



Thầy's Letter to the Dharma Teacher Order

Dear Dharma friends,

We are currently facing an unprecedented pandemic which has spread worldwide. This has brought horror to everyone.

Faced with this situation, I urge you to keep the Body Healthy and Mind Peaceful in order to pray for the pandemic to be eliminated soon.

To keep the Body Healthy:

- take care of your health, live up to the hygiene.
- practice vegetarianism.
- avoid contact, spend time at home in prayer retreat.

To keep the Mind Peaceful:

- practice compassion and willingness to help people in need, such as sharing clothes, food, medicine, and praying for the sick.
- use fearless mind to help others to relieve suffering;
- make vows to recite the Great Mantra “OM MANI PADME HUM” to pray for the divine power of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara to sprinkle the nectar of compassion to the burning world, to make a miracle medicine appear in order to save the world from this dangerous disease.

“Healthy Body - Peaceful Mind” is the strongest armor to protect ourselves and to help other people through their tribulation.

With the belief in Cause and Effect and with the wise leadership of the US government, the disease will be eradicated soon, medicine will be found, and people around the world will return to a peaceful life.

Namo Great Compassion Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva.

Pháp Nguyen Temple, Pearland, Texas March 27, 2020.
Bhikkhu Thích Trí Hồng

A Note from the Editor

**Kim Liên
Janet Reale**

We finally have the March 2020 edition of our newsletter but the focus of the newsletter is different than planned because, as you all know, the retreat was canceled due to the Coronavirus threat. We know how to adapt; after all, our practice includes impermanence and uncertainty so we decided to refocus our efforts to include supportive Buddhist-oriented practices and prayers that will help us help others and ourselves during this time. Please read “The Bodhisattva Response to Coronavirus” by Jack Kornfield on pages 4 and 5.

It is the Dharma Teacher Order’s 20th Anniversary and the festivities have been canceled but we are celebrating having the good fortune of the Buddhist teachings. Every day we have opportunities to practice compassion and to be grateful for the good things we have in our lives. If we look deeply, we will see our friends and neighbors in a new light, rising to the occasion, assisting wherever they can, personifying the Bodhisattva ideal. We have cause to celebrate seeing such goodness as we practice gratitude.

A Different Dharma Student

Elena Bravocruz

As you may know, I'm using Zoom to conduct remote meditation sessions with my groups in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and a growing group in NYC. Zoom has video and audio capacity and one can join by phone only, as well.

During one of my last sessions the participants, all but 2, joined via video. We all checked in, including those on the phones of whom, one explained she was having problems with video hence, the phone connection. This person has been practicing with me in Easton PENN. For the last 2 years and I know she has children and maybe one with special needs.

Her phone connection was bad so it difficult to clearly hear her, but we managed. As she was checking-in, I kept hearing a voice that could have been a child or a frail person who kept saying

"Hello, I'm fine!" I responded "Oh, I'm glad you're fine, so am I." The next time she said "Hello..." I said, "Welcome to Metta Meditation, glad you're here." She responded, "me too."

I could hear my friend kind of chuckle each time this happened until, finally, she said "OK, sit down and relax." I was relieved.

Now, when I began guiding the Qigong Breathing and said, "breath in... etc." the voice repeated "Breath in... and out." This went on for a while, until, finally it stopped.

We continued with the Practice for about 20 minutes. I recited the Metta Sutta and gave a short Dharma sharing and again, the voice came and said, "that's so nice." Here I responded "Yes, this is a very inspirational Sutta and it is all about building our capacity to love and care for ourselves and others, regardless of who they are." Her response was, again, "that's so nice."

We continued with a Metta Meditation and I explained that, if there were no comments or questions, we would end the session after sharing merits. Everyone agreed.

The Meditation came to an end, but a couple of participants had comments. The video of the participant with the "voice" on the phone suddenly showed up on my screen and said among other things, "She's so relaxed now Elena, she loves your voice, look at her here, sitting so quietly on my shoulder." Truly, I could not control my burst of laughter. Who was sitting on her shoulder? It was her TALKING PARROT!

So, this is my Metta-generated anecdote, who would have thought!

The Bodhisattva Response to Coronavirus—Jack Kornfield

Dear Friends,

We have a choice.

Epidemics, like earthquakes, tornadoes and floods, are part of the cycle of life on planet Earth.

How will we respond?

With greed, hatred, fear and ignorance? This only brings more suffering.

Or with generosity, clarity, steadiness and love?

This is the time for love.

Time for Bodhisattvas. In Buddhist teachings, the Bodhisattva is someone who vows to alleviate suffering and brings blessings in every circumstance. A Bodhisattva chooses to live with dignity and courage and radiates compassion for all, no matter where they find themselves.

This is not a metaphor. As Bodhisattvas we are now asked to hold a certain measure of the tragedy of the world and respond with love.

The Bodhisattva path is in front of us. The beautiful thing is, we can see Bodhisattvas all around. We see them singing from their balconies to those shut inside. We see them in young neighbors caring for the elders nearby, in our brave healthcare workers and the unheralded ones who stock the shelves of our grocery stores.

As a father, if she called me, I would fly to the ends of the earth to help and protect my daughter.

Now she and her firefighter/paramedic husband and my toddler grandson await the virus. His urban fire department, like many hospitals and first responders, does not have masks. Eighty percent of their work is emergency medical calls and they all expect to get the virus. They will not be tested, because the department can't afford to lose the help of too many of their firefighters.

What can I do? What can we do?

In this moment we can sit quietly, take a deep breath, and acknowledge our fear and apprehension, our uncertainty and helplessness... and hold all these feelings with a compassionate heart. We can say to our feelings and uncertainty, "Thank you for trying to protect me," and "I am OK for now." We can put our fears in the lap of Buddha, Mother Mary, Quan Yin, place them in the hearts of the generations of brave physicians and scientists who tended the world in former epidemics.

When we do, we can feel ourselves part of something greater, of generations of survivors in the vast web of history and life, "being carried" as the Ojibwa elders say, "by great winds across the sky."

This is a time of mystery and uncertainty. Take a breath. The veils of separation are parting and the reality of interconnection is apparent to everyone on earth. We have needed this pause, perhaps even needed our isolation to see how much we need one another.

Now it is time to add our part.

The Bodhisattva deliberately turns toward suffering to serve and help those around in whatever way they can.

This is the test we have been waiting for.

We know how to do this.

Time to renew your vow.

Sit quietly again and ask your heart: what is my best intention, my most noble aspiration for this difficult time?

Your heart will answer.

Let this vow become your North Star. Whenever you feel lost, remember and it will remind you what matters.

It is time to be the medicine, the uplifting music, the lamp in the darkness.
Burst out with love. Be a carrier of hope.
If there is a funeral, send them off with a song.
Trust your dignity and goodness.
Where others hoard.....help.
Where others deceive.....stand up for truth.

Where others are overwhelmed or uncaring.....be kind and respectful.

When you worry about your parents, your children, your beloveds, let your heart open to share in everyone's care for their parents, their children and their loved ones. This is the great heart of compassion. The Bodhisattva directs compassion toward everyone—those who are suffering and vulnerable and those who are causing suffering. We are in this together.

It is time to reimagine a new world, to envision sharing our common humanity, to envision how we can live in the deepest most beautiful way possible. Coming through this difficulty, what we intend and nurture, we can do.

In the end, remember who you are is timeless awareness, the consciousness that was born into your body. You were born a child of the spirit, and even now you can turn toward the awareness, and become the loving awareness that witnesses yourself reading and feeling and reflecting.

When a baby is born our first response is love.

When a dear one dies, the hand we hold is a gesture of love.

Timeless love and awareness are who you are.

Trust it.

Dear Bodhisattva,

The world awaits your compassionate heart.

Let's join in this great task together.

With metta,

Jack

Visit <https://jackkornfield.com/pandemic-resources/> page on my website for meditations & other materials.

Related practices:

<https://jackkornfield.com/steady-heart/>

<https://jackkornfield.com/compassion-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>

Editor's Note: The above underlined blue text lines are viable links; each one includes several pertinent articles.

Bodhi Day Celebration at Huntsville State Prison Sondra Kaighen

The Pearland Sangha attended the Bodhi Day celebration with the men at the Huntsville Unit, located in Huntsville, Texas. This location happens to also be where the state's executions take place...a place of much suffering. Our group goes once per month to support their services. This Sangha began as an off-shoot of the prison ministry that the volunteers from the Pearland Sangha started back in 2015, as we were first invited into the Luther Unit, in Navasota, Texas. Once one of the men from that unit was transferred to Huntsville, he suddenly found himself alone, without a Sangha with which to practice. He was fairly new the practice of Buddhism, but understood, from his attendance with the group in Luther, how the 3 gems would help him quell his suffering. After almost 2 years of corresponding with him, providing him resources, answering his questions and meandering the difficult process of gaining entrance into another prison, in August of 2018, we were able to send a team to Huntsville!

The group started with about 6 men and 3 volunteers crammed in the Assistant Chaplain's office. After gaining some momentum, word got out to the other inmates about this service, and we now have about 30 men regularly attending. Ten men are waiting to take the Precepts/3 Refuges, with about 5 already having taken them. The group is certainly interfaith, with a Wiccan, a Catholic or two, a Taoist and an Orthodox something or another. We have two that don't speak English (one Hispanic and one Vietnamese), but others have been sitting with them interpreting Dharma talks for them. It has been a beautiful thing to witness the love and support in this group.

On December 7, 2019, our normal volunteers (Robert, Sondra & Brandon) as well as a couple from the established Luther group (Phap Lan & Alan) were able to facilitate a beautiful Bodhi Day celebration with the Huntsville Sangha. We had the good fortune, for the first time, of having a benefactor who donated all the vegetarian food from a popular Houston Vietnamese restaurant. As this was a celebration, which is only allowed twice per year, our time together was doubled from two to four hours. This extra time allows us to not only have the service, but to practice mindful eating together as well as give us additional time to get to know the men more. We brought a small tree that lights up, handed out Buddhist "ornaments" for the men to hang on the tree. Each ornament had a different Buddhist concept written on it, and were handed out to the men prior to the sitting meditation. The men were asked to use their concept as their focus of attention during their sit. Once the bell ended the sit, we all lined up and mindfully offered a procession of ornament hanging on the tree, and returned to our seats. The Dharma talk was then just a sharing of that experience of sitting with the concept and the meaning that experience gave to each participant. The room was almost immediately lit up with laughter and shared experiences. Men who had not ever spoken at previous services suddenly found their voices and shared. It was an amazing experience that touched each one of the volunteers as much, if not more, than the men. We also, for the first time in the entire history of our prison ministry, were allowed to have pictures taken of the event.



Needless to say, the two-hour dark drive back home to Pearland was a revealing time for all the volunteers as we shared how grateful we were for this unique experience. After the close of the service, one young man approached me and revealed a deadly diagnosis which he has not told his family or any of his friends about. He stated that the service is what moved him to share his news. I encouraged him to share his medical diagnosis with those he feels closest to him so that he can be supported on that journey. I just received my first letter from him as he informs me he was transferred to another Texas prison and now finds himself alone and wanting information on how he can start a Sangha there...seeds are planted and the story continues....



My Experience Spreading the Dharma Sondra Kaighen

I wanted to take this opportunity to share my most recent experiences, as a hospital Chaplain, in spreading the Dharma. Working at the busiest Level I trauma center in the United States has been a wonderful experiment in planting dharma seeds. As you can imagine, there is incredible suffering in a place such as this, both in the patient and family experience, as well as with the staff who work with this population, compassionately caregiving for those patients and families. As our system has in excess of 5,500 physicians and 25,000 employees, there are an incredible amount of people who could benefit from the practice of meditation and mindfulness.

Although I've only been on staff since September 1, I am lucky enough to have a Director that supports my efforts to teach this practice to our hospital community. It has been difficult to organize, but we rolled out our first campus-wide session on January 14. The only advertising we currently have is through our digital "news flash" that is sent through our campus emails. The marketing department is working on posters and flyers for posting in all the units. Word of mouth is slowly working however until those postings are available. I gathered a team of people, that I have met in my short 5 months on staff, who are either already have a meditation practice established in their own personal lives as well as some who are interested in learning the practice and willing to help with leading them. This is a project, that while sounds very simple to implement, has been somewhat difficult to roll out, as our system is vast and moves very slowly. I am careful to follow all the rules and guidelines as set out by our leadership, which are also somewhat burdensome. I feel like I'm literally moving in the proverbial "10 Directions," with every step forward also including a few steps backward. However, I remain undaunted. I merely reassess at every obstacle and then try a different approach. It is beginning to pay off and our daily "Relaxation Sessions," which they are called, so as not to seem religious in any way (we are in the Bible belt after all) are slowly gaining attention.

As I work in Surgical Services at the hospital, "behind the red line" of the Operating Rooms, for half of my day, and the other half in the out-patient setting in our Cancer Center, I was recently asked to conduct daily meditation sessions there as well.

Unfortunately the requested time to conduct those sessions for staff is the exact same time as the in-patient side request. However, as I already have a committed team of 7 staff members, comprised of other Chaplains, a physician, my Director, a RN and a Sonographer (who, incidentally, used to attend our Temple!), I have begun the same sessions for the Cancer Center staff, and will be offering the same to the patients and families in the afternoons there, within the next couple of weeks.

While getting paid to meditate at least twice a day, along with my other duties of patient/family and staff care, is super exciting and advantageous for me personally, my interest in writing this article is to express my more profound experience that I was not expecting. It started when I was conducting a "Refreshment for the Soul" event at the Cancer Center. This is a staff care event, where I provide tea and snacks for the staff in a quiet environment for a set period (typically 2-3 hours), to allow staff an opportunity to come and go for little "self-care." I scatter uplifting quotations and meditation instruction cards on the table for the staff to peruse, aromatherapy, and other ways to help staff calm themselves and re-center before going back to their work with the patients. During this event, one of the physicians, Dr. Lu, came to me and began to ask about the meditation sessions at the hospital. This conversation resulted in a fast friendship and she began to share her own personal practice journey. Since that meeting, she and I have worked feverishly to inform the other physicians and leadership of the benefits of meditation for everyone involved. She brings the "science" to the conversation, which is helpful and makes the conversation more well-received by other physicians. As a result, our daily Cancer Center meditation for staff have already started. However, the Vice President and the Director there have now requested an audience with me next week to see what other resources I can conceive to assist the Center, as well as to discuss becoming full-time at the Cancer Center, as we're in the budget preparation time for fiscal year 2021. And, I have been given a separate, small space there now, to decorate as I wish to help to meet one-on-one with patients/family members and staff (dokusan!) in a quiet, private and calming space. Also, Dr. Lu and I have now toured 2 other Cancer Centers and are gathering information about what resources we would like to see implemented at our Cancer Center in hopes of writing a proposal to the Non-profit Foundation in time for the budget-planning deadline at the end of this month. These are exciting times, no doubt.

While meeting over tea during one of those tours, Dr. Lu confided in me that she believes I have been brought to the Cancer Center and placed in her life for a reason. I agreed, however to distract any notion of "divine intervention" I simply stated my understanding as to why this is happening. I believe that when conditions are right, our hearts break open to people in a most profound way. Dr. Lu and I happen to both be on a path of transformation, not only for ourselves but for those who we perceive to be suffering all around us. She has shared that she, too, feels called to leave her practice as a physician and to enter the world in a way to help others relieve their own suffering...a true Bodhi-sattva. While both of us are experiencing some hurdles, we both are passionate about making this path open to all of the people with whom we come in contact, and are unrelenting in our pursuit.

I write this article to my national Sangha in hopes to inspire all to continue to follow their hearts and pursue the Bodhisattva path. When I decided to close my law practice and pursue this path, I had no idea how it would unfold. I was truly grateful just to have an income and health care benefits as I met with, prayed with, laughed and cried with patients. I never saw this other opportunity on the horizon, but my heart was certainly open and ready to perceive the need and pursue the opportunities as they presented themselves. I hope to finish my part in this story one day with a smile on my face, knowing that others are on the path to quieting their mind and learning to live a mindful life. I challenge you all to do the same and continue to sprinkle the dharma seeds in ways that present themselves to you in your life.

Always my head at your feet, my community that lives in harmony and awareness...

Sondra Kaighen
Tuòng Liên (Auspicious Lotus)

Mindfulness Day at Pháp Nguyen

Photos Submitted by Sister Pháp Lan



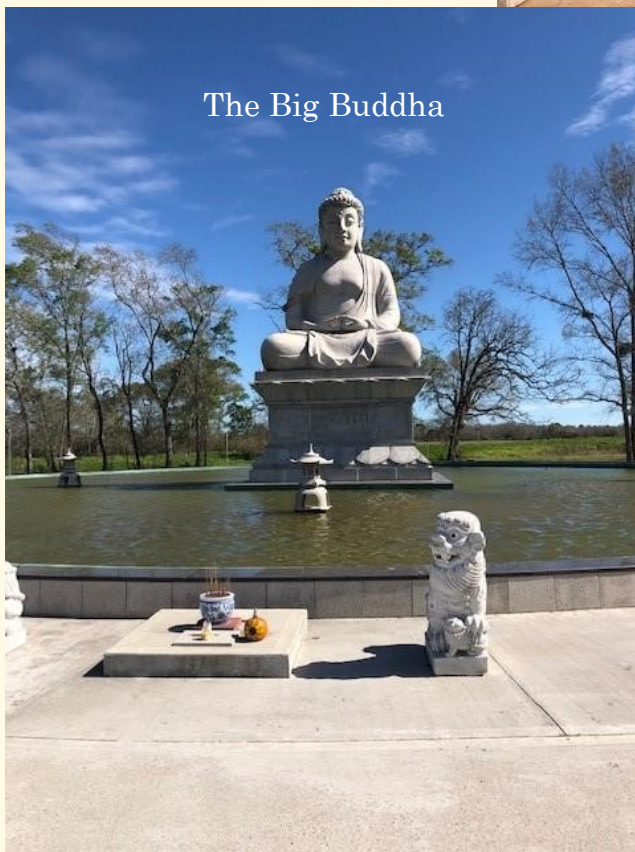
We bow



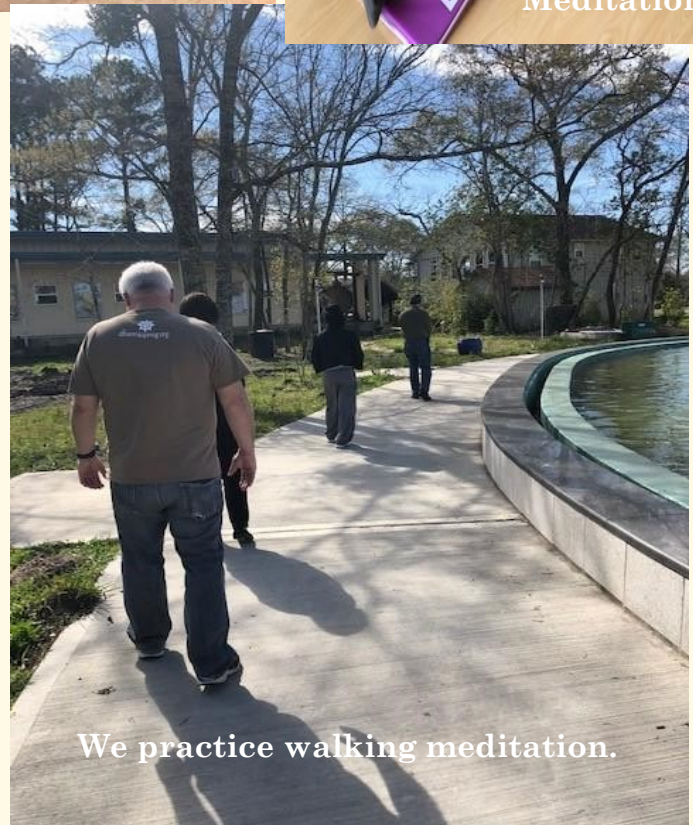
We serve



Relaxation
Meditation



The Big Buddha



We practice walking meditation.



Preparing delicious vegetarian food



Meditating Together

Not All is Bad!

My Grandfather often said, and I have heard said by many after him that, necessity is the mother of invention. This will prove to be truer than life in these perilous times we live.

The Pandemic caused by the Corona Virus came to our shores and is affecting us all, albeit in different degrees: the fear of contagion, the disease itself, the deaths it's caused, and the preventive measures all have monumental and manifold, consequences. Apart from the socioeconomical impact, our ability to cope with pain and suffering, our own and that of others, is being tested. Fear, uncertainty, isolation, and loneliness, among other things, seem to dominate our mental and emotional spaces and, we are not alone. The whole world, literally, is going through the same hard and uncertain times. What do we do? The Dharma Teacher Order (DTO) is our Sangha where we take refuge, after taking refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma. Following the structure of our Bodhisattva Vows we realize that Beings are numberless and in vowing to save them all, we commit to practice limitless compassion and spread it throughout the world, starting from our own selves.

So, in the face of COVID-19 and all of what it means, how do we effectively live our Bodhisattva Vows, what do we do? How is the current necessity to mother our invention? We connect via Zoom!

And, that's what we did, thanks to our Techy Guru Craig Hannah on March 27th, 2020 at 7:30 PM we were able to connect via Zoom. A Big thanks to Craig! To All those in attendance Kudos to you! Many of us are not at all Zoom savvy still, we took the risk and joined the video call and shared our experiences with COVID-19 in each other's locations; we talked about the many ways we continue our Practices in spite of the limitations; we shared what and how media is being put to work to spread the Dharma and to build lovingkindness and compassion; and, most importantly, we shared the Dharma and had a Meditation Practice, tog ether.

Of course, we missed those who could not join us and hope they will in future Zoom visits. We are all invited! We will work to create a template for participation of each Sangha so we can get the most benefit and learn from and with each other in each meeting. Together and out of necessity, we have invented the Virtual DTO National Sangha! This is something to be very grateful for. Please, feel free to share with me at bravodharma4u@gmail.com any idea you may have that we can incorporate to make this a growing experience for all of us.

I look forward to our future as a Virtual Dharma practicing and learning community and thank you very much for responding to the call.

Sharing the Merits, we all cultivated on March 27, 2020 with Fernando, Thay, all of you and the Medical Professionals, whatever their level, the First Responders of our Country and the world I say: Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu.

Elena Bravocruz
DTO Dharma Priest
March 28, 2020

**Please take the time to view this Pali chant -
The Three Jewels of Buddhism - Taking Refuge Mantra.**

It is so beautiful and easy to memorize.

Buddham saranam gacchami,

Dhamman saranam gacchami,

Sangham saranam gacchami.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0c0AA1JLPYY>