

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 2

March - April 2007

A Different Kind of Struggle

As I travel around the St. Louis area speaking about Buddhism to high school and college comparative religion classes with my teacher Kalen, I often hear her talk about dragons.

Kalen reminds her audience of European fairy tales in which the knight slays the dragon to conquer evil. It is different, she says, in Asian fairy tales. In those stories the hero confronts the dragon, and then makes peace with it, becoming friends the beast that he formerly feared or despised.

So it is, says Kalen, with us. The Buddha challenges us not to destroy our dragons, but instead to face them, to confront them and to understand them. We might even make peace with them. Our dragons are fear, anger, hatred, aversion, selfishness, cravings, bad habits, excuses...the list goes on.

Thank you, Kalen, for this valuable lesson. This issue's theme is "Taming the Dragon". May the words

contained in this issue bring peace to all sentient beings, even if only to cause one person to see things a little differently, a little more clearly, a little more compassionately. -Shoshin

Making Life Meaningful

By James Pate – Farmington, MO

In this life, if we try to help others as much as we can, and have as few selfish thoughts as possible, we shall experience much happiness.

In my past life, I was taught that you have to go out and take what you want, and then and only then would you become happy.

Now I realize that by practicing the Buddha's teachings, the important thing is that as long as

you are a human being, you should be a good human being.

I shall use my mind, hands and body to serve others. Being kind to others will be wonderful, excellent.

I ask for forgiveness for the hurt and harm I have imposed on females. I thank Kalen and all other females,

including my new female friends, for being compassionate toward me. I have much faith in the Buddha's teachings, which brings peace into my mind.

Taming the Dragon



Emotions

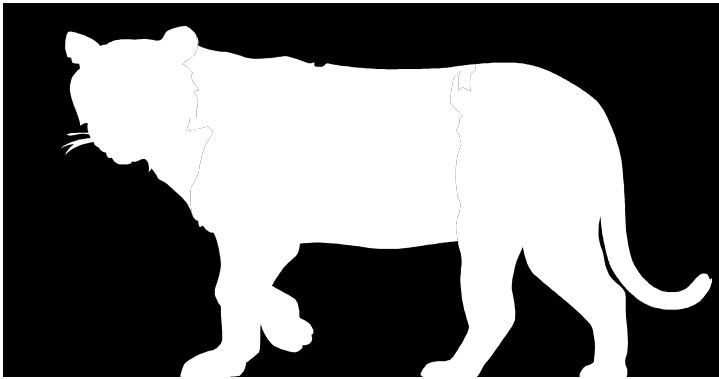
By Anthony Byrd – Licking, MO

When we are affected by our emotions, we must first ask ourselves what it was that caused them to arise. Once we know the cause, we are ready to ask why. Why have we had this type of reaction to what has happened? We must understand how this has affected our mind and body as well.

Through understanding the cause and effect, only then can one seek its end. Each emotion affects one's mind and body in different ways. Only by total understanding of the truth can we overcome the suffering caused by emotions.

The rise of one's emotions can trigger the rise of many others. One must fully understand each one. This understanding will give you the happiness that you seek. Happiness cannot be found by walking the mountain high road, nor on trails in a lush valley. It is in the realization of truth that happiness dwells.

May all beings be happy and free from suffering.



Personal Prisons

By Charles "Tom" Brown – Buckeye, AZ

Mohini, a white tiger, spent years pacing back and forth in her twelve-by-twelve-foot cage in the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. Eventually a natural habitat was created for her. Covering several acres, it had hills, trees, a pond and a variety of vegetation. With excitement and anticipation, the staff released Mohini into her new and expansive environment. The tiger immediately sought refuge in a corner of the

compound. There she lived for the remainder of her life, pacing back and forth in an area measuring twelve by twelve feet.

Some prisons are built with concrete, steel and razor wire. Others are built in the dungeons of our minds. Though freedom is possible, we often pass our years trapped in the same old patterns. We cage ourselves in to our self-imposed prisons with self-judgment and anxiety. Then with the passing of time we, like Mohini, grow incapable of accessing the freedom and peace that is our birthright.

Life however, is continually calling us to become more, to journey into the wilderness and face the truth. In my case, the shell of my life had to be softened—broken down, even—by the experience of coming to prison before the moment of truth could appear. I needed to be humbled, cooked in the tears of loss, for any deeper life to emerge.

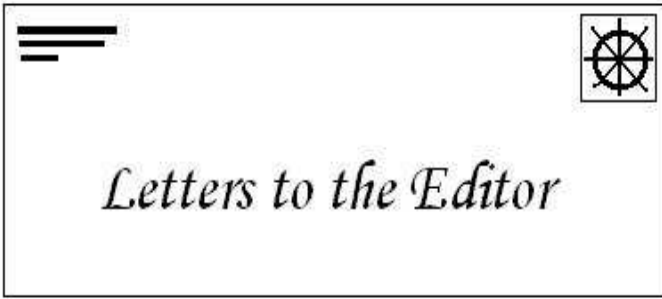
A new life requires a death of some kind; otherwise it is nothing but a shuffling of the same old deck. What dies is an outworn way of being in the world. We are no longer who we thought we were.

On the deepest level, this journey of awakening opens is to the innermost center of love. Love creates its own freedom from imprisonment, has its own direction, moves according to its own rhythms, and makes its own music.

Poelosophy

By Mark Mason - Licking, MO

I sit in my room thinking sometimes,
Trying to understand my ways,
Searching for clues, looking for signs
That would maybe define or explain,
Cause though I'm a shrewd and simply divine
Individual laced with game,
I'm sometimes a fool, but of my own kind,
So I analyze to maintain.
See the way I move, groove, bump and grind
Puts the average Joe in a daze.
That's why I lose fools when I rhyme
Leaving them baffled and amazed.
If you only knew the root of my shine
You could comprehend my pain
And know the Truth is absolutely mine
And is the fuel of my flame.



Dear Friends,

It was 1:30am on January 15th and I couldn't sleep, so I decided to walk my 15-pound Schnauzer to the mailbox for the mail I didn't pick up earlier. The whooping cranes were talking to each other. All else was asleep, quiet for the night.

My mailbox was full of "throw-away" offer for exciting cruises, insurance, and even an invitation to a bank opening party. I saw **Inside Dharma** and, with the throw-aways at my feet, I read the "Starting Over" issue.

What an inspiration—so many thoughts from those who wrote those lines. Somehow we connected, there at 2am in Florida, in an upscale retirement community, even though you were all so far away.

I went back to bed uplifted by your ideas. And thought, "Starting over requires a stop first." In that stop, a stop from running after outside things, is the wealth of our inner selves. As we sit, motionless in nothingness, we realize that we have everything-ness inside of us.

But we must come to a stop to realize that in that nothingness is everything. So we start over. But first we must stop to find it.

- Dedie Fries, Florida



[from a letter to Kalen]

...I think a lot of guys come back because they forget.

Most of the guys that I talk to that come back all say that after they are out for a bit they forget what it was like. In a sense we give ourselves permission to return because we tell ourselves that we "can" do time. That if it comes down to it, we can make it on the inside. Sometimes this place is kind of comfortable. Not that any of us like it here. But it is kind of like being a drug addict. The drugs make us miserable, but it is something that we know how to do. There are no surprises involved.

Change is harder. Change can be scary for us. As for being "institutionalized" I think that we are. All of us are to a degree. I know that I am. But not in the sense that we need the institution to survive or to feel comfortable. We just become adapted to our environment. That is transitory. Once we go to another environment then we will change accordingly. It may take some time but I think that if we have really worked on ourselves while we re inside then we will be much better prepared when we are released...

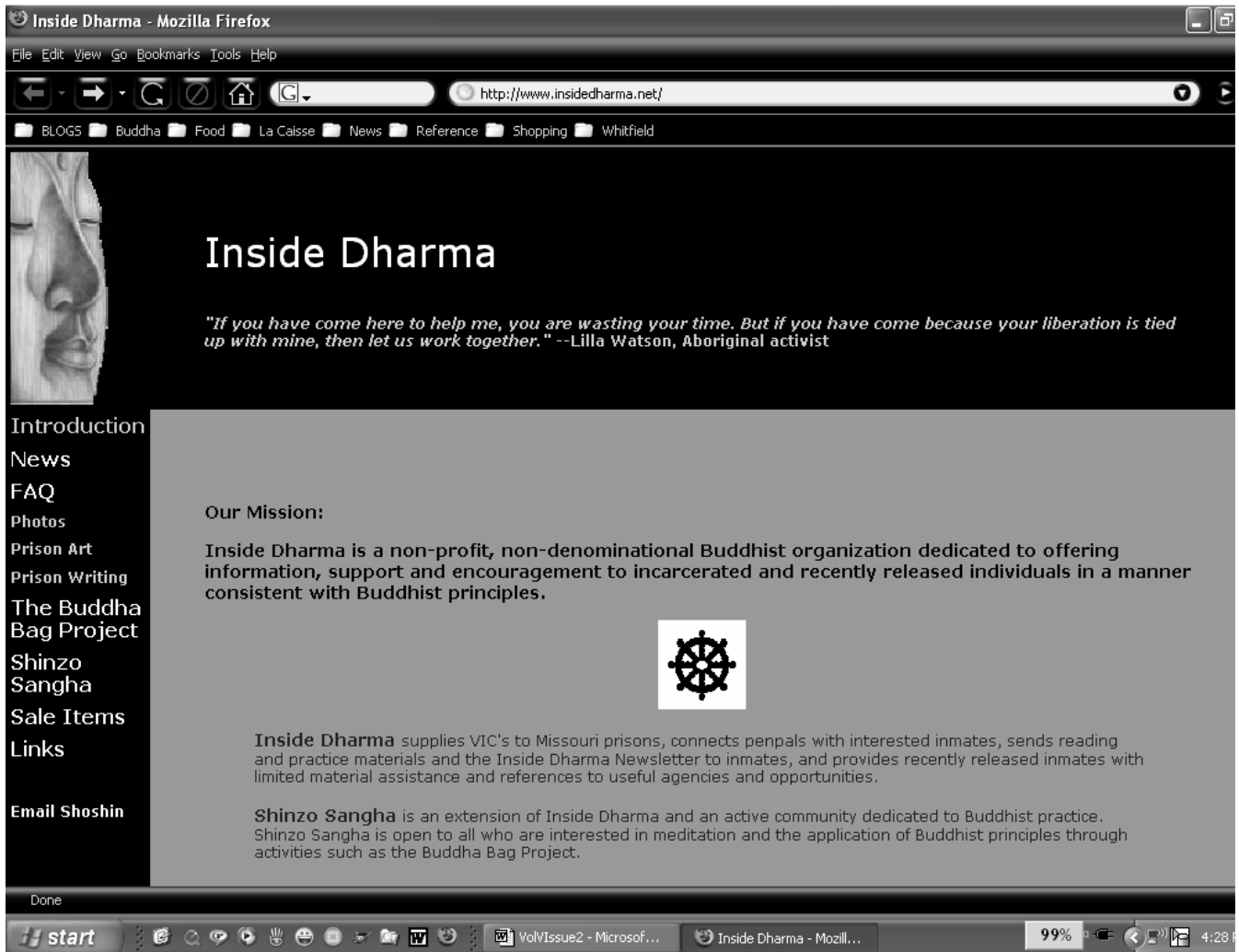
- Bryan Taylor, Rosharon, TX



Dear Shoshin,

I just wanted to say thank you to all of the guys who write stuff and send it to you to go in the newsletter. I find the newsletter makes me think things over and each issue has at least one thing I end up talking about with others. I am not much of a Buddhist, and not a great writer, but I appreciate the effort of others and I am grateful.

JR, Missouri



Inside Dharma on the World Wide Web

by Shoshin

The World Wide Web is an interconnected network that joins computers around the world in the way that Indra's jeweled net holds together the universe. With access to the World Wide Web, computer users can access ancient Buddhist texts, discussions among Sangha members, pictures of Buddhist temples, audio recordings of teachings by the Dalai Lama, and videos of Buddhist ceremonies.

And now, people from all over the world can access Inside Dharma. In September, Inside Dharma obtained an address on the World Wide Web and construction of an informative site was begun.

Our site, www.insidedharma.org, provides an introduction to Inside Dharma's mission and

activities. It also provides links to other Buddhist organizations and prison outreach projects.

In the coming weeks, prison art and writing will be added to galleries on the web site so that viewers from around the world may appreciate the insights, creativity and skill of our contributors. Back issues of the Inside Dharma newsletter will soon be available via the web site as well.

Statistics gathered demonstrate that our site is indeed being visited from around the world. We have had visitors from Canada, England, France, the Netherlands, Australia, Mozambique, Russia and Taiwan.

In February alone we had 72 different visitors to the site, and we averaged three visitors each day, but we are hoping that those numbers will increase and that our mission and our message will spread. Encourage your friends and relatives to check out www.insidedharma.org

Zhou Chu and the Dragon

By Shoshin

Adapted from a traditional Chinese folk tale

Zhou Chu was the toughest young man in town. He took what he wanted, he never admitted to a mistake, and he never thought of others. He was the town bully.

When Zhou Chu woke up in the morning, his first thought was to find something good to eat. He would walk to the market and make the rounds, glaring at vendors and taking what he wanted from their carts and stalls. They dared not stop him or even speak to him. He was hard. He was cold. He was intimidating.

In the afternoon, Zhou Chu would sit by the fountain in the center of town, and when people came for water he would make comments about them, making fun of those he considered weak or unattractive. If a stranger appeared, he would make sure to let the stranger know who was boss. No one liked Zhou Chu, but no one dared to stand up to him.

Not until one day, when a little old man appeared as if from nowhere and walked toward the fountain just after lunch time. Zhou Chu was picking his teeth with a fish bone. He had just enjoyed a meal that was meant for a man working in a nearby field. He had taken it from the man's wife's rucksack as she filled a pitcher at the fountain. It had been a good meal, and Zhou Chu was pleased with himself. The old man hobbled straight toward the fountain, supported by a knobby wooden cane. He was small and wrinkled, with a long white beard and a smiling face. Just before he reached the thin trickle of water, Zhou Chu growled,

"I don't know you, old man. It will cost you a few coins to use my fountain."

The old man laughed and cupped a hand to catch the cool water. "No, no it won't, Zhou Chu." And he drank.

Zhou Chu was stunned at first at the old man's boldness, but he quickly rose to his full height, towering over the little man with the smiling face, and said, "You may know my name, but I don't

think you know me very well. But you are about to learn."

"Oh, I know you," said the old man. "You are no different from any other man. You get hungry. You get thirsty. You get sleepy. And you fear the same things as any other man."

"I fear nothing," roared Zhou Chu.

"That cannot be so," said the old man without flinching. He stared straight up into Zhou Chu's fierce eyes. "The farmers in this part of the country are afraid of the dragon that lives in the mountains. You are afraid, too, or you would not be hiding here by the fountain each day instead of defeating the dragon. You are not so tough."

Zhou Chu was livid. No one had ever dared speak to him like this. "I will show you, you wrinkled old fig. I will go wrestle this dragon and tie him up, and when I drag him back here to town, I will feed you to him in front of everyone."

"I hope you do," giggled the old man as he ambled back toward a side street and disappeared into the shadows.

Zhou Chu knew nothing of fighting dragons. He had heard old tales about a dragon in the mountains, but he had never considered them more than rumors spread by cowardly farmers. He would show that old man and all the townspeople who might have overheard their exchange. If there was a dragon, he would drag it back and indeed feed the old man to him. If there was no dragon, he would come back and feed the old man a taste of his rage and teach him a lesson.

Zhou Chu stormed off into the hills, and soon he found himself high up the road that passed over the mountains. The ground was rocky and cold, and no birds sang. The sun disappeared behind somber clouds. Zhou Chu felt a shiver creep up his spine. He clenched his fists and his teeth, and he walked up a narrow valley that stopped at the mouth of a deep black cave.

At the entrance to the pitch black cave, Zhou Chu hesitated for the first time in his life. He stood before the cave, unsure what to do next. Was he afraid? What if there was a dragon? What might happen? No, he was Zhou Chu. He was the hardest, most fearless, toughest man around. He stepped forward.

But Zhou Chu froze in his tracks when from out of the shadows emerged the scaly, horned head of a great razor-toothed dragon. The dragon's head edged forward into the dull light, and Zhou Chu felt true fear for the first time in his life.

"Why are you here?" growled the great beast.

"To...to defeat you and drag you to my town," Zhou Chu said in a voice he barely recognized as his own. "I fear nothing. You are about to learn how tough I am."

The dragon's long snaky body emerged fully from the cave, his huge four-clawed talons gripping the small boulders beneath him. Zhou Chu raised his fists and dropped into a fighter's stance. Sweat dampened his brow even though the air was cold.

"You may defeat me, but there will be no honor in that," the dragon rumbled. "The farmers in this country have never come to bother me, not because they are afraid, but because they consider me a guardian. No army has passed over these mountains to occupy your town, and that is because I am here. No, if you want to earn fame and glory and a reputation for ferocity, you must defeat the most despised, most feared, most loathsome creature in the land. If you defeat the horrible monster of which I speak, you will indeed be a great warrior."

"I have never heard of such a beast. Who is this foul creature?" asked Zhou Chu.

"He is a great bully, a selfish, mean man who does nothing but make the people's lives harder and more miserable. He steals from the farmers, he threatens the shopkeepers, and he gives all the children nightmares. His name is Zhou Chu."

Zhou Chu's mouth dropped open, and his fists unclenched, and his knees felt weak. Just when he thought he had overcome his fear, he was now paralyzed by something even stronger. Zhou Chu was ashamed.

The dragon just watched knowingly as Zhou Chu's realization washed over him.

"Go and defeat this Zhou Chu, and when you have done so, I will bow three times before you, stranger," declared the dragon. The great dragon then turned and disappeared into his dark cave.

Zhou Chu walked very slowly back down the mountain road to the town. He finally arrived as evening settled over the square, and he walked past the fountain and past the market straight back to his house.

The next morning, no fruit or bread was stolen from the market, and no one threatened any shopkeepers. As the midday sun heated the square, no one bullied the people who came to the fountain, and no one mocked or threatened any strangers.

For several days, the town was quiet and peaceful, but the people all assumed that Zhou Chu was just sick, and that as soon as he was feeling better, things would be hard again. But Zhou Chu was not sick. Eventually he was seen around town again, but his behavior was very different. It was the talk of the town. Zhou Chu was spotted carrying water for a widow. Someone else said that he helped stack apples back onto a cart that had been upset. Someone else even claimed that Zhou Chu had apologized to a man he had insulted and beaten just three weeks before.

The rumors were true, and Zhou Chu was indeed very different. After a while, Zhou Chu was no longer feared, and in fact people began to talk to him, and even to greet him. Zhou Chu would never be the people's favorite neighbor, but he was no longer loathed and feared and despised. He even made a few friends.

For a long time Zhou Chu wondered about the little old man who had set his transformation in motion, until one day when Zhou Chu was drawing water at the fountain for an old woman who could not do it herself. The old man appeared behind Zhou Chu. Zhou Chu did not now what to say, but before he could even open his mouth, the smiling, wisened old man silently bowed three times to Zhou Chu.



This issue is dedicated to:

**David H
and
Henry S**

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

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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