



DHARMA TEACHER ORDER

Volume 7

Issue 10

March-June 2021

Dear Buddhists and Friends,

For nearly two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged the world, causing many scenes of mourning and desperation, and causing millions to die from this terrible disease. The sick cannot be cured, the dead cannot be buried. This is a terrible calamity for mankind!

America is not spared from this scourge. However, thanks to dedicated scientists and abundant resources, we have successfully developed a vaccine against COVID-19. Now much of the American population has been vaccinated, the pandemic has been slowed, and life is slowly coming back to normal. America is finally recovering!

Meanwhile, the pandemic has broken out everywhere, especially in India and Vietnam. People live in isolation and fear, not knowing what their fate will be. We cannot bear to stand by and watch the people get infected and die slowly in despair.

What can we do in this painful situation? With the compassion of the Buddha's children, as well as the love between all people, we earnestly call on all Buddhists and friends to join together in raising funds to buy vaccines. The money raised will be prioritized to help India and Vietnam in this time of great need.

Please make online donations to our GoFundMe campaign:

<https://gofund.me/46e6be37>

-OR-

Please make out your check to

Phap Nguyen Buddhist Temple and send it to:

Phap Nguyen Buddhist Temple

1838 County Road 129

Pearland, TX 77581

Praying for the end of the pandemic, peace in the world, and happy living beings.

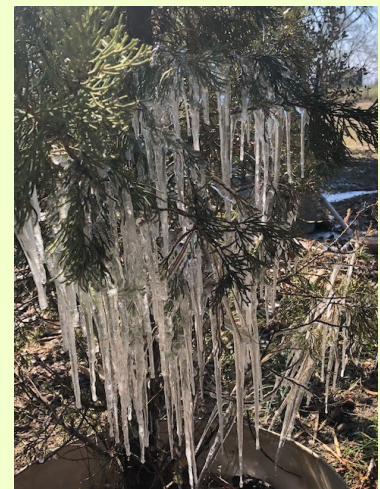
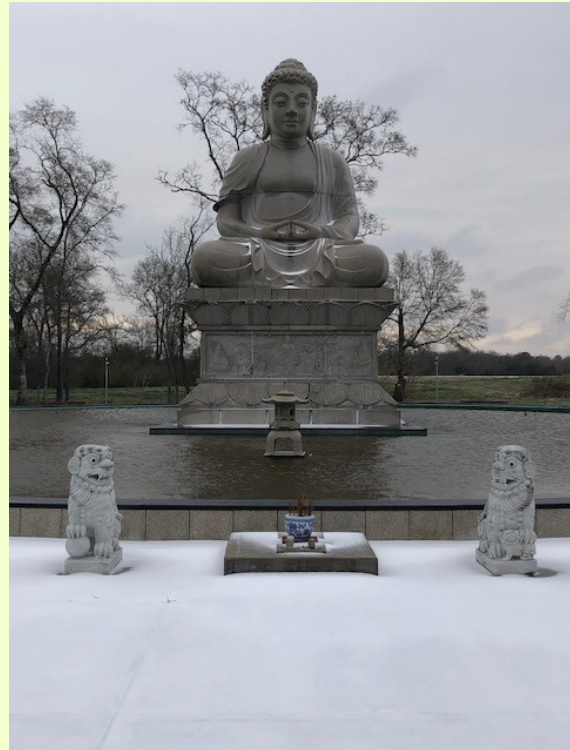
Namo Great Compassion Rescue Suffering Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva

Phap Nguyen June 4, 2021

Most Venerable Thich Tri Hoang

Thay's Photos of [Dharma Spring: Chùa Pháp Nguyên](#) in the Snow

These are winter photos as this newsletter was meant to be published in March 2021.



[Dharma Spring: Chùa Pháp Nguyên](#) above (and here) are
Hyperlinks. Click on to learn more.

Link to Lion's Roar article for these times:

How Not to Lose Heart—Sylvia Boorstein

[HTTPS://WWW.LIONSROAR.COM/HOW-NOT-TO-LOSE-HEART/](https://www.lionsroar.com/how-not-to-lose-heart/)

BY [SYLVIA BOORSTEIN](#)

At Chùa Pháp Nguyên

<https://1drv.ms/v/s!AkNCCzQRWw-tiloFhdbguLuQh2wzvQ?e=1aCcvq>

“Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bath Water”



Shakya Muni Buddha with Samantabhadra (riding 6-tusk elephant representing compassion) and Manjushri (representing wisdom) bodhisattvas.



Amitabha Buddha with Avalokiteshvara (representing compassion) and Mahasthamaprapta (representing wisdom) bodhisattvas. You can differentiate that Shakyamuni Buddha statue is always sitting

Message
from Thay -
We Welcome
Ocean Vuong

I would like to introduce to our sangha a Vietnamese American talented writer: Ocean Vuong. He is a well known poet and fiction writer; and also an open gay and Buddhist.

Metta,

Thich Tri Hoang

[Ocean Vuong, Poet and Fiction Writer | 2019 MacArthur Fellow - YouTube](#)

[Ocean Vuong: On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous - YouTube](#)

Awakening Compassion for a Forgotten People

Reflections on *The Buddha in Jail*

By Cuong Lu

Article by Peter Thánh Viên Chiêu Davis

Everyday people all over the world from many different walks of life are suffering greatly. They are suffering from malnutrition, immense cruelty brought on by the ignorance of others, injustice, anger, and greed. While all of these people are talked about at length, there are others who fall beneath the cracks, suffering people shrouded in darkness, left to their own devices. These are people who have fallen into the hole of failure without any clue of how to get out. I'm speaking not just about the men, women, and children that have fallen victim to criminal behavior, but also about those men and women who have committed those crimes. Many people all over the world are willing to help the victims of violent crime, but most of us forget the other side, which consists of the hurting people who have hurt other people and must live with the memories and consequences of their actions. This is not a call for pity but a call for compassion.

I want to shine a little light on the many human stories of those persons who find themselves imprisoned in legal systems all over the world. I want to open a window into a marginalized group of individuals that are judged, criminalized, and by some even hated and considered not worthy of respect. I hope to give these brave men and women both a voice and dignity. I want to encourage all of us to put down the blinders of prejudice and see the truth that everyone has Bodhi Nature that is often covered over by suffering and is in great need of our love and compassion, not hatred or pity. Buddhism teaches that every living being has basic goodness and is worthy of respect. The mind or Bodhi nature is like a mirror that has been clouded over by personal experiences, unwholesome upbringings, social conditioning, and bad choices. When we look deeply into ourselves and the lives of others, we realize that we are all the same. I like to think of us as "variations on a theme". When prisoners are given the chance to sit quietly in meditation, they can learn to just sit with their suffering of childhood trauma, problematic relations, and remorse for crimes they have committed. Knowing and feeling the truth though painful, can be a source of happiness. When inmates are given a chance they can feel listened to and understood, not judged, which helps transform the way they see themselves and helps change their attitudes and behaviors. Facing our suffering gets beneath our defenses, resistance, self-denial, painful experiences, and memories, and can become a source of healing that can lead to real happiness.

Buddhist Prison Chaplain "Cuong Le" once asked an inmate named Derek, "What do you think is the worst part of being in jail?" Derek's response gives us a small window into the experiences of an incarcerated life. His answer was this, "You don't have your own cell. A guard locks you in and you wait until he comes back. You are confined within four walls, you feel powerless." Many prisoners, just like people on the outside, are imprisoned by our bodies and our mind. Because we don't understand our true nature, we feel unhappy and unfree. When one is locked up, it's hard to see that you are not only incarcerated in your cell, but you also do not realize what true freedom is. Freedom, first and foremost, is our attitude, a state that begins in the mind. This realization offers us a key that opens the door that leads to awakening, whether we are locked up in a cell or stuck in our narrow personal view. Here we can get a glimpse of refugees that fled Vietnam after the war, who were locked in a large room with other refugees with only one small window to look out of. As one of his fellow refugees asked, "Is this the price of freedom?" In light of the criminal justice system we can ask ourselves that same question, "In a country that calls itself free, is this the price of freedom?"

Awakening Compassion for a Forgotten People **Reflections on *The Buddha in Jail*** **(continued)**

One of the main problems with the mind-set of the outside world is epitomized by the notion that believes it is wrong to try to understand prisoners. The general public often believes that somehow inmates are “bad” people and that all the rest of us are “good”. We turn our backs on those “bad” people and cut off communication with them at a time when they need it the most. Lady Justice is often portrayed holding a scale to way the balance of judgment with her eyes covered a blindfold. The idea is that justice is blind. I feel this a wonderful representation of the criminal justice system as a whole. If the criminal justice system would remove lady Justice’s blindfold then maybe she could see the truth about what’s going on in the lives of these men and women caught in a vicious cycle of suffering. This would allow us to make more informed compassionate decisions motivated by loving-kindness and non-judgment, not by hatred or greed.

In an interview, Bettina Stanghneth was asked, “Does understanding a criminal mean that you approve of their actions?”. Her response is very telling about the attitudes of a vast majority of the outside world. She said That the problem is, that once you connect understanding with apologies or justification, you are on the side of the perpetrator. These notions of two sides, the side of the perpetrator and the side of the victim, say that somehow it is unfair to view the perpetrators as victims themselves.

It is important to understand the deepest form of thought, a kind of openness that is no longer occupied with notions of “good” and “bad”. However, the Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki taught us, to observe life always with the beginner’s mind. Unless we have faith in someone we can’t help them, and the alternative is punishment. Prisoners need our help. Most of what we call punishment in many cases equates to vengeance for wrongs done, a way to get back at someone by inflicting suffering because their actions have caused us pain.

Always remember that right-speech always goes along with deep listening. These men and women who end up in prison need compassion and a deep understanding that enables the embracing of one's inner Buddha Nature, ones loving kindness that transcends selfish personal views, and enables inner transformation to begin for both the victims of violent crimes as well as the perpetrators.



W. S. Merwin, Zen Buddhist and Pulitzer Prize winner for Poetry in 2009 and again in 2019, wrote this sensitive poem:

AFTER THE ALPHABETS

I am trying to decipher the language of insects
they are the tongues of the future
their vocabularies describe buildings as food
they can instruct of dark water and the veins of trees
they can convey what they do not know
and what is known at a distance
and what nobody knows
they have terms for making music with the legs
they can recount changing in a sleep like death
they can sing with wings
the speakers are their own meaning in a grammar without horizons
they are wholly articulate
they are never important they are everything.

- W.S. Merwin, from his 1988 book [*The Rain in the Trees*](#).
- Copyright © 1988 by W. S. Merwin.



Buddhist Holidays

A while ago, the Texas Sangha's Wednesday Night Meditation featured Jon's presentation on Buddhist Holidays. Sister Phap Lan has sent out an email to all sangha members about it. This is an excellent resource for all of us to learn more about the Buddhist holidays.

Here is the link to the session:

<https://1drv.ms/v/s!AkNCCzQRWw-tjFtSsAgzk9LBSCTUg?e=j9Cmzs>

Sister Phap Lan provided the visuals he used, as well as the letters that went out from our temple to describe our activities during the 3 major Mayahana holidays that Jon mentioned. This will give you more of an idea of what goes on at a local temple.

The pictures attached are of: Shakyamuni Buddha with Samantadhabra (riding 6-tusk elephant representing compassion) and Manjuri (representing wisdom) bodhisattvas; Amitayus Buddha with Avalokitesvara (representing compassion) and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (representing wisdom) bodhisattvas. You can differentiate that Shakyamuni Buddha statue is always sitting crossed legs whereas Amitayus Buddha statue is always standing.

Good Buddhist Calendar http://urbandharma.org/pdf14/fs_calendar_2021.pdf