



**Inside Dharma**

*A socially engaged Buddhist outreach organization  
 applying Buddhist principles in prison & on the street*

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**The Buddhist Newsletter Serving the Inmate and Ex-Offender Sangha**  
*"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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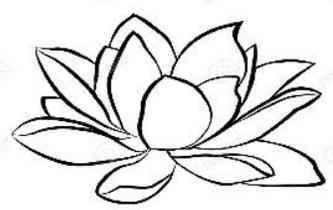
***"Presence"***  
**by Donald Warner – Sterling CO**

Buddhism has given me awareness, or I should say, shown me the path to discover the awareness we all hold. I am now able to be present and through awareness, hold and be in the moment.

Previously being in the world or a relationship, when things became difficult or unpleasant, my thing was to try and escape. Now, I sit and am aware, observing things as they are and I am okay.

As I journey on the path, I am grateful for all that I encounter, comfortable or not. Every moment of every day is precious.

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***"How my Buddhist journey has changed the way I view the world ( and perhaps my relationships)"***

**by Stephen Ferguson – Licking MO**

By recognizing the delusion of self/not self, and then using the precepts and practices of Buddhism to free myself from that delusion, my view of the world changed completely.

Instead of imagining the world around me as separate, which would allow oneself to win at the expense of non-self, which would lose, I now see that all are connected and one. If I am correct, there is no wall of separation. All matter is part of one cosmos. All life is simply variations of the same DNA. When we help anyone, we help everyone and everything. When we harm anyone, we harm all.

So now, rather than view this world as a competition between winners and losers, I am able to view existence and all life in it as simply various aspects of an indivisible one. When I wish that all beings may experience happiness, peace and freedom from suffering, I do it with the belief that

it is all or none, and that to do so is our only real path to happiness, peace and freedom from suffering. Correct or incorrect?

Perhaps my “wisdom” will always be exceeded by my ignorance? But, with this view in mind, I sincerely wish that you and all beings (especially those I find most difficult to appreciate and understand) may experience happiness, peace and freedom from suffering.

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**“Choose Wisely”  
by Ronald Avey - Alamo GA**

Realization that it was all an illusion created has dawned. The feelings of closeness, the events that were thought to be special, nothing more than empty images projected on the screen of the mind from the senses. Smells delighted in, sounds smiled at, shapes found alluring, touches that comfort was found in, tastes enjoyed, thoughts found brilliant....all illusions. It was an attempt to find lasting pleasure in things that by their very nature are fleeting. Nothing permanent

could have come from them no matter the effort.

Great effort was put forth before realization occurred, though this effort never was and never could be enough. The best way to describe it would be like building a sandcastle on the beach expecting it to last forever and then realizing, no matter how cleverly designed, the tide would destroy it.

No matter how much money, no matter the time spent, no matter the deity invoked...everything fails.

Now what is done with this information depends on the person.

That person can laugh about it.

That person can despair about it.

That person can continue to try to enjoy those fleeting things that come across their senses.

That person can attempt to transcend them, looking for happiness and peace that are not dependent.

But, they cannot be kept.

Everything fails, including the paper this is written on, the ink on it, the very words they are composed of.

What is done with that information is up to the person reading.

Choose wisely.

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*“Opportunities I have had as I’ve experienced Buddhism”*

**by Donald Warner – Sterling CO**

Mindfulness in my practice has opened the world up for me. Although it has always been there and been available, my habitual responses, reactions and internal narratives had closed the world in around me, around self.

Sitting, practicing with my thoughts and emotions have uncoupled the chains of habit and allowed me to become aware and present. Hours of practice have produced a new found life, mindful of what is, mindful of here and now.

Being mindful has allowed me to be grateful and appreciative in the good and the bad, taking every moment, person, and experience as an opportunity for dharma.

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***“A Guide to Zazen”***  
**By Reverend “Shindo”**  
**Tom Bradshaw**  
**Shinzo Zen Meditation Center**  
**St. Louis, MO**

I’m sure many readers may not have a copy of Dogen’s guide to zazen, called the *Fukanzazengi*. (FU-con-za-ZEN-ghee) It’s a rich explanation of and instructions for zazen; the foundation of our Zen practice.

At monasteries it is read by everyone together after the last zazen of the day.

It’s too long for an article, so here is a shortened version. Don’t let confusing parts discourage you. Reading it daily will help your practice.

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If we’re already enlightened, then why do we need to do anything?! Effort is necessary because opinions make practice easily missed.

Sit zazen with your flesh and bone, not your brain. Don’t let your head get in the way.

Buddha & Bodhidharma weren’t special experts at zazen; even they had to sit zazen for many years – just like us. You need to make the same tremendous effort whether or not you believe you’re able to do what they did. Don’t underestimate your zazen.

Shine light on your ideas about Zen and practice to see that they are just thoughts. Even let go of the thought, “I’m sitting zazen.” Then no one is left doing anything. This is called body and mind dropping away. You will be yourself as you are, instead of who you are yet to be.

Sit zazen in as quiet a place as possible with enough light. Don’t be too full or hungry, hot or cold. During zazen notice how the brain naturally judges, analyzes, gauges, plans, remembers, dreams, and imagines; release each of these as you become aware of them and straighten your posture. You go past

zazen in trying to understand it. Both in zazen and daily life, don't entertain thoughts about enlightenment.

Sit on a cushion or chair so your body is stable. With palms facing up, rest your right hand in your lap and place your left hand on top with thumb tips lightly touching. Sit upright and as straight as possible but also relaxed. Make your ears in line with your shoulders and your nose in line with your belly button by pulling your chin in a bit. In your closed mouth rest your tongue and breathe naturally through your nose. Keep your eyes halfway open to help stay awake.

Now that you are in posture, breathe in and out deeply. Like a boat settling in calm water, slowly rock your body side to side until you are motionless and upright.

Thoughts occur naturally. Adding to those thoughts is called *thinking*. Trying not to think is called *not-thinking*. Zazen is **non-thinking**; neither adding to nor trying not to think – just letting thoughts go as best you can. Endlessly open the hand of thought.\*

Zazen is not learning concentration or a technique to become enlightened. It is enlightenment.

This non-thinking of zazen liberates us from thoughts as bothersome and we find ourselves returning to a reality that we never truly left. Zazen is the home of clarity we return to.

Don't get up from zazen carelessly. Move slowly and calmly because zazen and daily life are one; don't treat them differently. Respect

this one bridge that connects zazen to daily life.

Zazen effortlessly goes beyond ordinary and enlightenment.

Whatever it is that allows an enlightenment has no relation to the thinking mind nor some special or magic ability. Enlightenment exists before you recognize it.

Keep in mind that being smart or not doesn't matter as long as one tries wholeheartedly. Putting forth effort creates seamless practice - enlightenment. You will realize practice and enlightenment are one as you take care of daily life. This is called everyday mind – which you already have.

Soto Zen practice boils down to devoting oneself wholeheartedly to sitting still. Don't look for it anywhere else.

How fortunate it is you are not only alive but you came across zazen – a practice worth doing above the things that only bring temporary relief. Life is short.

Please realize your brain's limited understanding of zazen is a safety net. Dedicate your energies to continually dropping this net. Respect those who've done this. If you engage yourself in zazen as though saving your head from fire\*\* you can't help but walk in their shoes and transmit zazen to others.

\* Uchiyama Roshi's saying

\*\* Dogen's Zenji's saying

**RESOURCE DIRECTORY –**

To request copies of the resource directory for St. Louis, please write to:

Heartland Zen  
9648 Olive #364  
St. Louis, MO 63132

***Note: There is only ONE directory and it is only for St. Louis.***



***“Living In Moment”***  
**By “Kyoryu” Kris Ash**  
**Shinzo Zen Meditation Center**  
**St. Louis, MO**

Originally, I discovered Soto Zen Buddhism and zazen (mindfulness meditation) out of a sense of intellectual curiosity some 25 years ago. I was teaching middle school students about eastern cultures and their religions (my day job) and realized that I knew precious little about these subjects. So, I joined a local Zen Buddhist center and began learning zazen. And although I started these studies to learn factual information about Buddhism, as time wore on, I stuck with the study of Zen meditation (zazen) for much the same reason as most people originally have when coming to this practice....I was hoping to find peace. What I found was of greater value.

As most Buddhist practitioners know, the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) taught that there are...

4 Noble Truths:

1. Life involves suffering.

2. The cause of this suffering is our grasping and ignorance.
3. An individual can become “awakened” which induces the cessation of suffering.
4. To experience this “enlightenment”, one must follow the Eight Fold path.

I truly believe that as a human being, I originally saw “magic” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Noble Truth (when I first began my Zen studies). I think that many of us do. It is that yearning for a life free from suffering that causes us to make most of the decisions in our lives. In fact, we are biologically programmed to do “whatever it takes” to remove the obstacles in our path (whether they be physical threats – attacking alligator, a person with a knife, tornado overhead...or emotional ones – nagging partner, complaining boss, cellie who keeps messing with your stuff). Our mind yearns to feel “safe” and we do what it takes to create that feeling (grasping). So naturally, the idea of the cessation of all suffering sounds like a wonder pill....who wouldn’t want that?!!

But, this yearning for the attainment of the cessation of suffering is just another trap of grasping (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Noble Truth)...and that grasping is what leads to our suffering in the first place. It’s a vicious cycle until we truly come to understand the entire point for sitting zazen.

Anyone who is following the Buddhist path just to end their suffering will probably get quite frustrated as they come to recognize that the causes of suffering are always going to be present in one’s life. But, if they wholeheartedly devote themselves to the

practice of zazen (\* note below), over time they will finally come to recognize at some point that the actual circumstances which cause the suffering will never be eliminated. What does change though, is our relationship to this suffering, the way we “see” things (\*\*see note below). Once you have come to this point in your practice of zazen (where you are no longer “thinking” with your mind but rather observing with your point of awareness), your natural tendency to avert your attention from painful circumstances will change and you will come to recognize and develop an acknowledgement that suffering exists. In some circumstances you might even find that you come to “accept or embrace” your suffering as you recognize that there may be wisdom, insight and understanding to be gained from a particular experience. (Though I am not implying that we should not work to eliminate suffering for ourselves and others, nor that we be alright with the times we have caused suffering.) My father used to say, “That which doesn’t kill me only serves to make me stronger”. I myself say that I acknowledge that those experiences will shape who I become.

The wonderful part of my Zen Buddhist experience is that despite my original naïve perspective (of attaining peace), my meandering down this path has helped me develop a growing expansion of my natural curiosity and a genuine appreciation for all circumstances of life while reaching a point of acknowledgement for what the universe has in store for me moment by moment. And I guess, in a way, that increasing modicum of “acceptance” is a sort of peace. But, it’s not

the “happily ever after” concept of fairy tales that so many chase. There is still suffering; but I am coming to acknowledge its arrival, and I look for the lessons each moment has to teach me rather than running away as I used to do.

As the recently deceased Thich Nhat Hanh says, “Waking up this morning, I smile. Twenty-four brand new hours are before me. I vow to live fully in each moment and look at all beings with eyes of compassion.” And I myself add, “And to look at all circumstances within this world with eyes of curiosity for the lessons that I might find within them.”

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\*(as described in Shindo’s article in this newsletter with his brilliant simplification of the Fukanzazengi, an instruction for zazen)

\*\* (as described in Donald Warner’s article in this newsletter edition with his eloquent description of how Buddhism has changed his perspective on life and Ronald Avey’s article which beautifully illustrates life’s illusion)

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**EDITOR’S CORNER:**

Dear Readers,

Please note that any mail sent to our old “PO Box” address will not be received by us and you need to use our new address which is located within the new Laughing Bear Bakery building (and listed on the next page).

Thank you for your various submissions. Please know that they are deeply appreciated but should follow the 7 guidelines below in order to be published. Works that contribute to supporting the values of Buddhism and its connection to

helping offenders are most welcome (as this is the topic of our publication venue).

This month's publications have given me many reasons to pause and reflect on my own practice. Thanks to those of you willing to take the risk to share your experiences, thoughts, and beliefs.

I look forward to your continued submissions and deeply appreciate your efforts!

In gassho, Kris (Kyuryo), Editor

#### Submission Guidelines:

1. Submissions need to be typed or printed neatly (readable).
2. Submission topic should support the belief in Buddhist values and the connection to the life of an offender.
3. Submission writing needs to be of adequate font/written size. (Not small)
4. Include paragraph breaks between major points.



5. Length ***1000 words or less.***

6. ***Please proof read*** your submissions for sentence clarity. (Know that the audience of your written work can not read your mind. Each sentence thought needs to be clear. If not, I will edit this.)

7. **NOTE: Submissions *will not be returned.*** (Whether used for publication or not. Sorry!)

Our NEW ADDRESS:

#### INSIDE DHARMA

**4001 Utah \* St. Louis MO 63201**

Reminder: **Our next issue deadline is July 31st.**

(Photos of Laughing Bear Bakery and founder Kalen McAllister below.)



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***For our 2022 July – Sept. Issue  
We will publish your thoughts on....***

***What “moments” in prison  
help get you through a day or  
give you strength to get  
through your time served?***

***Inside Dharma*** is a quarterly Buddhist newsletter published by ***Inside Dharma***, a not-for-profit organization based in St. Louis, Missouri. We publish Buddhist articles, stories, humor, and other writing submitted by current and former residents of correctional facilities, as well as friends, supporters, and spiritual teachers. ***Inside Dharma*** is dedicated to the free giving of the Dharma (Buddhist teachings). There is no charge to offenders or ex-offenders for subscriptions. However, donations are always appreciated. If you are interested in distributing the newsletter, please write to the editor at address above or just send us the addresses to be added to the mailing list. This newsletter may be reproduced, whole or in part, for free distribution. Prior permission from the editor is required for any use for which a charge is applied. All submissions are subject to editing and ***Inside Dharma*** has the right to publish submissions, in whatever format and by whatever means it deems appropriate in its own or other Buddhist publications.