

Inside  Dharma

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

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

VOLUME XV * ISSUE I

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"The Four Noble Haikus"

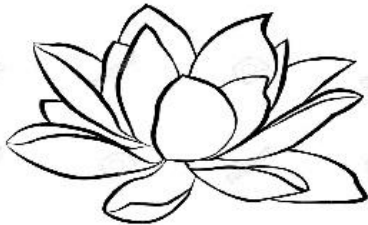
by Samuel Byrd – Crawfordville FL

Ever will it end
From birth, through sickness 'til death
Pain and suffering.

Karma which I caused
Craving, ignorance, grasping
The rest is just life.

Escape illusion
Cessation from desire
One step at a time.

Buddha leads the way
The path to enlightenment
Guiding from within.



"Enough"

by Norman Toler – Farmington MO

It is easy to think of incarceration as lack, privation, doing without, and not enough. Being so, I have spent some years at my institution accumulating that which was allowed by our Basic Items List. If it was permitted, I wanted to have one. Then, as I began to consider my engagement with the Buddha Way and the aspiration to become a monk, I realized I had more than enough. I began reading about the life of monks ordained in the Theravada tradition. They are permitted a few items that are just enough. I began downsizing. I unplugged my radio and stored it on a shelf. I downsized my clothing to a few polo shirts without designs or advertising on them. I went down to just two pair of pants. I am not trying to live austerely. I want to know what is enough for my situation.

It is not enough to do this materially. What am I doing with my mind? The mind demands stimulation, so as not to be bored. The mind fears, panics at, boredom. Putting away my radio is one way to stop feeding mind craving. Not scheduling television programming is another way to take care of the mind. With seemingly nothing to do, what do I do? I walk. I walk for about 5 hours a day. I walk similar to zazen. I walk the hallway outside my room door.

Just this life is enough. It is so rare and precious to be born human. Human life is so brief. Instead of dwelling in this life, we chase and crave. We crave from birth, and this is reinforced by our surroundings. We are surrounded by stimuli that demands we crave this and that. Ever be satisfied, never be content – this is the message we are given. This is not the message of Buddha.



“My Opportunities Through Mindfulness”
by Steve Ferguson - Licking MO

These are not my words, but I like the idea that “to live, we must choose – to love, we must experience.” When I foolishly default to endless loops of my passive wandering mind, have I any hope of truly choosing, empathizing or experiencing?

So, it seems the choice between mindfulness and mindlessness, is the choice between life and death. Whether to live life to the fullest with awareness and intention or to die ever so slowly in a semi-conscious existence of mindless wandering?

It is only my limited experience, but I find all existence to be opportunity. And I find mindfulness to be the tool by which I may make the most of that opportunity.

So, I would say for me, mindfulness has been in all aspects the opportunity to live life with awareness and intention and to be the change for which I wish in this world. Is there any better opportunity?

“Making Spirits Bright....From Prison”
by Shon Pernice – Moberly MO

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear about a men’s medium security prison? Probably not the happiest of thoughts. Moreover, what if I were to tell you about a group of over 130 offenders that held a candy donation, among themselves, in order to help the local community at Christmas? It may not capture the top of the news hour as some of their crimes did; however, the story shows that humanity and the desire to assist others does not eclipse when the cell door closes the incarcerated from the rest of society.

The Moberly Correctional Center (MCC) located in Moberly, Missouri, houses roughly 1700 men serving sentences for a variety of offenses. Inside of the 15 foot razor wire fences is Housing Unit Four, which consists of two wings, A Wing and C Wing, that holds 66 men per wing. The Therapeutic Community (TC), located in A Wing, was created in 2012. It is a structured wing that allows offenders a path for growth, personal development, and an environment free from the typical prison distractions. The men in the TC unit must take classes, volunteer to clean their living environment, and maintain a monthly tracking sheet to show their therapeutic gain. With their mission statement that begins, “Through positive thinking, inspiration, accountability, and dedication, we are transforming individuals....”, the Therapeutic Community exemplifies positivity and rehabilitation in the correctional setting.

The Veterans Program, in C Wing, with its signature flagpole displaying the US flag in the front, houses military veterans from all the

branches of service. Founded in 2017, the wing offers veterans specific resources to assist in their transition back into the community. From mental health services to the local Veterans Administration Hospital involvement, the Veterans Wing promotes a structured living environment that revives a sense of duty from their prior military service. In their Mission Statement that reads, “To reduce recidivism in the Veterans Community by restoring our Honor and means to succeed”, the men are always in search of humanitarian and restorative justice projects. The Veterans Wing at MCC is the pilot program for the entire Missouri Department of Corrections.

The Community Kitchen, in Moberly, is funded solely by donations and is run by volunteers. They serve healthy home cooked meals to approximately 125 guests twice a week that are having a hard time making ends meets. With the headline news showing the economic impact of COVID, inflation, and merchandise shortages at stores, the men yearned to do something different this year. They wanted the kind of venture that would positively impact someone’s life. The majority of the men come from low socioeconomic backgrounds that include being raised in group homes, the Division of Youth Services, and living on government assistance. They know hardship first hand. However, nobody ever forgets their childhood memories of the sweet bliss in possessing a bag of assorted candies. Thus, the proposal to the prison’s administration for a candy drive was submitted and approved.



On December 20, 2021, two large boxes of candy that were solely donated by the men of Housing Unit Four, weighing a total of 34 pounds, was picked up by a volunteer from the Community Kitchen. Inside of America’s prisons, sadness, homesickness, and depression resonate through

the cell walls. In many cases, the incarcerated do not have the opportunity to participate in altruistic projects. That Christmas of 2021, men from Housing Unit Four’s Therapeutic Community and Veterans Program, came together and made a difference not only in the local community, but also in their own lives.

“My Experienced Opportunities Through Mindfulness”

by James Hochschild – St. Petersburg FL

The closest I have come to experiencing “levels” or opportunities of mindfulness is during my practice of the 4 Foundations of Mindfulness (which can be either 4 or 5 levels or stages). The 4 Foundations are: 1) Form, 2) Feeling, 3) Mind, and 4) Dhammas (or dharmas). All four can be practiced during meditation or any other activity where mindfulness can be utilized. They are not levels, but aspects to be practiced to help support each other.

- 1) **Form** is mainly awareness of the breath or any other physical part of the body such as the nose, stomach, etc.
- 2) **Feeling** is awareness of the current state of pleasant, unpleasant, neutral in relation to Form or one of the other two foundations (mind, Dhammas).
- 3) **Mind** is awareness of mainly whether the mind or heart is in a sad/depressed state that needs to be gladdened; whether the mind is in a restless/agitated state that needs to be calmed or steadied; whether the mind is in a heightened state due to released stress.
- 4) **Dhammas** is awareness of what strategies that can be used to help with the other 3 foundations. (6 Senses, 4 Noble Truths, 7 Factors of Awakening, Noble Eightfold Path, 5 Aggregates, etc.)

“My Refuge”

by Eddie Williams – Menard IL

People know about me but they don’t know me. I show them everything while revealing nothing. I never pick a side because I talk to everybody but hang with no one. I live my life fluent like water. But, the only way I was able to accomplish this is with an open mind and a silent heart.

This is how I deal with the stress of being a prisoner.

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.

“Fukanzazengi”

by James (Kyugen) Bettis – Clarinda IA

To me the Fukanzazengi is like a diagram to finding The Way.

One must become careful on the way. Pride and ignorance can get in the way. One way can turn the path of the way into disaster. Pride for instance can inflate one’s ego, and this in turn will strengthen one’s belief in duality which will ruin one’s path.

When in sesshin, one shouldn’t have any likes or dislikes. There should be nothingness. Don’t think; don’t engage in thinking of pros and cons. Think of “nonthinking”. The masters themselves say, “Nonthinking - This in itself is the essential aspect

of zazen.” Basically don’t think; just be. Be one with the surroundings. Blend into nothingness.

You can practice the way every day. When you sit, walk, eat, work....you can practice the way. Just be mindful in whatever you do. Be one with whatever you do. Be mindful in everything.

Find yourself a nice, quiet place to sit. Get into lotus, half-lotus, or Burmese position. Most importantly, get into a comfortable position with your back straight, eyes open, and breath through your nose. Have your eyes sort of cast down at a 45 degree angle towards the floor, and be one with the universe. Be nothingness. When your meditation is done, get up slowly and remain relaxed.

Don’t waste the time you have. Take full advantage of the time you have as the human life itself is short. And the human life is so precious that we need to walk and talk The Way, every chance we have.

Don’t worry about destiny or being a buddha (as you already are a buddha). Be one with the universe; we are all one entity, one life force. Be one in satori.

Editor’s note: Definition of *satori* – inner, intuitive experience of sudden enlightenment ; a moment of total presence spent in the silence and stillness of zazen (Japanese Zen Buddhism).



“An Experience of Non-Judgement”
By “Kyoryu” Kris Ash
Shinzo Zen Meditation Center
St. Louis, MO

There is a monastic training monastery for Soto Zen Buddhist practitioners just north of Decorah, Iowa called Ryumonji Zen Monastery. I was given the opportunity to attend a portion of their winter Ango this past January/February 2022.

During the few weeks that I was there spending hours each day studying, meditating, working, and learning to live with others in harmony, I experienced many memorable moments. But, I would like to share one with you that I've never had before in all of my previous 60+ years!

Each day, the details of our lives were scheduled out and adhered to like in any traditional monastic training monastery. I arose at 5:30, sounded the wakeup bell for everyone else at 6 am, proceeded to the Sodo (zazen hall) and Buddha hall to prepare the altars, followed that with our first round of zazen (meditation) and a subsequent morning service with the chanting of the Heart Sutra, (all before our first breakfast meal of the day) and on and on the schedule went.

We had three meals each day, and although the evening meal was informal and much like one I would partake in at home, breakfast and lunch were experienced in the traditional Japanese oryoki style (much like a Japanese tea ceremony).

It was during one of these oryoki meals that I experienced an interesting phenomenon; one that I had never really had before. And before I describe it, I need to explain the conditions that I think led up to my experience.

First, the oryoki meal itself is prepared of foods that are usually donated to the monastery. Thus, the produce and products used to construct the meal may not necessarily be of good quality. Sometimes produce which is close to spoiling is used to construct a dish. In addition, the final meal itself may consist of foods one does not even like. And there is no alternative to the meal itself...you eat what you're served or you do without food until the next meal. However, all through my stay there and often times during the study period called "Chosan", we Ango participants were reminded that as "monks in training", we were to recognize that the process of eating was for nutritional purposes only and that to engage in our dualistic judgemental mindset of "I don't like/I do like" was simply a hinderance to our process of eating. We were

encouraged to practice "non-thinking" (as mentioned in the Fukanzazengi).

Secondly, the Chinese characters which make up the word "oryoki" roughly translate to mean "just enough", and this meaning comes through in this meal process. All of the physical movements of the meal are precise and ritualized...doing only what is necessary to get the job done. Thus, a newbie such as myself spends quite a bit of time watching the seasoned monks to make sure that I am laying out the bowls and utensils correctly, using the correct bowl for each specific food, bowing at the proper time, eating only when allowed, using the correct hand for each specific process, gesturing in the prescribed way, chanting the prayers while holding my hands in gassho at the prescribed point, and so on. You watch for these signals as the meal is done in silence and no actual auditory instructions are given. It's a little nerve-wracking at first, but eventually it is easy to catch on as the entire procedure from start to finish is exactly the same each time. So, practice generates accurate repetition. And with this learned repetition, one is allowed to eat without thinking and become intimately attuned to the present moment. Also, because one is so intent on completing the steps of the process accurately, your focus is not on **what** you are eating, but **how** you are eating.



When this aspect of ritualized eating is coupled with the fact that between the steps of the process you are chanting prayers of gratitude, one finds themselves eating the meal with no sense of judgement towards the food itself, but rather a sense of gratitude that you have been given a gift from the plants and animals who have sacrificed

their lives for your nourishment. This creates an “in this moment experience” that allows one to be fully present and simply experience the meal.

The combination of the prayers of “gratitude” between the steps of the process, the gratitude that you are encouraged to feel at have anything at all to eat, and the focus on expressing one’s gratitude through properly participating in the oryoki meal process all combine to create a most unusual experience. I found that eating in this way, I was able to have all of my senses fully intact (tasting, touching, smelling, seeing, hearing) and yet because I was practicing my “suspension of judgement” (no thinking of pros and cons or “nonthinking” as instructed in the Fukanzazengi), I was able to eat foods that I normally wouldn’t have eaten at all while allowing myself to experience the 6 tastes presented in each oryoki meal (sweet, salty, sour, bitter, spicy and simple/delicate).

As a result, I was stunned that I could eat beets without gagging and stringy asparagus without spitting them out. I actually ate everything that I was given, whether I had previously disliked it and found myself marvelling at the sensations they created in my mouth. I also discovered that I was eating far less than I have previously done with no sense whatsoever of feeling deprived. I was eating “just enough” and feeling neutrally content about the whole process.

I walked away from this whole experience wondering that if I were able to suspend my judgement while eating oryoki meals, then perhaps I could apply a similar process of “judgement suspension” to other areas in my life....maybe even in my relationships with loved ones, friends, strangers, and perhaps, I could even suspend my judgement with myself. Ritualizing processes with interspersed prayers and chants of gratitude can perhaps be a viable solution to moments in my life where I can’t get past my need to complain or manipulate circumstances towards what I want and like. It is definitely an idea worth exploring.



**“A Relationship Between
Right Thought & Right
Speech”**

By Reverend “Shindo”

Tom Bradshaw

**Shinzo Zen Meditation Center
St. Louis, MO**

Right Thought & Right Speech are two practices of the Eightfold Path. The word *right* in these phrases doesn’t mean “right” versus “wrong.” *Right* means an increasingly **complete** practice. So, these could be called “increasingly complete thought” & “increasingly complete speech.”

Let’s look at *Right Thought* first. In Buddhism the senses are divided like this - the parts of the body (sense organ) and what that part of the body detects (sense object). Two examples are: 1) the *sense organ* of the eye & the *sense object* of a cloud, and 2) the sense organ of the nose and the sense object of pizza. This also applies to the skin (touch), the tongue (taste), and the ear (sound); but, it also applies to the brain (thought). Thought is the stuff that the brain detects. So, *Right Thought* is an increasingly complete view of the stuff the brain detects.

Now, let’s look at *Right Speech*. Speech is the words we say and write. It is the nods and shakes of our head. It can be Braille, Morse code, a bow, or a touch on the shoulder. It is what we communicate. *Right Speech* is communication made with an increasingly complete view.

An amazing relationship between Right Thought and Right Speech is uncovered as we continue to practice.

Let’s take a look at two statements.

- 1) “Do you think the state of this country is good?”

The word “think” here is misleading; the person asking the question is *really* inquiring, “Do you *believe* the state of this country is good? To *think* is only to have a thought about something, while to *believe* is to take something to be the truth.

2) "I don't think this is a good plan."

Again, this person used the word "think" when they mean *believe*. One major teaching in Zen is *non-self*. This simply means that everything exists because of everything else; if you didn't exist, I wouldn't exist. (This has been covered in articles past.) So, who is the "I" in saying, "I don't think this is a good plan"?

This is a lot for our brains to chew on... and that leads us to *Right Thought*.

Words matter.

Through practice we begin to pay attention to the words we use. The changes can be small and often overlooked by others but they are significant.

We may notice that instead of asking our friend, "Who do you think is the best team?" we can ask, "Who do you *believe* is the best team?" Working towards this helps our brain pay close attention to the difference between a thought and a truth. Seeing this difference is a major part of practice – it can lead to believing fewer of our own thoughts.

Instead of saying, "I don't think this is a good plan" we could say, "It crossed my mind this is not a good plan." Working towards this keeps our brain questioning the presence of the "I."

The practices of *Right Speech* and *Right Thought* influence and strengthen each other.

Working towards mindfulness of our words can be tough, but if we keep practicing, it can change how we think and that is *Right Thought*. That's a wonderful relationship!

As we continue our practice, we end up using words that better express the Dharma not only to others but also ourselves.

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 below).

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). Your article contributions continue to amaze me! :D

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

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***For our 2022 April - June Issue
We will publish your thoughts on....***

***How your Buddhist journey
has changed the way you view
the world (and perhaps your
relationships).***

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