

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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The Path Continues

By Dom Lupo - St. Louis, MO

When I was released in April I was filled with optimism because I was no longer behind the walls. It was short lived though, because as time passed much of my optimism has turned to loneliness and desperation. I had lived in Columbia for over 25 years before I was arrested but had to home plan to St. Louis. So, all my friends are in Columbia and other cities. I do have my family which I am so blessed to have. I actually home planned to my mother's home, but my family can't always be there for me like a friend can. When I first got out I felt like I was walking around with an orange jumpsuit on. It was one of the strangest feelings, and even though that feeling has faded it hasn't completely gone away. I have been attending the Shinzo meditation group and it has given me one night a week that I gather with people of like mind. Unfortunately, several of the individuals who attend are other ex-offenders on parole or people who work as VIC's which doesn't allow us to just hangout.

Trying to find work has been exhausting. It's a full time job looking for a job. I've been through three re-entry programs but none of them has really helped my situation. They cover how to write a resume and how to interview which were things I already knew how to do. I have a graduated level education but it hasn't help in my case. All anyone seems to see when they look at my application is that I'm a sex offender.

Even if I can get to the point of an interview and explain that I committed a computer crime with no hands on victims the label of ex-con/sex-offender is all they seem to see. For me this label is the hardest thing I've had to deal with since I've been out and really ever. It's the fact that no one sees me, they just see the label and all the horrible connotations that go along with it. But I am not that label. I am a 51 year old man with a lifetime of good works in my past. I am a man who has dedicated the past 35 years to service work helping others. I even tutored inmates while I was in prison.

My Buddhist practice helps to keep me in the moment, where at any given moment I'm ok. When I get caught up in the past, it's filled with wanting my old life back. Wanting the respect and positions I used to hold. It's filled with regret for the poor decision that I made that brought me to this point. When I get caught up in the future, it's filled with the fear of never getting a good job again, of becoming homeless. It's filled with loneliness and hopelessness.

My practice reminds me that neither the past nor the future exists. The moment is the only point of time that I have any influence over. So every day I find gratitude for what I do have in my life. I am not homeless, I am not friendless and I have a family that loves and supports me. I have a practice and a teacher that bring compassion into action for me. They give me an outlet to help others and to develop my own compassion. I'm not sure what's going to happen, but I'm on the other side of the walls. I can only make the best decisions I can make when I make them and see where the journey takes me. I choose to believe that good will come from this and that I will continue to be ok right now.



Dear Dharma Friends:

Below is a copy of my monthly Buddhist column. This column will appear in the Kansas City Star newspaper. As always comments are welcome.

Your Friend In The Dharma,
Lama Chuck Stanford
(Lama Changchup Konchok Dorje)
Rime Buddhist Center

Question: "What can I do if my spiritual life is stagnant?"

Answer: Most of us see the spiritual world as separate from our everyday world. We believe that a spiritual life is reserved only for priests, nuns and monks. When we see the spiritual as separate from the ordinary world our view is very narrow -like tunnel vision. If you are dissatisfied with your level of faith, you may, in fact, be dissatisfied with how you are relating to the world. Faith manifests itself in our everyday actions. The problem for most of us is that we see "faith" is an accomplishment or a personal possession. Faith is more than just a belief in this or that - it is a vision of a greater and deeper reality. It is a vision of how our lives and our world can manifest great compassion.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, "All religions share a common root, which is limitless compassion. They emphasize human improvement, love, respect for others, and compassion for the suffering of others." Faith, then, is a challenge for us to open to our vision to how our lives and the world can be fully awake. It is asking us to become more kind; more compassionate, and practice loving-kindness in our every-day lives. So, if you feel your spiritual life is stagnant then that is a wake-up call to change how you are relating to the world around you.

Question: "When you meditate, what do you focus on?"

Answer: Nearly every religion has a contemplative side to it where meditation may be used to help one connect with the sacred. Thomas Keating has written many books about "centering prayer" and/or "contemplative prayer" from the Christian perspective. Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield have written a great deal about Buddhist meditation.

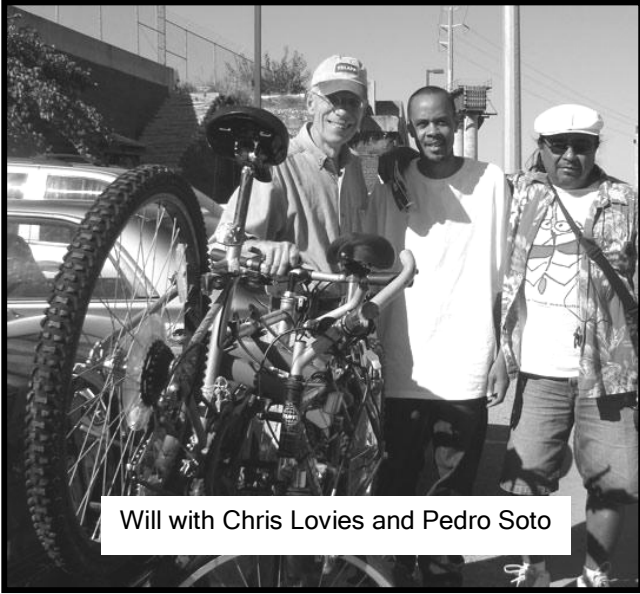
There are many different types of meditation such as analytical meditation, placement or concentrated meditation, and dzogchen or mahamudra meditation. Basic Buddhist meditation practice is often referred to as "mindfulness practice." It is a type of meditation known as "single-pointed meditation." Single-pointed meditation focuses upon a single point - as the name implies. Most Buddhist meditation places the focus of attention upon our breath. Why the breath? By focusing our attention upon our breath we are connecting the mind to the body. The goal of meditation is not to reach some transcendence or bliss, but rather to train the mind of the practitioner to be in the present moment.

Experiencing the present moment has been compared to the sharpness of a razor's edge - sharp and thin. Walking the razor's edge is facing life fully and accepting pain as readily as we accept joy. When we live fully in the present moment our lives and activity can manifest great compassion and dignity for others and ourselves. A daily meditation practice awakens our compassion and introduces us to a far larger view of reality.

Call for Submissions

This month's issue is shorter, as you've surely noticed. No, we're not broke, but we are wanting when it comes to submissions. We would love to have your letters to the editor, poems, thoughts about dharma practice, and stories of your path toward enlightenment.

Next issue's theme will be **Right Effort**.
What does it mean to you?



Will with Chris Lovies and Pedro Soto

The Dharma Rolls Forward

Carol and Will continue to collect, repair and distribute bicycles to homeless and ex-offenders at the halfway house downtown. This allows these people to have transportation to work and doctors appointments, etc. These bikes are their lifeline.

Happy Holidays to all of our readers!

Stories of Hope & Gifts of Joy

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**Our dharma brothers
who continue their practice
with diligence and
are dedicating their effort to
success on the outside.**

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