

# Dharma Seeds

*Meditation Journal for Prisoners*

January — March 2009

Volume II • Issue I

## What's been going on, and who we are

It has been year to the date that the last issue was published. Since then we have been going through some changes and upgrades. Today begins a new era for Dharma Seeds, as we are becoming a non-profit organization. We will have a board of directors which will help us realize our goals. We will be able to produce a quarterly newsletter. In due time I hope we can expand this to include a monthly newsletter.

What exactly is our mission probably will differ than any other newsletters you might have seen. We combine various religious traditions and focus upon the transformative power of meditation. This newsletter and organization is affiliated with Mahayana Buddhism from the Chan School; White Robed Monks of St. Benedict, and other various religions of our writers. We may focus on Muslim, Jewish or other traditions, but our main focus is meditation.

How do we know this mediation works? Basically others and myself on our board of directors know the personal transformative power of mediation.

Personally, about fifteen years ago while living in California, I was introduced to "The Awakening of Faith by Ashvagoshia." A good friend gave it to me. It was one of the oldest Mahayana Buddhist text and focused on the NO THOUGHT mediation. I also began a lifelong journey into the esoteric books that I could find on comparative religions.

During this initial introduction into meditation and esoteric books, I found myself sitting inside one of the finest jail cells in California. Whereupon I was forced to meditate as time had to be filled somehow. I spent one year inside county jail before being transferred to Folsom State Prison for the next 2 years and 10 months.

While at Folsom I continued with my meditation journal, and had a lot of Buddhist and other esoteric books sent to me. I began to share my readings with

other lifers, In time we had began a transformation that now has extended to other prisons.

Five other lifers and myself along with a free staff volunteer through the Catholic chaplain, we formed a meditation group. We met weekly at our chapel. Our numbers grew to about 100 when I paroled in the fall of 1997.

While at Folsom we were introduced to Siddha Yoga with monthly visits from their prison volunteer group. The Quakers came to teach us about peace through their workshops.

Upon my release I kept in touch with this group and they grew to include 8 different prisons with over 3000 inmates mediating for twenty minutes or longer daily. I also begun to write down my own thoughts on how I was able to transform my life while being incarcerated. This literally is the beginning of Dharma Seeds.

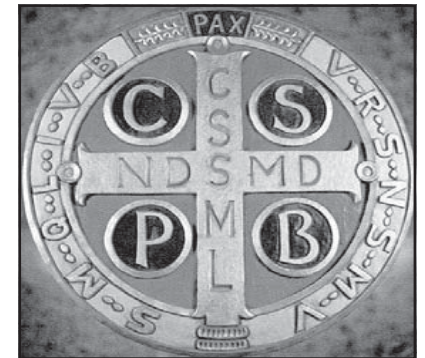
In the mean time, I stayed in contact with some of our main spiritual advisors while at Folsom, one of them being Fr. Thomas Keating. Fr. Keating was the man behind the international growth of Centering Prayer.

I stayed very close to my Catholic traditions, but also grew into an awareness that the Buddhist teachings were quite similar. I even begun to visit some Buddhist centers and received more teachings.

I was asked to speak at the Oklahoma Buddhist Conference in 2004 and that is when I was introduced to Jian Hu Shifu. He was the abbot of Buddha Gate Monastery in California and associated with Chung Tai Chan Monastery in Taiwan. I even was blessed to take the precious Three Refuges Vows.

As well, I have been blessed to find a haven within the White Robed Monks of St. Benedict which also practice the ancient

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## Summer retreat in Shawnee

*By Mark Maxey*

In August I traveled back to St. Gregory's Abbey where I first embraced the Catholic faith over twenty years ago. Specifically we were using the book "The Spirituality of Imperfection" which used various traditions to show our human frailties.

One of the opening paragraphs had this unique spin on what errors are in our lives. "Baseball teaches us, or has taught most of us, how to deal with failure. We learn at a very young age that failure is the norm in baseball and, precisely because we have failed, we hold in high regard those who fail less often — those who hit safely in one out of three chances and become star players. I also find it fascinating that baseball, alone in sport, considers errors to be part of the game, part of its rigorous truth." Francis T. Vincent, Jr, Commissioner of Baseball

Spirituality teaches us, or has taught most of us how to deal with

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## Shawnee retreat...

failure. Is that not a precious kernel of truth? I found that even behind the walls you could find a spiritual person and find truth. All the while we still are “broken” in one way or the other behind the walls, as we are separated from society and family. Yet while there... we can...if we desire to change... is embrace our imperfection and grow with spiritual truths.

This retreat we learned that to be human was to become this paradox, for according to ancient wisdom teachings, we are less than ‘gods’, more than ‘beasts’, yet somehow we are also both.

Within spirituality we learn to understand and then eventually to accept the imperfection that lies at the very core of our being. Within this book we read is the perfect example of this paradox. It is the spirituality that is found within Alcoholics Anonymous.

The spirituality of imperfection begins with the recognition that trying to be perfect is the most tragic human mistake.

Who are we? Why are we? How are we to live? These are the basic questions which are spiritual questions. These stories of our

life and others is the foundation of our spiritual stories from ancient wisdom teachings.

Listening to stories and telling them helped our ancestors to live humanely – to be human. Within the tradition of AA or NA we find that the individual stories of ourselves and others help us find our own spirituality.

One story from the great far east characterizes one form of storytelling which is used to teach a lesson.

The great master Mat-su of youth, was a fanatic about sitting in meditation for many hours at a time. One day, his patriarch’s disciple Huai-jang asked him what on earth he hoped to attain by this compulsive crosslegged sitting. “Buddhahood,” said Mat-Su. Thereupon Huai-jang sat down, took a brick and started to polish it assiduously. Mat-Su looked at him, perplexed, and asked what he was doing. “Oh,” said Huai-jang, “I am making a mirror out of my brick.” “You can polish it till doomsday,” scoffed Mat-su, “you’ll never make a mirror out of a brick!” “Aha!” smile Huai-jang. “Maybe you are beginning to understand that you can sit until doomsday, it won’t make you into

a Buddha!”

I remember once when I was county jail, I read a book by Chogram Trumpa. It basically broke things down that in Buddhism that we first accept own evil deeds. I went back throughout my lifetime and begin to see in my minds eye all my faults. I can remember I stayed in my cell for days...crying and processing all that information.

I first had to recognize my own imperfection. In AA or any 12 steps program this would be called taking our personal inventory. At the end I was broken and weak. I became sensitive in how my actions hurt others. I was a broke man. But within that emotional sensitive spot I could feel a warmth of spirituality growing. In time I would see that once we see our own imperfection and accepting that imperfection then, and only then, can God come in to create more of Himself within our soul.

When we think we have to be perfect or become perfect we set up for ourself a form of self deception. We become blind to who we truly are. If on the other hand we embrace our shortcomings...and adopt a more peaceful means of

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expression to others, then spirituality becomes obtainable within us.

I remember reading a few opening sentences of welcome from Baba Muktananda from Siddha Yoga. In his opening statements to those of us behind bars, he said... “You must realize, that where you are today is because of decisions you made in the past. The decisions you make today determine your future.” I knew right then that if I was to be successful when I was paroled then I would have to start building my spiritual character. I began that process from day one of my incarceration. I have followed that once I paroled. And today some twelve years later I am still free and enjoying the freedom of living life on the outside.

I used my time in my cell as my own meditation cave. That space become sacred and I watched how I prac-

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## What’s been going on...

Zen tradition of Zazen mediation.

Anyway, it is my goal to offer prisoners the truth that I found in prison. Which hopefully allow them the same glimpse of transformation that I and many others witnessed while at Folsom State Prison.

Dharma Seeds will feature many different writers and authors, and stories from various religious traditions. While the origin of story’s may vary, the underlining core is simple ancient wisdom.

We all deserve to find the truth, and to let that truth become one with ourselves. I have been practicing that idea for over fifteen years now, and most importantly for the past twelve years as a free person who paroled into a new lifestyle.

I hope that through the years or months you read our newsletter that you will find the truth you need to help you grow into a new person as well. That is our goal with Dharma Seeds.

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# What is Centering Prayer

by Fr. Thomas Keating

Centering Prayer Centering Prayer is rooted in the word of God, both in scripture and in the person of Jesus

Christ. It is an effort to renew the Christian contemplative tradition that comes down to us in an uninterrupted manner from St. Paul, who writes of the intimate knowledge of Christ that comes through love.

Centering Prayer is designed to prepare sincere followers of Christ for contemplative prayer in the traditional sense in which spiritual writers understood that term for the first sixteen centuries of the Christian era.

This tradition was summed up by St. Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century. He described contemplation as the knowledge of God that is impregnated with love. For Gregory, contemplation was both the fruit of reflecting on the word of God in Scripture and a precious gift of God. He called it “resting in God.” In this “resting” the mind and heart are not so much seeking God as beginning to experience, “to taste,” what they have been seeking. This state is not the suspension of all activity, but the reduction of many acts and reflections to a single act or thought to sustain one’s consent to God’s presence and action.

It is important not to confuse Centering Prayer with certain Eastern techniques of meditation such as Transcendental Meditation. The use of the Sacred Word in Centering Prayer does not have the particular calming effects attributed to the TM mantra. Nor is the Sacred Word a vehicle to go to the spiritual level of one’s being as it is in TM. There is no cause-and-effect relationship between using the Sacred Word and arriving at some altered state of consciousness. The Sacred Word is merely a symbol of our will’s consent to God’s presence and action within us based on faith in the doctrine of the Divine indwelling. The Sacred Word is simply a means of reaffirming our original intention at the beginning of our period of prayer to be in God’s presence and to surrender to the divine action when we are attracted to some other thought, feeling or impression.

Throughout the period of Centering Prayer, our intention predominates—the movement of our will to consent to God’s intention, which according to our faith, is to communicate the Divine Life to us. Hence, unlike TM, Centering Prayer is a personal relationship with God, not a technique. Centering

Prayer is basically two things at the same time: the deepening of our personal relationship with Christ developed through reflection on scripture; and a method of freeing ourselves from attachments that prevent the development of this relationship and the unfolding of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. It reduces the tendency to overactivity in prayer and to depending excessively on concepts in order to go to God. In short it reduces the obstacles in us, chiefly selfishness, so that we can be sensitive to the delicate inspirations of the Holy Spirit that lead to divine union.

This form of prayer was first practiced and taught by the Desert Fathers of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria including Evagrius, Jon Cassian, and St. John Climacus and has representatives in every age. In the Patristic age, St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great in the West, and Pseudo-Dionysius and the Hesychasts in the East. In the Middle Ages, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, and Guido the Carthusian; the Rhineland mystics including St. Hildegarde, St. Mechtilde, Meister Eckhart, Ruysbroek, and Tauler; later the author of the Imitation of Christ and the English mystics of the 14th Century such as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle, and Julian of Norwich. After the Reformation, the Carmelites, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Therese of Lisieux; among the French school of spiritual writers, St. Francis de Sales, St. Jane de Chantal and Cardinal Berulle; among the Jesuits, Fathers De Caussade, Lallemond and Surin; among the Benedictines, Dom Augustine Baker and Dom John Chapman; among modern Cistercians, Dom Vital Lehodey and Thomas Merton.

Over the centuries ways of cultivating contemplative prayer have been called various names corresponding to the different forms they have taken. Thus we have Prayer of Faith, Prayer of the Heart, Pure Prayer, Prayer of Simplicity, Prayer of Simple Regard, Active Recollection, Active Quiet, and Acquired Contemplation. In our time a number of initiatives have been taken by various religious orders, notably by the Jesuits and Discalced Carmelites, to renew the contemplative orientation of their founders and to share their spirituality with lay persons.

The method of Centering Prayer is a further attempt to present the teaching of earlier times in an updated format and to make it available to ordinary people who are experiencing a hunger for a deeper life of

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# Finding Purpose

By Tony Schirtzinger

We all want the sense that we have fulfilled our purpose in life. Therapy clients in particular, after they have conquered most of their demons, feel a strong desire to find new purpose. With their unhealthy goals now eliminated, they wonder: “How will I spend the rest of my life?”

How much purpose do we have? How much do we need? What is a healthy purpose? How do we know if we are fulfilling our purpose?

## PURPOSES WE ALREADY HAVE

These are biologically preordained and achieved in this order: (1) To stay alive. Be safe and take care of your body. (2) To belong. Love and be loved. (3) To feel joy. Get enough of what you want to feel satisfied. (4) To regenerate. Contribute so the world is better when you leave it.

“Biologically preordained” means you will always strive for these goals—even if you consciously try to ignore them.

If you put off working on these tasks in some misguided belief that other things are more important your body will let you know. You will be unhealthy, or lonely, or sad and angry, or you will feel empty.

## HOW MUCH PURPOSE?

These biological purposes are entirely enough. Every ounce of energy you put into achieving them is rewarded with pleasurable sensation. These sensations tell you that you are in sync with your natural role in the universe. It’s as if you are saying: “The

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## Chan is in Your Mind

Three thousand years ago, Sakyamuni Buddha observed the bright stars under the Bodhi tree and achieved the supreme enlightenment. He said, “How amazing! Although Buddha Nature is in every sentient being, it is not realized because it is covered up by the defilements and attachments.” Today, in the 21st century, people are able to launch rockets to outer space and are able to access information from around the world through the Internet. Despite that, no matter where we go, or where we are, the ancient problems of aging, sickness and death are still threatening us. Even if one has a strong and healthy body, and is achieving roaring successes in his field of expertise, how many years of health and success are ever enough?

Exploring the unknown future and adapting to the changes of society and environment are among the challenges of modern people. Their minds and bodies have to endure all kinds of stresses. In order to find a sure path for survival in this changing world. Many wise people have begun practicing meditation to calm their minds.

Master Yungjia once said, “Walking is Chan (Zen), sitting is also Chan. Talking or being silent, moving or staying still, these are all ways of attaining tranquility.” Chan is everywhere. You can only feel it if your mind is in the present. Master Sengcan, the third Zen Patriarch in China, once had a severe headache. He asked the second Zen Patriarch, Master Huike, to help him repent for his sins. Master Huike said, “Hand me your sins, and I will repent on your behalf.” Master Sengcan said, “But I can’t find it!” Master Huike replied, “Well, I have just finished with your repentance.” This is an example of the way of Chan...straight to the root of the problem by scrutinizing what is in our mind.

The old saying goes, “illnesses arise from your mind.” Despite the realization of this simple truth, people still need some more tangible ways to practice subduing their mind. In response to his need, Grand Master Wei Chueh recommends the “Three Links of Cultivation”. Scripture Understanding, Merits, and Meditation. These are the expedient gates which can be accessed from everywhere.

Once you become conscious of Chan in your everyday living, and are able to apply Chan to other aspects of your life, you will know the endless treasure of Chan. Scripture Understanding is practicing right view. Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Dharma Masters in the past have left us with a treasure of sutras and discourses. In fact, all the branches of Chung

Tai Chan Monastery around the world offer sutra study classes and Dharma talks. Attending classes and studying the sutras are good ways to learn the foundational lessons of Buddhism such as cause-effect, dependent origination, selfcultivation and cultivation of others, and original mind. When your life is led by right view, you will understand what is true and what is false and will not step foot in the wrong place.

Merits is to do all the good deeds. We should strive to treat people kindly and do things well. No matter a task is difficult or easy, big or small, we need to do it whole-heartedly. We also have to respect and be considerate to our co-workers, and maintain a harmonious relationship with them. Don’t just take the praise and avoid the mistakes.

In meditation, we learn how to be with Samadhi, which means being unmoved by situations. In the Chan Hall, we initially learn how to become aware of our thoughts, be free from attachments, and not to doze off. Then, we come to no-thought and see our original mind. By joining the meditation class or the seven-day retreat, you can see your pure still and bright mind.

Scripture Understanding, Merits, and Meditation are actually one unified teaching, not three separate components. If you are lacking of merits and good connections, you might constantly suffer from conditions or have difficulty calming down your mind. Under such a predicament, how is it possible to get in touch with the greatness of the scriptures? During the Tang dynasty, Zen Master Huaihai of Baizhang was the ninth Zen Patriarch in China. He established the code of monastic conduct in the Chan Monastery and pursued the goal of “A day without working is a day without eating.” He taught his disciples, “The Buddha nature is not polluted and is readily profound in you. You are the Buddha at the very moment you are away from illusive thoughts.” Master Huaihai’s practices were perfect manifestations of the “Three Links of Cultivation.”

The Sixth Patriarch Huineng said, “The Buddhadharma is here in the world. Enlightenment is not apart from the universe. To search for Bodhi apart from this world is like looking for a hare with horns.” All sentient beings naturally wish to be free from vexations. However, we don’t have to leave this world but instead can look inward to our pure mind to be free from vexations. Remember, all the good or bad situation will vanish eventually, only the already present clear and pure mind stays forever!

## Humility

*By Joseph R. Crowe, Okaloosa Correctional Institution, Crestview Fl.*

One of the biggest obstacles on the path to enlightenment is learning to be humble. Sure, you might actually act humble around others most of the time, but what about in your mind? How often have you imagined yourself to be a rock star, or a movie star, or some great Bodhisattva worshiped by millions? Those of us in prison are extremely guilty of this. It is how we sometimes pass the boring hours. You always hear guys talking about what they are going to do when they get out, how they plan on making all this money, or who they plan on finding some gorgeous lover and retire on a yacht. Is this being humble? Most of us have misconceptions about what enlightenment even is. We think that it is some grand, golden jewel encrusted trophy that we obtain. It will allow us to rise above the mundane and achieve some higher state of living. Or special esoteric powers that will allow us to levitate (hopefully over the fence) or some other type of special power.

Most of us want to find some yogic exercise or mantra or mediation technique that we can practice for some time and then achieve instant enlightenment. But in reality it doesn’t work like that. Zen master Seung Sahn of the Kwan-Um School of Zen likes to talk about mantra sometimes. He says that chanting any mantra is good. You can chant Om Namah Shivaya or Om Madi Padme Hum or Namu Myoho Renge Kyo. Any mantra is good, you can even chant coca-cola and it will help. The path, the mantra, the tradition you choose is only a tool to help you achieve enlightenment. Ultimately you have to work on yourself. You have to recognize when thoughts

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## Centering Prayer...

prayer and for a support system to sustain it. Centering Prayer is rooted in the word of God, both in scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ. It is an effort to renew the Christian contemplative tradition that comes down to us in an uninterrupted manner from St. Paul, who writes of the intimate knowledge of Christ that comes through love.

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## Sweet Dew of the Dharma

**The Four Noble Truths:** 1. Suffering exists in everyone’s life. 2. The causes of Suffering are greed, anger and ignorance. 3. Nirvana, the extinction of suffering, is possible for everyone. 4. Nirvana is achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

**The Noble Eightfold Path:** Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Samadhi.

**Twelve Links of Dependent Origination:** 1. Ignorance 2. Intentional action 3. Consciousness 4. Name and form 5. Six Senses 6. Contact 7. Feeling 8. Craving 9. Grasping 10. Begin 11. Birth 12. Old age and death.

### Three Refuges

I take refuge in the Buddha, vowing that all sentient beings understand the Great Way profoundly, and bring forth the bodhi mind.

I take refuge in the Dharma, vowing that all sentient beings deeply enter the Sutra Treasury, and have wisdom vast as the sea.

I take refuge in the Sangha, vowing that all sentient beings form together a great assembly, One and all in harmony.

**Five Precepts:** 1. No Killing 2. No Stealing 3. No Sexual Misconduct 4. No Lying 5. No Intoxication.

**Six Paramitas:** 1. Charity 2. Moral Conduct 3. Tolerance 4. Diligence 5. Mediation 6. Wisdom.

**Four Tenets of Chung Tai:** 1. To our elders be respectful, 2. To our juniors be kind, 3. With all



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## Meditation Behind Bars reprinted from Centering Prayer Newsletter 1998

In the suburbs of Sacramento, California, there's a small town aptly named Represa. It has its own post office and a small housing community. In the back yard of several homes stands a thirty-foot granite wall. Behind this wall are housed approximately 4,000 people. The place is Folsom State Prison.

Three years ago, (1995), something very unusual started to happen behind that wall.

With the help of an outside sponsor and the Contemplative Outreach Fellowship, the inmates in Folsom State Prison started a group of their own. The Contemplative Fellowship came into being inside these walls.

We were a small group to begin with, about fifteen inmates, mostly lifers and long-timers. This small core of inmates, that once met on Friday nights, now meets in one form or another every day of the week. It has grown to over 150 regular members and is continuing to grow daily.

Our group has chosen Centering Prayer as taught by Fr. Thomas Keating in his book "Open Mind, Open Heart," as our main form of meditation. It is now taught by inmates to all new members who chose to attend, with a "sit" occurring at every meeting. It is a remarkable situation in that we are convicted felons from different ethnic backgrounds and have different religious beliefs, yet we set all of that aside and mediate (pray) together as a family. There have never been any problems with violence or discipline within the group. We have representatives in every building in the prison which houses inmates who are able to share meditation with them. Our group also has developed and maintains a library with books and cassette tapes that are available to members; there is also a growing selection of video cassettes that are used during the meetings to teach and further the knowledge of the group. The library is the result of donations of books and materials by many groups and individuals. It is one of the most appreciated and used part of our program. Inmates are using Centering Prayer to improve their lives. It has become a very real tool in self-rehabilitation. In the three years that the group has been meeting, inmates who have been active members have not returned to Folsom after being released (paroled). This fact is extraordinary when one considers that the return rate to prison is over 80 percent.

Whether it be a parole violation or a new crime; the majority of inmates released from prison come

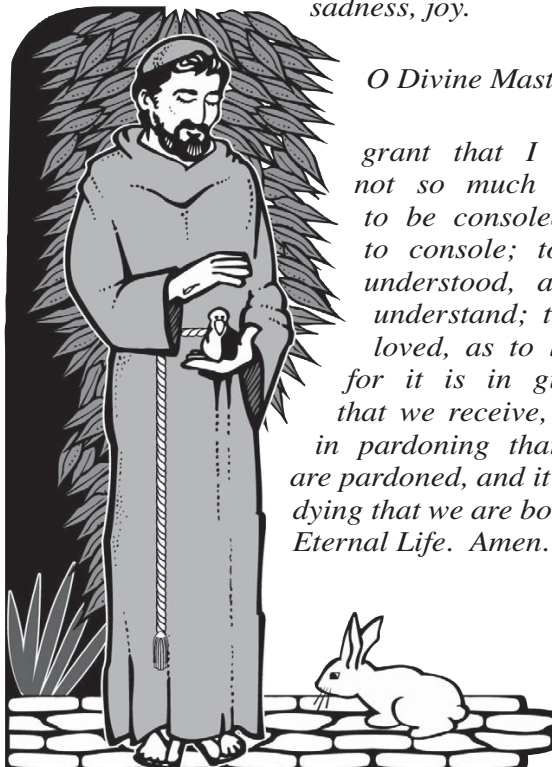
back. With mediation, the inmates learn to cope with and overcome problems of everyday life, and, upon release, become productive members of the community and stay out of prison.

It is now time for us to combine contemplation with action. Our group is looking to expand its efforts into other prisons. It is our hope that people who are willing to become sponsors in other prisons will contact us and learn the information needed to start a group. There are over thirty prisons in the State of California alone. This program should be in every one of them and in every prison across the country because its is changing lives.

Prison life is not easy and yet we have found a way to free our spirits and share with God in our quiet times. Using our Sacred Word, we allow Him to work within us, giving us a freedom that transcends prison walls.

## Prayer of St. Francis

*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.*



*O Divine Master,*

*grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen.*

## A Personal Note

*By Dan Millman*

The crust of our Earth shifts—just a little—one plate rises, setting forth waves that move across the sea . . . and we are reminded of our mortality and our humanity...

Joy and I just donated funds to the American Red Cross International Relief Fund. A small act, but something we could do. . .

So many are in need . . . so many good causes in the world today.

Many of us feel torn between the call to inner work and the call to social and political action. We sense a need for working on ourselves, but an equally-compelling urge to help make changes in our community or nation.

The following story may help bring balance to the push and pull between the internal and external challenges that we face:

One day Socrates and I were walking back toward the Berkeley campus during a period of intense self-analysis, self-healing, and other forms of inner work. As Soc and I neared campus, a student handed me a flyer. I glanced at it. "Soc," I said, "will you look at this. It's about saving the whales and dolphins. Last week," I sighed, "I got one about oppressed peoples; the week before it was about starving children. Sometimes I feel so guilty, or self-centered, doing all this work on myself when there are so many people in need out there."

Socrates glanced at me but said nothing.

"Did you hear what I said, Socrates?"

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## Words from the Grand Master by Ven. Master Wei Chueh

1. The mind is Buddha. When there are desires, vexations and attachments in the mind, this Buddha becomes a sentient being. When this mind is pure, a sentient being becomes a Buddha.

2. If you cannot assume responsibility for your own cultivation or endure its trials and hardships, then you are at best studying Buddhism, not practicing it.

3. No matter how much external circumstances change, if we can see through and let go of vexations, delusions, and attachments, with the mind always in equanimity and suchness, having clarity and true understanding—that is Zen.

4. Prosperity and adversity both facilitate our cultivation. They are expedient means for our cultivation. Prosperity fulfills us; adversity disciplines us.

5. If we are content, our minds will be at peace, we will see our blessings, be filled with gratitude and a willingness to help all, and our lives will be filled with hope and happiness.

6. If we face suffering without worry then we can remove karmic hindrances, settle disputes, turn our enemies into friends, and be united in the Dharma family.

7. With respect we eradicate arrogance, with com-

passion we extinguish anger, with harmony we eliminate violence, with truth and sincerity we eradicate deceit.

8. To be liberated is not escaping reality. It is eliminating vexations, eradicating erroneous thoughts, and opening the knot in our minds. When the mind is opened to true understanding, that is liberation.

9. The riches and honor in this life are fleeting, like the dew on the flower, evaporating when the sun rises. The only true prosperity in life is when the mind is pure, clear, and content.

10. Vexations and joy are only within one single thought. The key is, when faced with the problems in life, can your mind maintain tranquility, will you have the wisdom to understand and observe accurately?

11. The one key word in practicing the Way is tolerance—to endure patiently and accept suffering. By accepting suffering, we eliminate suffering. This eradicates karmic hindrances, and prepares us for supreme enlightenment.

12. Purity of mind is to be away from the mind of delusion. The Diamond Sutra says, “the mind moves freely without attachment.” That is the mind of purity.

## A Personal Note...

*Continued on Page 6*

Abruptly, he stopped, turned, and said, “I’ll give you five bucks if you can slap me on the cheek.”

“But . . . what does that have to do with — “

“Ten bucks,” he interrupted. I figured it was some kind of test, so I took a swing — and found myself on the ground in a painful wrist lock. As Soc helped me up, he said, “Notice how a little leverage can be quite effective?”

“Yeah, I sure did,” I replied, shaking my wrist.

“It’s admirable to want to help the world,” he said. “But to best help someone, you have to understand them—and to understand others, you have to first understand yourself. So do what you are moved to do—but at the same time, prepare yourself so you can develop the clarity to know how to exert the right leverage, in the right place, at the right time. Then your actions will carry the power to make an effective difference.

“History,” he added, “holds many examples of those who acted without the wisdom to foresee the consequences . . .”

From Sacred Journey of the Peaceful Warrior, Written by Dan Millman.

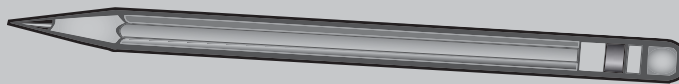
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Dan Millman, author of Way of the Peaceful Warrior

His website is:

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## Zen & The Lotus....

By Ryuei Michael McCormick

Sutra Opening Verse:

An unsurpassed, penetrating, and perfect Dharma

Is rarely met with, even in one hundred, thousand, million kalpas. Having it to see and listen to, to remember and accept, I vow to taste the truth of the Tathagata's words.

Maylie Scott: The Sutra Opening Verse is a great opening to the class because it's taken from the Lotus Sutra. I wanted to say a little bit about how this class is going to progress. Since I am leaving in the late summer, I wanted to give one more class on the Lotus Sutra. I won't say that I taught the Lotus Sutra, but we read through it a few years ago together. It is very much the foundation of our practice. In our meal chant we refer to it. Our ancestors refer to it again and again in the Blue Cliff Record, the Sutra of the 6th Patriarch, and Dogen's Shobogenzo, and in the Crooked Cucumber, Suzuki Roshi's biography, which I am about halfway through. While reading the Crooked Cucumber in conjunction with the Lotus Sutra, I am struck again and again by how much Suzuki Roshi is speaking from the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra is extremely difficult to teach. Shakyamuni Buddha says that it is extremely difficult to teach. The listeners in the sutra themselves complain of it's extreme difficulty. Although I said I'd teach it, I began to quail because it's never been taught to me, and there is something about our lineage which suggests that if you are going to teach something it is better to have been taught it first. So I called Taigen Leighton and told him what I was doing, and he said, "Oh, I have a friend named Michael Ryuei McCormick who is a Nichiren Shu practitioner, and the Nichiren Shu studies and is taught the Lotus

Sutra." When Michael called me I was very pleased and excited by his understanding and familiarity with the sutra. We talked; and the more we talked the more it seemed obvious to me that I could sponsor the class and Michael could teach it.

So it is very difficult to teach. The Mahayana sutras have such a different style from our Zen style, which is spare and close to the ground while the Mahayana sutras are large and baroque. So I hope we can suspend our judgment of this difference in style and perhaps come to appreciate it. I think we may. My hope is that we may as the class continues. The most important thing is how we study this sutra in a way that really informs our practice. In reading it, in thinking about it, and in reciting it, how do we integrate it and internalize it?

As an aide to that, there are three hand-outs. One of them is just a single sheet of questions we can ask ourselves and practice with. On that sheet there are a couple of quotations, one from Dogen and one from Suzuki Roshi that are very rooted in the Lotus Sutra itself. As a class assignment it would be good to write a little paragraph or make a little painting or have some creative response to this sutra which is your own.

Michael will explain the readings in the hand-out. There is also a copy of Dogen's fascicle on the Lotus Sutra, Hokke-ten-hokke. I hope that you can think about reading that fascicle once a week over the next five weeks during the class. Simply read it and see what happens as you digest it in the context of the class. At this point I would like to turn it over to Michael.

Zen and the Lotus Sutra

Michael McCormick: Good eve-

ning. Before I actually start, I want to thank Maylie again for having so much confidence in me after only a couple of telephone conversations and a business dinner. I'm very flattered and very thankful that you asked me to come here.

Tonight, I will do two things. First I want to talk about the role of the Lotus Sutra within the Zen tradition. I want to explore some of the ways in which the Zen Masters expounded and utilized the Lotus Sutra in order to show the place of the Lotus Sutra within the Zen tradition. Then, for the second half of tonight's class, I want to give an overview of what I will be discussing over the next three weeks of talks. This will give you the highlights of things to come.

Let me start with a passage from the fascicle Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels which is in the Shobogenzo. In the fascicle, Dogen is emphasizing the importance of taking refuge in the three jewels and how absolutely vital it is in our practice to understand the meaning of the three jewels in our lives. To do that he cites a passage from the Lotus Sutra which emphasizes the importance of the three jewels. In this fascicle, Dogen feels the need to stress the authority of the Lotus Sutra which he is citing to make his point. Here is what he says about the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra (which is the original title of the Lotus Sutra in Sanskrit): The Saddharma-pundarika-sutra explains the purpose of the various Buddhas having appeared in this world. It may be said to be the great king and the great master of all the various sutras that the Buddha Shakyamuni taught. Compared with this sutra, all the other sutras are merely its servants, its relatives, for it alone expounds the Truth. The other sutras, on the other hand, include provisional teachings of the Buddha, and therefore do not express his real intention. It is a mistake

to use the teachings of the other sutras as the basis for determining the validity of those contained in the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra, for without the merit-power of the latter, the former would be valueless. All the other sutras find their origin in this sutra.

That is quite a review. Definitely two thumbs up. One might wonder what is the big deal about this sutra? Why, in a tradition which emphasizes the Dharma that is transmitted beyond the scriptures, would a Zen Master say these things about a mere book? But I don't think that he is talking about a mere book, and we'll be getting into that later.

First, I want to look at Hakuin. A few centuries after Dogen, at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, Hakuin also wondered about the Lotus Sutra. He also wondered what was the big deal. For those of you who are not familiar with Hakuin, he is considered the reformer of the Rinzai lineage and I believe that most lineage holders of Rinzai in America today can trace themselves back to Hakuin. He is quite a writer. I enjoy reading Hakuin because he is very dramatic and over the top in many ways. One of the stories that I really enjoy about Hakuin concerns when he was a young boy and was trying to figure out how he could keep himself from falling into hell. Apparently in those days, the wandering preacher-evangelists liked to give fire and brimstone sermons just as some like to do today. I believe this was due to their lack of television and slasher films. In any case this was what entertained the peasants and encouraged the children to behave themselves. Hakuin, however, took it to heart and wanted to know how he could escape falling into hell. Since he grew up in a Nichiren Buddhist household, I am sure he heard over and over again how impor-

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## Zen & The Lotus....

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tant the Lotus Sutra is and how it is the king of all sutras. He probably heard things very similar to what I just read from Dogen. He thought, "Well, I'd better give this sutra a chance and see if it has the answer for me." Here is what happened: I happened to hear that The Lotus Sutra was the king of all the scriptures the Buddha had preached. It was supposed to contain the essential meaning of all the buddhas. I got hold of a copy and read it through. But when I finished, I closed it with a heavy sigh. "This," I told myself, "is nothing but a collection of simple tales about cause and effect. True, mention is made of there being 'only one absolute vehicle,' and of 'the changeless unconditioned tranquility of all dharmas,' but on the whole it is what Lin-chi dismissed as 'mere verbal prescriptions for relieving the world's ills.' I'm not going to find what I'm looking for here."

That's very different from Dogen's reaction. But then, several decades later, after many years of strenuous meditation and koan study, after being battered with brooms by women on the street and shoved off verandas by his master, Shoju, Hakuin began to have a different perspective, a different point of view. At the age of forty he decided to take another look at the Lotus Sutra. This time things were very different. He says: I read as far as the third chapter, the one on parables. Then, just like that, all the lingering doubts and uncertainties vanished from my mind. They suddenly ceased to exist. The reason for the Lotus's reputation as the "king of sutras" was now revealed to me with blinding clarity. Teardrops began cascading down my face like two strings of beads - they came like beans pouring from a ruptured sack. A loud involuntary cry burst from the depths of my being and I began sobbing uncontrollably. And as I did, I knew without any doubt that what I had realized

in all those satoris I had experienced, what I had grasped in my understanding of those koans I had passed - had all been totally mistaken. I was finally able to penetrate the source of the free, enlightened activity that permeated Shoju's daily life. I also knew beyond any doubt that the tongue in the World-honored One's mouth moved with complete and unrestricted freedom.

Quite a change. It's very interesting how a sutra, a teaching of the Buddha that at first appears to be nothing more than some simple matter of fact tales of cause and effect and stories about the One Vehicle that we've all heard so many times before can suddenly become the king of sutras. It is interesting that it can suddenly become something that has such an emotional impact that it evokes tears of joy, tears of release. How can this happen?

Now notice, that he stopped at chapter three, "A Parable." This has happened before in the Zen tradition. When you go back to the 6th Patriarch, he too commented on the parable in the third chapter. In fact, the fascicle, "The Flower of Dharma Turns the Flower of Dharma" (Hokke-ten-Hokke) by Dogen is a commentary on the 6th Patriarch's commentary on the third chapter. So something very important, apparently, is going on in the third chapter and in the parable of that chapter. Something very important happened when the 6th Patriarch in China commented on it judging from the fact that Dogen wrote Hokke-ten-Hokke about it and you have Hakuin referring to it at this turning point in his life.

Let's look at the highlights, at least, of the 6th Patriarch's commentaries and encounter with the Lotus Sutra. The version I put in the hand out is a little different from the one that Dogen com-

mented on in Hokke-ten-Hokke. It's a little more fleshed out; maybe a little more polemical. I enjoy that kind of rhetoric. It's a vice of mine.

In the story, the 6th Patriarch is sitting at the head of the congregation, probably up on a platform like this, and he is fielding questions from the assembly. There was one monk in the assembly named Fa-ta who was very arrogant. He was very full of himself because he had accomplished the great task of reciting the Lotus Sutra 3,000 times. By the way, that is a very significant number in the T'ien-t'ai tradition that focuses on the Lotus Sutra. It is taught that there are 3,000 worlds or life conditions present in every single moment. I'm not going to get into that now, but the idea is that by reciting the sutra 3,000 times, somehow this monk was able to attain the virtue of understanding all things just in the moment. But he really didn't. He knew how to recite, but he did not know how to take it into the heart. The 6th Patriarch called him on this and a very illuminating exchange followed. The 6th Patriarch asked the monk if he really understood the sutra and the monk sheepishly admitted that he did not really understand it. His self-confidence was not very well grounded. So he asks the patriarch to please explain the sutra to him, and the patriarch replies: The sutra is free from doubtful passages. It is only your mind that makes them doubtful.

He then asks the monk to recite passages from the sutra for him, so that he could then comment on them to help clarify what the sutra is really about. The monk does so and after a certain point the 6th Patriarch stops him and says: The key note of this sutra is to set forth the aim and object of a Buddha's incarnation in this world. Though parables and illustrations

are numerous in this book, none of them go beyond this pivotal point.

Further on he quotes from the Lotus Sutra the passage that says: The buddhas, the world-honored ones, appear in the world because they desire to cause all living beings to disclose the wisdom of Buddha which will make them able to become pure. They appear in the world because they desire to show living beings the wisdom of the Buddha. They appear in the world because they desire to cause living beings to realize the wisdom of Buddha. They appear in the world because they desire to cause living beings to enter the state of truth which is the wisdom of the Buddha. Sariputra, this is why the buddhas appear in the world only by reason of the one great purpose.

You might think, "So what? We know that. We know the buddhas came into the world to open the way to the buddha-knowledge." But there is really something very revolutionary going on here. This passage is from the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra. It is from the theoretical discourse of the Buddha to Shariputra. Dogen returns to this again and again and again in the Hokke-ten-hokke. He refers again and again to "disclosure, display, realization, and entering." The reason this is so revolutionary is because, if you think about it, it is very hard to believe that we can become just like the Buddha. No matter what kind of people we are, no matter what kind of shortcomings we have, no matter what kind of mistakes we have made, no matter how much we may have hurt ourselves or others, no matter how shortsighted we may feel, the buddha-knowledge is there for us. There are no exceptions to this. No exceptions at all. Not any based on gender, or race or ethnicity, or anything else. This is very hard for people to understand. Especially in those

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## Resources for Prisoners

### *Free Books for Prisoners*

**Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery** 16201 Tomki Rd., Redwood Valley, CA 95470

**Americana Buddhist Temple** 10515 North Latson Road, Howell, MI 48855

**American Buddhist Association** 10515 North Latson Road, Howell, MI 48843

**Association for Research & Enlightenment** 67th Street and Atlantic Ave., POB 595, Virginia Beach, VA 23451

**Barre Center for Buddhist Studies** 149 Lockwood Road, Barre, MA 01005

**Buddhist Peace Fellowship Prison Project** POB 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703

**Chuang Yen Monastery**, Program Director for English Program 2020 Route 301, Carmel, NY 10512

**Dallas Buddhist Association** 515 Apollo Road, Richardson, TX 75081

**Dharma Publishing** 2910 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702

**Freeing the Mindfulness**, C/O Saraha Buddhist Center POB 12037, San Francisco, CA 94112

**Healing Tao Prison Program** POB 471, Revere, MA 02151

**Human Kindness Foundation** POB 61619, Durham, NC 27715

**Larson Publications** Dept. K, 4936 Route 414, Burdett, NY 14818

**Liberation Prison Project** POB 31527, San Francisco, CA 94131

**Lionheart Foundation** POB 194 Back Bay, Boston, MA 02117

**Naljor Prison Dharma Service** POB 1177, Mount Shasta, CA 96067

**Prison Dharma Network** POB 4623, Boulder, CO 80302

**Ram Dass Tape Library Foundation** 524 San Anselmo Ave., #203, San Anselmo, CA 94960

**Snow Lion Publications** POB 6483, Ithaca, NY 14851

**Sutra Translation Committee** 2611 Davidson Avenue, Bronx, NY 10468

**Siddha Yoga Prison Project** **Turning Wheel** POB 4650, POB 99140, Emeryville, CA Berkeley, CA 94704-0650 94662

**Theosophical Book Gift Institute** POB 270, Wheaton, IL 60189

**Wisdom Publications** 199 Elm Street, Somerville, MA 02144

**Woodland Publications** 2000 Arapaho Street, Woodland Park, CO 80863

### *Free or Low Cost Buddhist Publications & Newsletters*

**Prison Dharma** POB 4623, Boulder, CO 80306

**Dharma Foundation** POB 9999, Berkeley, CA 94709

**Dharma Friends** POB 7708, Little Rock, AR 72217-7708

**Gassho, Atlanta Soto Zen Center** 1404 McClendon Ave., Atlanta, GA 30307

**Gateway Journal** Box 700, Ramsey, NJ 07446-0700

**Gay Buddhist Fellowship** 2215 R. Market Street, PMB 456, San Francisco, CA 94114

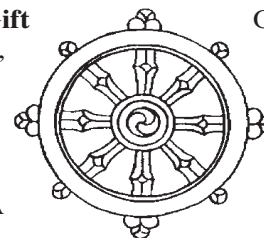
**Healing Tao Prison Program** POB 471, Revere, MA 02151

**Insight Meditation Society** 1230 Pleasant Street, Barre, MA 01005

**Purple Lotus Seed** 636 San Mateo Ave., San Bruno, CA 94066 (specify English or Chinese)

**Shenpen Osel** 4322 Burke Ave A., Seattle, WA 98103

**Dharma Seeds** POB 61175, Oklahoma City, OK 73146-1175



*Newsletters that focus on prisoners rights and criminal justice issues*

**The Beat Within** 275 Ninth St., San Francisco, CA 94103

**California Prison Focus** 2940 16th Street #307, San Francisco, CA 94103

**Coalition for Prisoners Rights** POB 1911, Santa Fe, NM 87504

**Families Against Mandatory Minimums** 1612 K Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20006

**National Lawyers Guild Prison Law Project** 143 Madison Ave. 4FI, New York, NY 10016

**North Coast Xpress** POB 1226, Occidental, CA 95465

**The Prison and Jail Project** POB 6749, Americus, GA 31709

**Prison Legal News** 2400 NW 80th Street, #148, Seattle, WA 98117

**Southland Prison Newsletter** PMB-339, 955 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139

### *Free Buddhist Sutras*

**ChungTai Zen Center of Sunnyvale**, Attn. Jian Ju Shifu, 750 E. Arques Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94085

**Humility...***Continued from Page 4*

arise and how to let them go, or learn more about your neurosis or bad habits and how to let them go. Meditation and mantra chanting can help. Buddhism is all about discovering SELF.

So what is enlightenment? Many of us feel that it is something that is sought after, that maybe discovered through the Guru or mantra. Sakyamuni Buddha search for enlightenment for six years. He practiced under a guru, he practiced yoga and mantras, he even did extreme ascetic disciplines that we would find impossible. But all of this was in vain. The Buddha realized this, he realized that a person starving himself half to death had no better a chance at attaining the supreme knowledge than a fat glutton had. So he therefore took nourishment, sat under the Bohdi tree and practiced mediation until he achieved enlightenment.

Do you know what he realized as he sat there looking at the morning star, gazing through his third eye at the endless universe, a fully liberated Buddha? He realized that what he had been searching for that whole time had been within him always.

You are already enlightened. You don't get enlightened from something. You don't get it from the guru, or from a mantra or from a meditation technique. Enlightenment is part of your natural make-up. It's not to say that your 3rd eye, i.e....enlightenment, your Buddha Nature, is shut. Your 3rd eye has never been open or shut. It gazes at the universe limitlessly or endlessly. Only our warped, selfish sense of our righteous self prevents us from noticing this. We have ignored our 3rd eye. It works quite fine, only we are not looking through it.

As we walk along this path, it is so important for us to be humble. Chogram Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist and founder of the Shambala lineage, talks about a broken heart. It is a very sore and raw and therefore it is very perceptive and full of feelings. As we become humble, we begin to realize the suffering of others and our heart aches. But is a good ache, for it means we are developing great compassion for others. It does not mean we just be depressed and lonely. On the contrary, a truly humble person is a happy person. His holiness the Dalai Lama says he is not lonely, and this is a statement from one who is a celibate monk.

This is the situation, we are inside the fence, and some of us will be there for along time while others will be there but a short time. But even if we were to be released tomorrow, is there room for us in the world for us to attain enlightenment if we have a giant inflated ego? After all in prison there is no privacy when it comes to showers, bathrooms or in our cell. So it is vital we become humble.

Practice hard brothers, all that you learn becomes your daily life. The highest teaching is absolutely useless unless you learn to practice it in your every day life...humbly. The smaller our sense of self becomes, the larger the world will seem to us.

Blessed be, with love for all sentient beings I write this.

**Zen & the Lotus...***Continued from Page 9*

days when there were so many biases, so many ideas about how certain people weren't educated enough to become buddhas, or how certain genders were not qualified to become buddhas, or how certain people will never get it because they have selfishly gone off into the hills to attain their own liberation. Such hermits will never attain the compassion of a buddha. The Lotus Sutra is saying that the Buddha is trying to convey the very same enlightenment that he had to every single one of us. All his teachings come back to that point. This monk Fa-ta had trouble understanding that. He thought, "If only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the true reality of all existence then how can we get in on this? How can we possibly share in this?" This was Fa-ta's attitude: "This is something that only the buddhas can understand. I'm not up to this." The 6th Patriarch reprimands him and says, "No, no. This is for you. Don't think that it is beyond your reach. This is for you." He says: You should not misinterpret, and come to the conclusion that Buddha-knowledge is something special to Buddha and not common to us all.... Such a misinterpretation would amount to slandering Buddha and blaspheming the sutra.

When the monk finally gets it, "Well, o.k. Maybe it really is meant for me." He says, "Oh, I made such a big mistake. I wasted all that time reciting the sutra and I never got it. From this point on maybe I will not do that anymore." The 6th Patriarch says to him: There is nothing wrong in the sutra, so that you should refrain from reciting it. Whether sutra reciting will enlighten you or not or benefit you or no, all depends on yourself.

Now there is the key point of this whole discourse between this monk and the 6th Patriarch. There are profound teachings in the Lotus Sutra. But if you are not opening yourself to it, it is just going to go right over your head as it did with Hakuin the first time he read the sutra. If you understand what the intention is, this book will come alive and become more than just a book, as it did for Hakuin later on, or Dogen. The crucial passage is where the 6th Patriarch says: He who recites the Sutra with the tongue and puts its teaching into actual practice with his mind "turns round" the Sutra. He who recites it without putting it into practice is "turned round" by the Sutra.

So the sutra can help you or it can hurt you. We need to know the right way to approach it. Dogen took this as the theme to Hokke-ten-Hokke, "The Flower of Dharma Turns the Flower of Dharma." Dogen said: ...no one has grasped the point of the Flower of Dharma turning, or mastered the point of turning the Flower of Dharma, in the manner of our founding Patriarch, the eternal Buddha of Sokei...The reality that exists as it is is a treasure, is brightness, is a seat of truth, is mind in delusion, the Flower of Dharma turning, and is mind in realization, turning the Flower of Dharma, which is really just the Flower of Dharma turning the Flower of Dharma.

When the mind is in the state of delusion, the Flower of Dharma turns. When the mind is in the state of realization, we turn the Flower of Dharma. If perfect realization can be like this, The Flower of Dharma turns the Flower of Dharma.

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*To be continued in the next issue, Vol. 2 Issue 2*



## Finding Purpose...

*Continued from Page 3*

people I love, especially including myself, matter.”

If you think you must put off any of these natural purposes to achieve something more important, you are quite wrong. Achieve these purposes first.

### HEALTHY PURPOSES

Any additional purpose you assign yourself must somehow relate to those already listed. You can't always improve your physical health, but you can always give and receive more love, get more of the things you want, and contribute more to the well-being of others.

So, if you set a goal of becoming rich or powerful or wise or adored you won't be satisfied as you work toward your goal unless you use your achievements to give yourself and those you love more health, more love, greater satisfaction, and a more complete sense of belonging.

Compare Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Franklin Roosevelt with Napoleon, Adolph Hitler, and Richard Nixon. Each leader had huge dreams that were only partially fulfilled in their lifetime. Those in first group may have died with a sense of achieved purpose. For those in the second group, this was impossible all along.

### ARE WE ACHIEVING OUR PURPOSE?

We can tell if we are achieving our purpose by noticing how we usually feel when we are relaxed and resting. The degree to which we usually feel good at these times tells us the degree to which we are achieving our purpose.

### DO WE NEED MORE?

Maybe. A lot of the people I know and respect seem to think we do. Maybe they are right. But I think we only need to be true to our biology to know we are fulfilling our purpose. Fulfilling our role as a human being is difficult enough.

### THE BIG PICTURE

When you were born you were given one huge task: to take good care of yourself. Once you achieve that, your nature will lead you toward love and inclusiveness. What further purpose could there be? What greater purpose is there?

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Visit Tony's Web site at <http://helpyourselftherapy.com> .

## Sweet Dew of the Dharma... *Continued from Page 5*

humanity be harmonious, 4. In all endeavors be true.

**Repentance:** All the harm I have ever done, since time immemorial, are caused by greed, anger and ignorance, and produced through my body, speech and will, Now I confess and amend all.

**Four Great Vows** 1. Countless are sentient beings I vow to liberate. 2. Endless are vexations I vow to eradicate. 3. Measureless are the Dharmas I vow to learn; 4. Supreme is the Buddha Way I vow to attain.

When in action, perfect all actions. When at rest, rest all thought. Action and non-action are both illusory; All we need in life are already present.

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## Summer retreat...

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ted my time alone. I studied, read spiritual books, meditated and practiced what ancient wisdom I was learning. It all begun by accepting my imperfection. Some years later, I am back where I first begun my Catholic journey. I was back at St. Gregory's Abbey where I first become Catholic in the spring of 1988. Within that twenty year gap I had lost my freedom, regained my freedom and because of my faith and practice I was keeping my freedom.

The unique thing about this retreat is where it all began, accepting imperfection in ourselves. Then we can find the truth in spirituality of imperfection. It is good to never forget where we once came from and a reminder of where we are going.

Lets face it, they whole system of incarceration and those in charge of it don't have any problem reminding us that we are imperfect. We, as individuals, do have a choice. We who are imperfect have a choice in either embracing our imperfection or hiding from it. I think when we hide from the truth we become blind to reality.

Buddha was all about exposing the truth. His words opened many eyes and continues to open them today some thousand of years after he first spoke them.

Jesus said to the Pharisee, he came to heal the sick. Jesus embraced the ones thrown away by the religious society and downtrodden who felt they had no one to recognize their own worth.

When you have nothing, when you are cast away from society, only then do you hit rock bottom. It is only from there, with our self respect, that we can begin to seek the ancient wisdom for truth.

We can find that the time spent behind bars can be helpful to our spiritual growth. Or our time can in turn do us and keep us from the truth. You can do your own retreats behind bars, alone or with fellow like minded persons. I urge you to seek the spirituality of imperfection.