

# Inside Engagements

USING THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF INCARCERATION



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## Introducing the Engaged Buddhist Alliance

A group of individuals committed to helping incarcerated men and women find release from suffering.

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When we go inside, we come back outside with so much gratitude and motivation and insight.

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## Deep Dives

In-depth sharing of the transformative power of mindfulness meditation, and the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. As told by our men and women on the inside.

Prison has always been a breeding ground for violence, and I believe it's due to ignorance and fear. We fear what we don't know or understand and instead of educating ourselves

## INTRODUCING THE ENGAGED BUDDHIST ALLIANCE

We are a group of current and former University students who joined together around the idea that Buddhist informed education can help incarcerated individuals and society break the cycle of incarceration.

Visiting California State Prisons since 2013.

A REGISTERED 501(3)(C) NONPROFIT LOCATED IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

With so much going on in the world today, why would anyone take the time to bring Buddhism to inmates? THIS is why:

*"Yesterday was a life changing experience, I woke up feeling so much lighter. A huge burden that has been weighing me down for the last 20 years or so has laid down for the time being." - Anonymous*

What a statement. MOST of us would be happy to be able to say this after a mediation retreat. Now consider that it comes from a man who is serving a life sentence and participated in a one-day retreat conducted by some of our volunteers at one of our state prisons.

Started by a group of students from the University of the West in Rosemead, California, the Engaged Buddhist Alliance is now led by Dr. Venerable De Hong. Venerable De first became interested in prison dharma work in the spring of 2013 when he heard about it from Dr. Lewis Lancaster, his professor, when De was working on his dissertation for a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies. Dr. Lancaster said he wanted to start teaching Buddhism inside the prisons, which had been his intention for almost ten years. He held two meetings at the school for people who might be interested in joining him. "Out of the 20 people that came to the two meetings, only three people signed up, and I was one of them," De said.

The group now consists of seven volunteers who visit at least eight California state prisons on a monthly basis. Our volunteers are dedicated. They are not paid for their time or travel. Each of them may drive over 200 miles to meditate and share the Dharma.

They do this out of a sense of hope, and a desire to see men and women leave prison and become productive members of society. And out a recognition that:

- ❖ Inmates who meditate regularly, have a 50% lower chance of returning

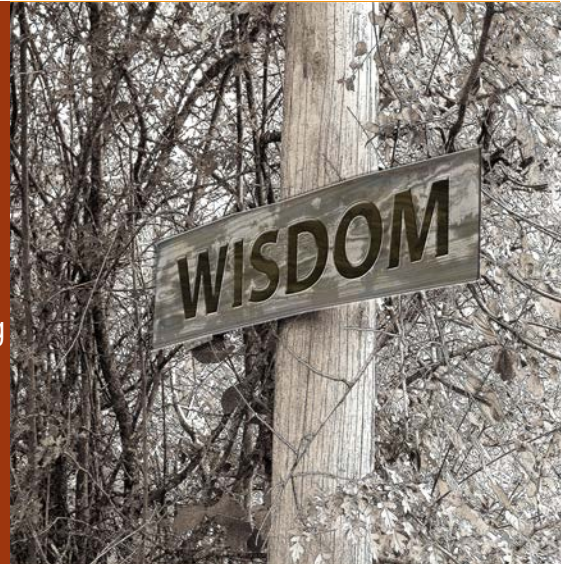
Thousands of prisoners in California want to learn and practice Buddhism but are UNABLE to; we want to change that.

*May all beings be happy, may they be well, may they be released from suffering.*

## Our Sangha Members Say

It's not unusual for us to leave a facility and walk out knowing that we learned so much more than we taught. We wish we could share with you ALL of the lessons we have learned. We cannot do that, but we can give you a sense of the valuable growth and sharing that is happening on the inside.

Below are just some of the quotes from letters written to us. Names are withheld to protect privacy.



### Words of Wisdom

*"So, the next time we're experiencing desire, instead of seeking instant gratification, hit the brakes, take a second and examine where it manifests in the body. Don't attach any feelings or thoughts to it. Be patient with yourself, and watch. Just to see it for what it really is."*

*"My practice gets stronger with every sitting. Stronger with every lap that I walk. This year I let go of a lot of anger, resentment, and attachment to what I thought was 'the way things should be.' The biggest accomplishment I've had this year is in this change of thinking which has finally allowed me to enjoy life just as it is."*

*"I am no longer living in pain seeking any relief, I am living with loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. No stress can hold up long with these. I can endure the emotions and sit meditating on the benefits of sending others metta, karuna, mudita, and upekkha. Most of all I remind myself daily that I can't change the world to stop my stress or give myself happiness. But I can change my attitude towards the world so as to remain unaffected by the stresses exerted by events around me."*

*"Meditation has helped me achieve insight as to why my life has wound up on the path that it is on now - through insight meditation - and I can use the noble eightfold path to live a more peaceful life."*

*"I was already taking self-help classes, but what Buddhism did for me was like looking at everything from above instead of at ground level. In the past, things were vague. I understood, but there was no path like I have now."*

*"I am only just beginning and already realizing the benefits... The calming or peace that comes from releasing attachments... gives us the room and the space we need for awareness."*

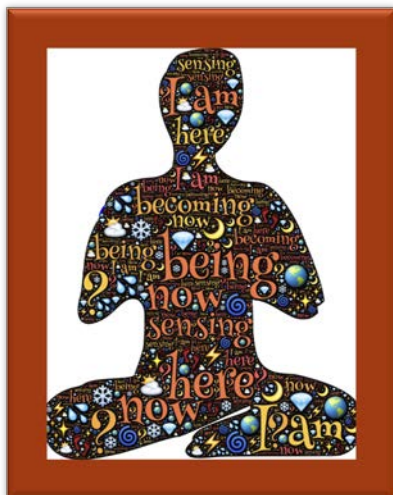
### THE ABILITY TO LIVE IN MY TRUE ESSENCE

What I have learned and gained from Buddhist meditation is a way of life that provides me clarity. Self-awareness, a positive way to perceive and cope, and to be the best version of myself today despite anything in my past, be it yesterday, ten years ago, or even what tomorrow holds. This doesn't mean my life is perfect or that I am perfect. Nor does it mean that I am not accountable for my past or my future. What meditation means is a practice and way of life which extends into my entire life.

Because of meditation I'm aware of what I feel, yet what I feel is no longer my identity. With a meditative breath I can see and identify what I feel. I can understand why and know not to attach to it, and it will indeed pass. This helps me to see others, and their feels and needs - and to then be able to act out compassionately - instead of acting out selfishly and impulsively.

This in turn, is an act of compassion, even for myself, because being able to care for others is honoring my true essence, which is an interconnected, empathetic human being.

Even if at times I make a mistake, my meditation practice offers me self-forgiveness and the ability to live in this moment right now, in my true essence.



*"I have come to understand that attachment to material things and false friendships did not bring me any kind of happiness."*

### FREEDOM FROM GREED, AND COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

Practicing skillful concentration meditation has helped me stay focused and on track to achieving the goals I have set for myself. Some of these goals were to refrain from causing harm to people and all living things, uproot greed and jealousy from my heart and mind, and to control my impulsiveness. These defects of character have plagued me my entire life.

In the past, whenever I saw a person with a certain nice item, I made it my goal to get the very same kind of item. Since I did not practice an honest or skillful livelihood I resorted to illegal and immoral means. Greed has kept me attached to worldly and material things...

I walked around with so much anger, full of hatred and resentment. In other words, I was a miserable person.

My meditation practice has allowed me to have compassion for those who suffer from addiction, especially those who I harmed with my negative actions.