

The Dhammapada Project



It has been said that if the New Testament had been lost, and only the Sermon on the Mount survived, we would still have what is necessary to follow the teachings of Christ. A similar claim could be made of all the Buddhist scriptures. If lost, the Dhammapada alone would enable us to follow the teachings of the Buddha. It is a collection of practical verse gathered from the direct disciples of the Buddha. In the Pali to Tibetan to English translation the location of the teachings and to whom they were given is stated. The 26 chapters have different themes. The Dhammapada can be read and appreciated as philosophy, as part of the great literature of the world. To study and put these words into practice may be difficult. They can be however, a roadmap for life's journey and a path to self realization. There are many different translations of the Dhammapada available today. I found myself especially drawn to the translations by The Dharma Publishing Staff, Eknath Easwaran, Thomas Cleary and Juan Mescaro.



"Offering" photo by Roberto Chavez Burning Man, Black Rock City 2003

The seeds of the Dhammapada Project were sown out at Burning Man in 2003. I was invited to Black Rock City to take part in a memorial for Court Demas who was murdered in 2002. His mother had shown a print of this fused glass Buddha to his friends, an image she was drawn to that soothed her in some way. They asked if they could place it on the bells of the Desert Flower. Late one night out at the Flower a man came up to me and asked, "If you could put 4 books in your memorial library, what would they be?" Without skipping a beat I replied, "The Dhammapada". I was familiar with the collection of verses and saying those words led me on a journey for which I am profoundly grateful.

The images come and go in a lenticular form, a technique used in advertising for many years. In this way the work responds to the Buddhist concept of Impermanence. Some of the 86+ images are drawn from a lifetime's work in stained glass and more recently fused glass. Some of the images have been created specifically for the project and some include photographs from my recent trip to Tibet and Nepal. The glass finds a new life and identity through context in graphic form. This speaks to the Buddhist concept of Dependent Origination. Another way of expressing that idea would be that I never could have created this project without each event giving birth to the next.

The viewer must physically interact (move) with the lenticular image to see the whole picture and be mindful of others, a working metaphor for how we live in the world. The complete installation would include a video camera trained on the viewers with screens projecting the interactions. The project was not created in any specific order. It unfolded as life presented itself through the dharma of everyday living.

I offer my gratitude to my teacher Khenpo Lama Pema Wangdak who helped me to turn that dream into a reality, Khenpo Kunga and Lama Rinchen, my Kailash brothers, Robert Thurman who inspired me to "Circle the Sacred Mountain," Joel Katz, my dear friend who patiently taught me the lenticular technique and to Court, who I never had the good fortune to meet in his lifetime but whose presence in the lives of those he has touched is the gift that keeps giving.

May all beings benefit

Ellen Miret