

October 11, 2010

Dear Ven. Chodron & the Sangha,

With my palms together-

I would like to tell you all that it has been very nice to hear all your voices and to speak with you. Thank you all for your letters, advice, and guidance over the years and helping to spread the Dharma! I've been so blessed to have been able to be in contact with you, and I pray that I'll meet you all in my next life and recognize you.

You have been my family and I'm thankful y'all have included me in retreats, prayers, and have made me feel a part of this wonderful family. My heart hurts when I see the attachment to this life. It was great to speak with all of you, and it was nice to speak with you, Ven. Jampel, last night and have you explain that I don't have to give up fighting (to get a stay of execution) but to internally let go. I hope I can find the happy medium. All of you have such a calming effect on me.

I feel a connection with all of you, but no denying I feel I've had a very strong connection with Ven. Chodron. I feel also a strong connection with Ven. Semkye and Ven. Jampel. October 29th, 2009 is a day I won't forget. It was very powerful for me and I'm so grateful to you, Ven. Jampel, for coming down here to visit and give me refuge and the five precepts.

To Ven. Semkye: You asked where my heart and mind is. My heart hurts, and I find it hard to understand and I'm sad. My mind is all over the place and consumed with worry most of the time. Tonglen has been helpful. I'm really trying to have compassion for all involved, like the staff, courts, lawyers, etc. You are already doing everything you can, and I'm thankful for all the prayers y'all have made for me. Yes, Ven. Semkye. There is one thing *you* can do for me. After understanding the precept of no touching the opposite sex – please give Ven. Chonyi, Ven. Tarpa, Ven. Jigme, Ven. Samten all a hug for me. Ha! Ven. Jampel and Tsundru can do the same. *There*, now I've been able to give everyone a hug – ha ha! Please make prayers for me to have a fortunate rebirth, to meet the Dharma early, and to meet Ven. Chodron and recognize her as well as all of you.

I have not done very well in practice lately. Tonglen, Chenrezig, and Amitabha practice have been helpful. I'm trying my best to follow Ven. Chodron's advice. I see my tendency to get overwhelmed by self-pity, worry, and fear. I pray my future lives will not be like this and I'll be able to know and practice the Dharma. When I can stop and step outside of myself and take a look, I can clearly see my suffering. But when I'm in the midst of it all, it is hard to see that and easy to get trapped in misery.

I've tried so hard to explain myself to friends and relatives and to try to help them, but I don't come across very clearly. So I pray in my next life I'll have that ability to be able to explain and teach the Dharma.

I pray that things continue to change and that women will come to be more recognized in Tibetan Buddhism. You are all important, to the Dharma, to many people and myself, and to continuing to be able to carry on the lineage and tradition. Thank you! I'm glad y'all are very proud of me – tattoos and all, ha! Ven. Semkye – you crack me up and always bring a smile to my face.

I guess by now y'all have gotten the sense of this letter. It is to say goodbye or *until next time in my next life*. I'm trying to stop writing so I may spend more time trying to focus my mind. Not easy. I look forward to spending time with Ven. Jampel and talking about the Dharma. I pray I'll be able to keep a clear, peaceful mind and just “let go” at the time of death. This is very tough, and my tendency has been to get caught up in fear and worry. I keep telling myself that I've lived out this negative karma and to see to death as a new start and a chance to do it all the right way this next time. I pray I'll be able to do much good for the Dharma and for others my next life.

Karma! Boy that's a blessing and a curse, ha. When Ven. Tsepal came, we had a really great visit and were able to discuss karma. She was so easy to talk with. How nice of her to come and see me. I hope it was helpful to her and that she'll be able to open up to other prisoners (especially in Australia) and be a good example to many there in finding the Dharma and developing a daily practice. She helped me to see we are all alike. She talked about dealing with anger, realizing the importance of the teacher, and relying on the Sangha and in taking refuge. I thought these were only my problems, ha.

Well, the anger problem I've really been able to defeat, and I'm so proud of that. It goes to show just how much you all have done to help me. We all have faults but ya'll lead by example, and I thank you for showing me and teaching me the way to live a good life. I was never taught morals, and I'm forever grateful to you for teaching me how to live a moral life. May my next life be able to repay all your kindness. I've suffered a lot in this life, so I rejoice that this karma is being paid off!!!! Thank you for helping me see that and to learn how to love myself. I'm still not great at this but it has really improved.

I pray that Ven. Chodron is having a safe trip (in Asia) and is able to benefit many beings there. I felt a strong connection to her from the beginning. I did not see that importance at first, but do now. You all have shown great patience in dealing with me. Thank you from my heart for what you do – for myself and for so many others. If people like Ven. Jampel and myself can make the changes we have made, it goes to prove what y'all do for us. Now he is in the position to do the same for so many, and I rejoice in that. My selfishness says I'm very sad because I was hoping I would be able to do the same.

I was sad to hear about your cat Achala dying, but pray that he will have a fortunate rebirth and will know the Dharma in all future lives. How is Mary? How is Pat, the neighbor? I pray for them and send them Medicine Buddha's healing light.

Ven. Chodron – I'm sorry for my last letter. You're right. It was filled with self-pity and selfishness. It is hard not to be drawn into that due to habit, but I see that and try so hard not to be that way. My whole life has been spent like that. I also realize I categorize

things as good or bad and have worked so hard to try and overcome my negative attitudes. The slogan in your chocolate wrapper, “Face up to fear. Every challenge is a blessing,” is great! My pieces of chocolate never say anything. That is some kind of chocolate you have there, ha ha. That is a good motto to live by.

I’ve thanked my lawyer, Susan, for all she has done and I’m grateful for her. Nothing would ever have been done if it wasn’t for her. I got to watch Ven. Chodron’s video message to me again this past week. That is special to me!! I see your enthusiasm and joy, and it is so wonderful. You are very special to me. I loved it when you got stern with me, then turned to Susan and then laughed. I can see the care you have for me (as well as everyone there), and it really touches my heart. I love all of you. You are my family.

Wow – karma is tough! But the good side can outweigh that – it is up to me. I wish I’d seen this 40 years ago. Thank you for the articles you sent. I’ll have plenty of questions for Ven. Jampel when he is here. Thank you for letting him come and thank you Ven. Jampel for doing that for me so I’m not alone and will be able to receive the guidance needed. You all have been so kind to me. *Thank you.* I offer all good things to you, including my practice, and pray for your long lives and enlightenment.

What goes around really comes around. Karma should be taught in schools. I think if it were there would be less violence and hatred, and it would help to instill morals and ethics in people. I wish I knew all the virtuous actions done to bring me to this point and to you – I’d repeat it them everyday.

Will my mindstream remember this life when I take rebirth? Will I know what and where? Will I remember things? I don’t want to not remember this life, so I’ll know real suffering and be able to avoid doing wrong. I’ve seen what not to do and don’t want to forget that.

I rejoice in the fact that my family and friends have been able to notice the change in me and like it. Many say I’m the old “Donnie” they remember. That really felt good to hear that. I know I’m a good person but really lost my way for many years. Thanks goes to all of you for helping me see myself and give me the tools to work and change myself. Thank Geshe Dorje Damdul for his prayer and words, and thank His Holiness for his prayers, and thank all of you for the many thoughts and prayers. Circumstances will decide if I’m able to write again. But if I don’t – please know that you all mean a lot to me and I’m grateful for all of you walking with me on this path. ***I love all of you!!***

With much respect, with my palms together and with metta.
Jangsem (Don Wackerly)
Om Mani Padme Hum

(Don was executed on Oct. 14, 2010, in McAlester, Oklahoma. While strapped to the gurney before the execution, Don smiled at Ven. Jampel, Geshe Dorje, and his family and then focused his mind. As his last statement, he recited *om mani padme hum* and continued doing so until the injection killed him.)