it. What they deserve is the love and support of family and friends, and whether they ever have the opportunity

to know it or not, they deserve to have the victimizer take responsibility for their crimes and acknowledge with heart felt remorse what they have done to innocent human beings.

...when we forget another's humanity, we end up giving up our own as well...

I could do nothing physically to alleviate the pain or discomfort of those around me. But what I could do was face this moment for and with them, exercising clarity, awareness and compassion. In this way I hoped that at least their pain, their struggles would not go completely unnoticed or be dismissed out of hand. These moments, whether they were good or bad, were the very makeup of our lives and as such they deserved to be acknowledged.

All too often ones humanity gets forgotten on the inside. People become "inmates" and nothing more. When that happens it gets much easier to treat someone badly. An officer doesn't have to think twice about making someone walk their line with a broken neck, turn the fans away on a hot summer day or curse and shout orders at people already outnumbered and subdued by cuffs.

Sadly whether it's an inmate or an officer, when we forget another's humanity, we end up giving up our own as well. Victimizing becomes ever easier.

By sitting with difficulty we allow not only an honest and unbiased look at the situation we're facing, but by working with the compassion engendered through our practice we can acknowledge and perhaps do away with some of the suffering of those around us. As with anyone else's suffering the men sweating their way through yet another institutional shakedown experience deserved to have their plight recognized.

If there is no real separation between you and me, or us and them, then just as I experience the suffering of others through my practice, others must on some level experience the merit of that practice. My recognition, my awareness and acknowledgement of others during my practice may well mean the beginning of healing and the negation of at least some of the suffering I witnessed.

When we got back to our cell after another long and harassing march, my celly and I spent a good hour straightening out our property boxes and putting away the stuff messed up during shakedown. He was tired and in pain from his exertion and while he described that pain to me and the frustration that went with it from so long without treatment, I sat and simply tried to listen.

Listening was all I could do for him at the moment. The act of listening, allowing myself to really hear what he had to say became a way to further acknowledge his situation as a human being. While not the surgery he needed, I hope it was at least a balm that gave him opportunity to speak his mind, know someone cared and was willing to be present for him.

If nothing more was accomplished in my day than that, then chapel was worth every moment. Sitting with difficulty always is.



Choosing a Teacher

by Gonpa Namgyal/
Carlos Pyles - Cameron, MO

The Shorter Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom says:

The Victorious Buddhas
Who possess the highest
Of all good qualities
Speak as one when they say:
Every single part of the Buddhist way
Depends on a spiritual guide.

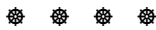
It also says:

And so the wise
Who seek the high state of enlightenment
With a fierce wish deep inside
Should smash all pride within them
And like a mass of sick men
Who flock to medicine for a cure
Take themselves to a spiritual guide
And serve him single-mindedly.

As Buddhists we are trying to remove ourselves and others from samsara. We should look at samsara, or this cyclic suffering, as a sickness, the Dharma as a cure, and the teacher as a master physician. The Buddha taught four schools of thought with each being subtler than the one before. He did this in order to produce realizations in the minds of students with different capacities, ultimately to lead them all to enlightenment. He was a master physician.

Today, many different traditions have grown out of these four schools, and as a result of our open society we have access to them in an unprecedented way. The problem is that each one of these traditions is a method in itself of revealing the dharma, and when we attempt on our own, without a qualified guide, to take from these different medicines, we can end up with a poisonous mixture. That is why it is so important to find a qualified teacher and to follow his or her teachings to the best of our ability.

You may wonder, If all the different traditions are Buddhism, what can it hurt to take a little from each? While it is true that what you take may all have been taught by the Buddha, if you do not have someone who knows all the scriptures to put it all in context for you, you will not make progress. So doing this kind of “grab-bag” practice can be dangerous because you become so confused that you are unable to begin real practice, or you come to wrong conclusions and practice incorrectly, bringing neutral or negative results.



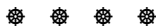
What is the Dharma?

by Anthony Bird - Bowling Green, MO

The Buddha’s teachings are known as the Dharma, or Dhamma. It’s not a revelation or some kind of speculation that has been dreamed up. It is the truth which prevails in life, in the world, in the universe, in all things. These truths were realized by the Buddha, and he shared them with the world. Throughout his life his teachings continued to expand with each new realization until his death. But did the Dhamma stop there, or does it continue to expand to this day? Is it limited to the realizations of the Buddha, or does it still grow within the minds of all beings?

It is my belief that the Dhamma is continuously expanding throughout endless time. As long as there is process of thought, there are new truths to be realized. Each and every moment we are making new discoveries about life, the world and the universe. They are all in a constant state of change. This gives us all an opportunity to learn new things and to make new discoveries, thus allowing us to learn new truths. Because of these new discoveries of truth, the Dhamma will be expanding forever, benefiting all beings through all time.

I pay homage to all the buddhas and to all the great thinkers of the world for the greatest gift ever given, the Dhamma.



Some Thoughts on the Journey

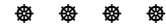
By Daniel Hooper- Licking, MO

It seems that many seekers want to take the easy road, and then wonder at the lack of success.

To me, the basics of the Buddhist path are like a survival kit, filled with the simplest items that seem of little account until you need them, swallowed up in the wilderness. And then those simplest of items can make the difference between life and death. The basics of Buddhism are the tools needed for surviving spiritual battles with the demons within or without, wherever you find them. To travel the path, you need a firm foundation, a place where you can take refuge, a place to be safe when you start getting mired in muck, a place to rest up before continuing the next leg of your journey.

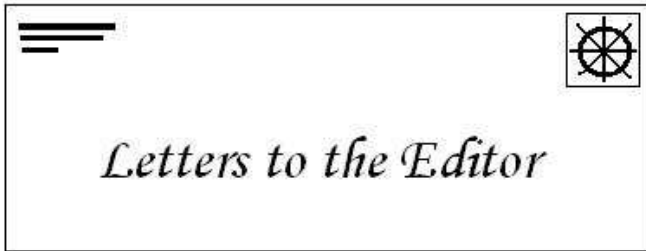
Many want to be like their own teacher or guide, but few are ready to actually travel the hard path that their teachers have traveled. Christ and Buddha both began their teaching only after they had made journeys, only after they had lived for thirty years or more.

First, take refuge, build the foundation, focus on the basics, then have the courage to make the journey.



Be here now
 what’s it mean?
 mindful of thoughts
 flowing consciousness stream
 right-minded actions
 peace be unto you
 here is compassion
 love them all too
 i am now
 meditate through violence
 exhibit right living
 strength in my silence
 walk this Way
 neither fast nor slow
 a step at a time
 learn as you go
 be an example
 nothing to preach
 living message
 sublime to teach
 actions of love
 I am now: Zen
 awakened dharma sangha
 be here now and then

--Norm “Noah” Toler, Bowling Green, MO



I am glad for those people getting help from DOC, but I am surrounded by people who are not. Please report both sides of the coin...

Don Wright

Thanks for the insight, Don. This is an important issue. While the rate at which Missouri inmates are being released may be changing, it sounds like there may be unresolved issues surrounding the housing situation at CRCC. You would know better than I. Changing situations begins with changing minds, and your letter is a step in the right direction. Perhaps our readership will educate themselves and others about this issue thanks to your effort, and that can lead to improvements. May all beings be free of suffering, greed, anger and ignorance.

Dear Inside Dharma,

I'm in the hole. I've been here since August 23. I have no feelings about it. It's where I am now. This is practice.

Practice is everything. Practice is life. Be here now—not yesterday, not tomorrow.

Practice, in Zen is also sitting. I sit at 6:20 each morning. Easier to sit in the hole. More time to think.

No formal training. Not sure if it is needed. Open my heart and allow my mind to become free of attachments. The Way can teach itself to me. Allow myself to become a vessel for the Force, as I sometimes term the Way, and the transmission begins. It is not all at once like flipping the switch. As slow and steady a transmission as I am ready to handle: illumination begins to occur.

I look forward to sitting with my fellows of the Bowling Green Sangha when I am released to GP.

True appreciation for all your works. I am inspired by all of you. I sincerely thank all of you. Perhaps in the future when I'm released I'll have the privilege of meeting and working with some of you.

Be here now,
Norm (Noah) Toler

Dear Shoshin,

On a recent visit to Bonne Terre, the guys were bragging to me about what they could cook inside their cells. One guy makes lasagne in a crock pot! So how about making a contest in one of the upcoming newsletters about what's the most creative recipes they have for "in-cell cooking"?

Kalen

Great idea, Kalen! So how about it, guys? Send in your creative (but appropriate) in-cell recipes for publication in our next issue!

Dear Shoshin,

In the last issue of Inside Dharma, you commented on how figures show that "Misery's" prison population is dropping, yet here at Crossroads Correctional Center we have a bed-space list of 4 to 5 months, meaning that when your hole time is done, you will wait 4 to 5 months for a bed to become available. Where is the decline here?

The numbers may look good, but while the DOC is patting itself on the back, inmates in this institution are just wanting out of the hole. I applaud any action that benefits prisoners or parolees. I have 17 in on forever, so I see the need for help. I also know that Mo. DOC will lie...Currently, inquiries as to the bed-space status of CRCC inmates will result in the fabrication that we are being held in a "holding area"...The "holding area" is the hole, nothing more. You are still denied contact visits, canteen, showers, rec, and everything else that population is allowed...One violation and you have to start your bed-space over, but that won't begin until your next review date!

There are currently over 120 people waiting for beds in population at CRCC being held in the hole beyond their sanctions. Every Tuesday and Thursday, new R&O's arrive to fill beds, and these people are forced to remain in the hole.

(cont'd)



Meditation/Medication

By Rick Miller - Farmington, MO

In January my right middle finger was smashed between two doors. The doors contacted at a point dead center of the nail with the fingertip in between. The contact was hard enough to shatter the bone. The skin did not break from the outside as might be expected but blew out from the inside afterwards. The resulting break in the skin spread diagonally the width of the finger and did not stop bleeding for more than three weeks. The pain was excruciating. In 53 years I have never experienced such an intense pain.

The next night I was having great difficulty sleeping. I would sit with the pain long enough for it to subside, crawl in bed sleep for twenty to thirty minutes, then be blasted awake with a flash of pain. I repeated this about three or four times until around 2:30am when the biggest blast hit. I was in tears.

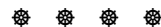
I was also really, really mad. I got up, threw my blanket and pillow on the floor, dumped myself on it, called to my inner friends, and said, "Okay, let's do something about this!" Then I focused intensely on the pain, the finger.

As I focused and began settling in with the pain, a thought arose. A friend was talking to me. The thought was, "Channel the pain elsewhere." I listened to my inner voices. They do not lead me wrong. I relaxed the intensity of my focus and began gently nudging the pain up my finger. I used my inner eye like a soft paintbrush, stroking the finger from the tip upward, and with each stroke I could actually feel the pain moving away from its center. Each "stroke" shifted it higher and higher, and as it stretched out along the finger, I noticed a slight decrease in the pain's intensity. This gave me confidence, and I relaxed more, using longer strokes. Soon there was a long "line" of pain running from the fingertip to my wrist, then tip to elbow and then tip to shoulder. As the line lengthened, the pain continued to decrease.

I was not sure where to direct it, but I followed the wordless instructions as they came, and continued extending the pain from right shoulder to left, then down the arm to the tip of my left middle finger. I was still holding a rather awkward mudra as I sat, and so I had completed a kind of circle.

However, the pain, though it was lessened, still existed. So I continued working and directed the pain back up my arms to my spine, and slowly I began driving it downward toward my right foot. By the time I made it to both big toes, I was completely relaxed and pain free. I don't know how long this intense process took. It may have been two hours, maybe four. All I remember is crawling back into bed and sleeping gorgeously until count time, then I returned and slept again until lunch.

My finger did not rightly heal for two months. Over that period, with the exception of a few bumps and a freezing, the pain never returned. What's more, since I play guitar, I was quite concerned as to how the finger would heal, whether it would be useful or useless. I talked to my inner friends and they assured me it would heal fine, that the problem was no longer in my hands. Trusted them. Today the finger is whole and beautiful.




Lama Death

My Lama's advice?
What was it? Oh, yes...
Today is the last day.
Today is the last day I'll see my mother and father,
My brother and sister, my friends.
Today is the last day I'll see my enemy
And have a chance to reconcile
Or develop patience.
Today is the last day.
What have I done? Said? Thought?
Will the enveloping black curtain of death
Be the knife that severs the ties? Nothingness? Or...
Must the wheels set in motion before,
Seeds in the field of the mind,
Still turn, just the same, into pleasure and pain?
And what of the experience?
Will it be me or not me?
Who am I but the experiencer,
The farmer reaping the crop of his own sewing?
Today is the last day...
And if I am to be...after...
Then today I will do what I must, to plant
Kindness, mercy, peace, thoughtfulness, compassion
and wisdom.
Today is the last day to do something meaningful!
Today is the last day!
And tomorrow?
The last day.

Gompa Namgyal - Cameron, MO

Thank you, faithful readers and dharma brothers and sisters, for all of your support and all of your contributions to the newsletter, the art auction, and other dharma activities and events this year.

As we look forward to the new year, let's dedicate ourselves to sitting more often, to putting our beliefs into practice in even the smallest things, and to dedicating our merit and our efforts to the continued strength of our sangha. --Shoshin



This issue is dedicated to:

Shoken-Sensei

For his generosity, support
and wisdom.

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.



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