

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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Investing in Change

by Shoshin

According to a Sentencing Project report, the United States incarcerates its citizens at the highest rate of any country in the world, and we have the largest inmate population of any country in the world. Last year, 30,324 people were behind bars in Missouri, representing a 0.5% increase over the previous year. Missouri spent \$586 million in fiscal year 2007 on corrections, and for every dollar spent on higher education, Missouri spent 67 cents on corrections. There are over 102,000 individuals in the Missouri corrections system now, 68,000 of whom are on probation or parole. Over 21,000 ex-offenders will be released in Missouri this year, so none of us can afford to ignore the need for change.

Therefore, we are proud to announce our first Inside Dharma fundraising campaign, **Investing in Change**.

Inside Dharma:

- supplies Volunteers in Corrections and meditation/discussion groups in nine Missouri prisons, with a goal to expand
- connects penpals with interested inmates,
- sends reading and practice materials and the *Inside Dharma* newsletter to over 300 inmates in Missouri and across the country,

- has published *Insights from Inside*, an anthology of prison writing
- holds an annual prison art show and auction, *Art from Inside*, which showcases dozens of pieces of artwork created and donated by current inmates
- provides recently released inmates with basic re-entry supplies and references to useful agencies and opportunities.

Investing in Change is an opportunity to get directly involved. Inside Dharma's work is done entirely by volunteers, but it still takes funding to support change. With a very small annual budget, Inside Dharma has managed to purchase hundreds of dollars worth of practice supplies, reading material, and other items to help educate and support inmates in their efforts to change in addition to printing a book written by inmates, *Insights from Inside*. Inside Dharma is also there when inmates make the difficult transition back to society with basic clothing and hygienic items that they do not yet have the money to purchase.

Investing in Change has a goal to raise \$10,000 by December 31.

This will support the continuation of current programs and enable their expansion to reach more inmates interested in taking a new path over the next year. It will also provide gas money for volunteers to travel to various prisons in the state. At present,

volunteers pay for their own gas, which can amount to as much as \$600 per month. Our plans for 2009 include producing a booklet of available resources for people leaving the prison system.

Inside Dharma's work is important, and we look forward to involving more supporters as our efforts grow.



Art from Inside

by Shoshin

We are thrilled to announce the third annual Art from Inside auction and fundraiser, which will take place in November. This event is an opportunity to exhibit art created by current inmates, many of whom have amazing talents in drawing, painting, photography and other media.

Inside Dharma is accepting donations from all of our incarcerated readers and their fellow inmates. The deadline for submission is October 20, and more details can be obtained by speaking with an Inside Dharma VIC or by contacting Kalen or Shoshin at:

Inside Dharma
PO Box 220721
Kirkwood, MO 63122



A contribution to a previous show by Xavier

What Buddhism Brings

by Scott Darnell - Menard, IL

In the last issue of *Inside Dharma*, we were asked to share our thoughts about what we believe Buddhism has brought to our lives. There are so many ways to respond to that, it's hard to pick just one. But I'll give it a try.

Sometimes a person's life can go terribly wrong, thrown off track by the abuse, misperceptions and outright lies of a caregiver who leaves a child filled with self-loathing and bitterness.

The things we say to one another have an impact, either for the positive or for the negative...

I was such a child. My earliest memories involve being told over and over again that I was a failure, unacceptable, unworthy of love, care or kindness. Because I was only a child who knew no better, I believed everything that was screamed at me.

If everyone out there believes their words don't matter and can't hurt, believe me when I tell you how wrong you truly are. The things we say to one another have an impact, either for the positive or for the negative.

By seven years old I so thoroughly believed the things that I'd been told, it literally became unacceptable for me to be me, and for the next few years I lost myself in a world of fantasy, pretending to be characters I'd seen on television or at the movies rather than myself.

By ten years old I would wake up in the morning wondering whom I should be today. Should I be Clyde Barrow? Maybe Jekyl and

Hyde? Or how about Black Bart? Rarely did the fantasy personas include positive figures. Since there was nothing positive about me, why bother?

One of the things we learn in Buddhism is that we train our mind, which inevitably finds its way out in some form of expression. In my case it wasn't long before I started getting into trouble, first in my neighborhood and school and then finally with the law.

By sixteen I was being sentenced to natural life in prison, and by twenty I'd become enough of a problem in the juvenile division that I was kicked out and sent to an adult institution. Never think that words don't have an impact. Thankfully there were other words spoken by dedicated and caring people who gave me the courage to change, to recognize the lies for what they were and begin seeing myself in a positive light.

Still there are times even after all these years when the dormant seeds first planted in childhood begin once again to sprout. I begin to get down on myself, questioning my every move and motive, seeing myself as a failure who is unworthy of the love and friendship of the people I have grown close to in my life.

Gratefully those first sprouts rarely have the opportunity to break ground for long anymore. Due in part to the lessons I've learned in my study and practice of Buddhism, along with the wonderful and caring people I know and share my practice with, any of the negative and debilitating thoughts and feelings I might begin to have

are quashed by all of the positives I've experienced over the years.

Negativity stands little chance in the face of hope and assurance. In the Dhammapada we are told:

Look within
Be still
Free from fear and attachment
Know the sweet joy of living
In the Way

What past acts of abuse can thrive in the psyche if we remember such words?

Therein we find assurance and verification of the fact that all of us have the potential in each and every moment to rise above our past and create something new and wonderful with our lives.

Buddhism tells me that I have the opportunity to take responsibility for who I am and how I choose to live. I

am not promised the joy of life is someone else looks within, or is still, fearless and unattached. This is mine to know, to practice and to claim if indeed I want it.

Buddhism has brought this opportunity to me. It is one I gratefully accept anew each and every day, and in doing so I hope that through my practice I can give back to Buddhism a life that has been filled with joy in the Way.

Buddhism tells me that I have the opportunity to take responsibility for who I am and how I choose to live.



Recognizing an Attachment: In Memory of a Princess

by Sherry Lednicki - Newport, Arkansas

I grew up with one of the most powerful women in the world and didn't know it. My aunt always tried to protect me while protecting herself and her interests. I was always close to my family, but never thought of them dying. When they died it was easy for me because of the relationship that I had with my family, and also the belief that I will see them again in my next life.

I realized the value of family when they were gone. They are gone. I also realized the value of everything they tried to teach me, lessons that neither money nor gold can buy, and without always having the "why" explained.

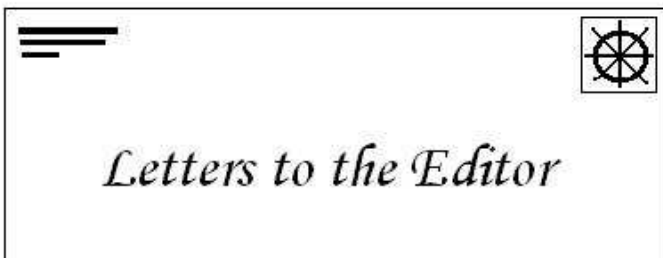
My aunt wanted me to go to college to become a legal secretary, and although I did get an education later in life, I now realize the value of that. When I was seven she bought me a set of *World Book* encyclopedias. She also gave me a pair of my baby shoes that my grandpa had preserved and painted in gold and filled with concrete, with the word "Daddy", meaning that grandpa had fixed my baby shoes. My grandpa died when I was twenty-three, a very gentle-spirited man, and a man of few words.

My aunt was diagnosed with breast cancer and was unsure of what to do. In my mind she would be a survivor. I recommended a treatment for her. I got out of prison in 2003 and got to spend a few days with her and then attend her funeral. She was the first family member I saw after my release. I also got to attend a dinner after the funeral with some of my surviving family members.

I reflect back to my younger years, and I remember that my aunt lived a very humble lifestyle. Her passions were gardening and sewing. Although I was always getting into "mischievous trouble" she always let me know that she loved me. When I was shipped off to my mother's in Missouri and changed phone numbers, I had a desk and a pink princess phone waiting for me. In her eyes I could do no wrong. She was a woman of very few words. When I was in jail she missed very few visitation days.

Although she is gone now, I hope to implement a program called SEEDS in memory of my aunt whose passion was plants and flowers. Who was that woman? She was my Princess Grace of Monaco. I love you Aunt Marcelle, and I'll never forget the legacy you left me and my unborn daughter. It takes a special person like a princess to be known throughout her life only as an aunt. Maybe my reign will be a very prosperous time for all to remember when I join my ancestors.





SEND your letters to the editor at:

Letters to the Editor
Inside Dharma
PO Box 20721
Kirkwood, MO 63122

Dear Dharma Friends:

Below is a copy of my monthly Buddhist column. This column will appear in the Kansas City Star newspaper on Saturday, Sept. 13th in the Faith Section. As always comments are welcomed.

Your Friend In The Dharma,
Lama Chuck Stanford

Question: "Is there any such thing as good or bad luck for a person of faith?"

Answer: From the Buddhist perspective everything that happens to us in this life is the result of causes and conditions known as karma from either this lifetime or past lifetimes. Most of us tend to want some explanation for the positive and negative events that occur in our life. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, "Shallow men believe in luck. Strong men believe in cause and effect."

The reality is that we never know when an event that occurs in our life is ultimately good or bad. There is the story about a poor farmer whose only horse runs away. Later the horse returns with an entire herd of wild horses. Next the farmer's son tried to

"break" one of the wild horses but is thrown off and breaks his leg. Finally, the army comes along to enlist the son into the army because their country is at war, but fails to take him due to his broken leg. Each of these individual events you could attribute as either good or bad. However, when you view them in context to one another you see that one particular event is neither inherently good nor bad, but simply due to causes and conditions that have arisen.

So, the important thing is not how ill or well favored our life is, but rather how we respond to situations as they arise. Every situation in our life has the potential to wake us up to the present moment or to cause us to respond with anger and fear.

Dear Kalen,

"Overcoming Attachment" as written up by J.R. Bloom of Cameron, MO, was meaningful to my, separated by miles, conditions, age and ideas in our environment. Yet all insights, from Tom Brown in Florence, AZ, and Noah Toller in Bowling Green, MO, who referred to the "small i" plus the comments by Shoshin proved something important to me:

Meditation, by many diverse i's anywhere, dissolves space, all differences, and all material ties. These meditators, so different from me in many ways, reached a place in which we were "one". Each of us sees consciousness similarly. In fact, they, wherever they are, regardless of past or present conditions, share something in common. Their insights meant more to me than most conversations had with very successful people in our dining room.

Attachments, as said by Shoshin, get very subtle. I think they rarely dissolve

completely. My main attachment comes from willfulness. It is difficult for me to surrender and allow everything to be, just as it is. During meditation I surrender, but later I try to control events. It's then that I ask myself, just as Noah Toller asks, who am i ?

These meditators helped me understand the oneness of life once we meditate. Noah Toller's little i is the same personality mentioned on a tombstone, between birth date and date of death, not the same i that never dies and is one with all other i's.

D.F. - Florida

Shoshin,

Could you please print the attached photos of Charlie Caviness in the newsletter? He's been out just over a year, and recently broke his neck. Lots of guys know him, and it would be good for all of us to keep him in our thoughts:



Charlie,

Please know that you have an entire community of Dharma brothers and sisters who are thinking of you and wishing you a speedy recovery and continued success.

Shoshin and the Inside Dharma Sangha



Asleep or Awake

by Anthony Byrd - Pacific, MO

As I walk out onto the yard from my cell, I feel the cushion of the grass and the firmness of the earth beneath my feet. Hearing the birds in the trees, I look only to see a group of young sparrows who are just learning to fly under one of the trees. To my left I see the clearing on the side of a small mountain. Its tall grasses blow in the breeze, resembling the waves of a deep ocean. Then they come, showing themselves, first the wild turkeys, two toms and maybe six hens, working their way across the clearing as they feed.

From the highest point of the clearing she appears from the tree line, a single doe. Slowly they begin to emerge from the trees, and the does and fawns begin to gather in a herd of about fifteen or twenty. Then the bucks appear, coming from three directions. They take their positions around the others, watching over them as they graze.

I sit on the yard to observe all I'm seeing, hearing, feeling. All around me are other inmates, some talking and laughing, others playing games, some singing, and each sound is its own, yet merges with the others. There are sounds of the people, birds singing, leaves rustling, and even the constant hum of all things. I can feel the warmth of the sun, the light breeze which blows across my body, and the earth beneath me.

Then I see them, four wild geese from the flock that makes this prison their home. They approach me looking for a handout. When they come to within about six feet of me, I hold out my hands so that they can see that I have nothing to give them. They look at my hands, then to my eyes seeming to say, "We understand," and with a few

honks they waddle away seeking handouts elsewhere.

At that time I realize that for a period of about fifteen or twenty minutes there have been no words, no thoughts, only peace and serenity. Had I fallen asleep and was I merely dreaming? Or for that brief period of time was I fully awake?



The Mule

by Brian Taylor - Huntsville, TX

Sometimes it happened
That I was a mule.
My stubbornness, it seems,
Made me act like a fool.

I paid no attention
To any good word.
I kicked and I brayed.
I wouldn't run with the herd.

One day I discovered
In a field all alone
Just how very far
That I'd strayed from my home.

Hungry and tired
And ridden with pests,
I yearned for a pasture
Where I could find rest.

It is many years later
And my goal is in sight.
I no longer struggle
Over what's wrong or what's right.

I'm thankful today
Because I've found a new start.
I'm no longer mule-headed
Because I think with my heart.

This issue is dedicated to

**The Native American
group at NECC,
Bowling Green, MO**

**Thank you for your friendship
and for your generous
artistic contributions to
Art from Inside.**

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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