



# INSIDE ENGAGEMENTS

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



## IN THIS ISSUE

### REFLECTIONS

Page 1

You Were Just Kids  
Forgiveness

### DHARMA STUDY

Page 3

Eightfold Path

### MEDITATION & PRACTICE

Page 4

### GRATITUDE

Page 5

Parole Grant

### POEMS

Page 6

Life Lesson

### ARTWORK

Page 7

Buddha's Enlightenment



## INSIDE ENGAGEMENTS

A quarterly publication of  
Engaged Buddhist Alliance

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Venerable De Hong, Co-Founder  
John Brown  
Margaret Meloni, Co-Founder  
Mark Scott  
Bill Taing

### STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

Christopher Johnson  
Rachel Goodrich  
Irving Relova  
Eric Tan

### CONTACT

Engaged Buddhist Alliance  
1409 Walnut Grove Ave.  
Rosemead, CA 91770  
(877) 990-7455

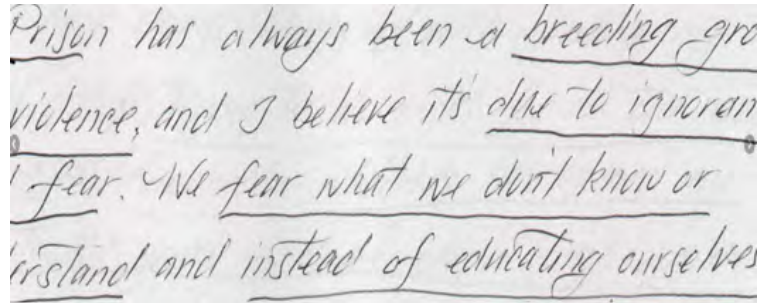
### FRONT COVER IMAGE

Photo by [Joel Holland](#) on [Unsplash](#)

### FRONT & BACK COVER IMAGES

Photo by [Samuel Ferrara](#) on [Unsplash](#)

© 2023 Engaged Buddhist Alliance.  
All rights reserved.



## JOIN US

The Engaged Buddhist Alliance is a 501(c)(3) registered nonprofit. If you would like to join us to help break the cycle of incarceration, please contact us. All donations are tax deductible.

To learn how you can support Engaged Buddhist Alliance, please visit [www.engagedbuddhistalliance.org](http://www.engagedbuddhistalliance.org).

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT!**



*Reflections*  
**YOU WERE JUST KIDS**  
by Irving Relova

I've often heard those words, "you were just kids". Every time I reflect and talk about my past, that thought never occurred to me. At the time and after I committed my crime, I never saw or felt myself as a kid. As the years in prison turned into decades it never once crossed my mind that I was an 18-year-old kid when I committed my crime. Over the years as I moved on and grew as a man, understanding and accepting the reality of my life in prison, I began to hold myself accountable and responsible for all the decisions I made leading me to where I was. Making peace with the reality that I would die in prison, I found peace in accepting the reality of that truth. With that, I was able to find ways to live my life meaningfully.

I started my daily meditation practice, and I was able to process and make sense of the traumas I experienced before, during and after decades in prison. Studying the Dharma gave me a clearer path in my life. I was a member of a youth diversion program that mentored at-risk youth that visited prisons. Sharing my life story in the hope that others may learn from my experience. I learned to be a tailor, designing, manufacturing dog leashes, harness, dog beds and blankets. I became a dog trainer for rescue dogs. Also, as an LWOP, positive programs are very limited but the ones I was able to sign up for, I took advantage of all of them and fully immersed myself. Expecting that I was going to die in prison; I came to a point and realize, it's not about the quantity of life but the quality of how I would live my life.

Recently, someone related to my remaining co-defendant an LWOP, tried to reach out to me. They wanted to know exactly how I received a commutation and granted parole. In their own words "a blueprint" on how I made it out. They even went as far as to try to give me the guilt trip. And honestly, I was irritated by that ploy! From the time we were arrested 29 years ago until to this very moment I could easily put the blame on others on how or why we got locked up. But even back then in March of 1994, on the day we were arrested, as a 19-year-old kid, I knew I was and still am responsible for all the decisions I make in my life.

A part of me wants nothing to do with my co-defendant. To say the least, to this day he still has not grown up and taken responsibility for his life. But a big part of me feels responsible for taking him away from his family, a son from his mother, a father from his child. For the sake of his mother, I would like to see him be with his family. I can only do so much. He has to do the work.

Looking back, wherever life takes us; our childhood, our past, will always be a part of who we are. At some point in our lives, we all must decide, to move on, to grow, and take responsibility for our own lives. At some point in our lives, when we look back, we can see we were just kids.





*Reflections*  
**FORGIVENESS**  
by Michael A.

Recently I was asked what was my greatest accomplishment of the year that passed. Bear in mind this was after one of my meditation sessions with my Sangha at the prison. The emotion and feeling came to me about forgiveness. This forgiveness I felt was for myself. I had so much to label as an accomplishment, but this feeling of forgiveness for myself was the greatest.

This was my greatest accomplishment because I have been so hard on myself for years, I never knew how to forgive myself, never knew if I ever would be able to do so. How did I do it, I cannot even explain that to you. All I know is that by living with compassion for others, having empathy, not making decisions or activities that would benefit me for my personal gain and living a proper life has helped. This is why I believe I was able to forgive myself. It was not like... OK I forgive myself; it was more of a realization. As I focused on the trauma I caused that dread, pain, shame, and guilt were not there as before. I still regret and hate what I did, but I no longer punish myself for it. A weight was lifted off my shoulders. Even as I write this, I am finally free from the hardest shackle that I had to break. This freeing feeling has empowered me to be more open and decisive in my decisions.

My continued search of redemption led me to this breakthrough in my life. With the support of my Sangha and the guidance of Venerable De Hong, living a wholesome life was the only way to forgive myself. There is no question, doubt, or trauma that I am creating to hinder me from forgiving myself. By following my heart and seeing everyone and everything without judgment I freed myself and I am no longer bound to the suffering I created.



*Dharma Study*  
**THE EIGHTFOLD PATH**  
by Amritraj

The assignment I would like to elaborate on is The Eightfold Path. The most beneficial knowledge that I gained while completing this assignment was regarding the right resolve in right view aspects of The Eightfold Path. Right resolve is the realizations that you must reflect on the fact that your quest for happiness is going to have to depend on your actions and you don't want to harm anybody else during the quest.

By examining my past thought process and patterns of behavior I can see that they clearly did not fit with the concept of right resolve. My quest for happiness was often based on the actions of others or their approval of me. My intentions and motives behind everything I did were very distorted. In my quest for happiness, I harmed people significantly without any regard for the pain I was causing them.

Right view is about seeing things in terms of The Four Noble Truths: stress, it's cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. There is the truth of suffering or stress, then the acknowledgement that suffering is always accompanied by craving. This is a very significant concept to be aware of, I recognize this in my life significantly.

By examining my past thought process and patterns of behavior I can see that they did not fit with the concept of right view. I never realized my suffering was accompanied by craving, I was constantly chasing after my craving for the feelings I get when I was high, and I also was craving acceptance and validation from people around me. I believe if I could have understood that the same feeling that was making me feel pleasure was going to be the same one that was going to cause me heartache and pain, I would have made a different decision and choices. By living with the right view, I would not have been backstabbed by so many "friends". I would have valued my loved ones, the people who truly cared for me.

I really enjoyed this course; it was very beneficial for me. If I could change anything about this course, I wouldn't it was very effective and helpful. I am thankful for all that I gained by completing the assignments and I believe I learned a lot about myself along the way.



## MEDITATION & PRACTICE

I really enjoyed reading the book, “Mindfulness in Plain English.” It was not too long, and it was to the point. Also, it simplified what I would image is a complex and complicated subject.

Breaking down the ideas into simple examples and everyday language helped me related to the material. Further, the simple metaphors help me to understand the ideas of mindfulness practice.

The assignments were useful for me. I liked the first one because it allowed me to develop the meditation practice my own. since I designed it my own, the personalization helped me to do it when I don't want to. It's mine to do, not someone else. I understand my situation with being incarcerated but I would have really liked to have been in the actual class so that I could ask questions. ~Edward



Having practice the brahmaviharas (loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity) for the past five months, my mind is in a better place. It has made me feel more connected toward myself and others as opposed to just driving by in life and thoughts.

I realize that I can hold each moment of awareness that passes through loving-kindness, just by accepting things as they are and utilizing a beginner's mind, I amaze myself of life and the moments that make them. I notice that I am a part of these moments making up the whole experience and interacting with the environment around me, a part of this bigger picture of this universe.

This insight lends itself toward compassion for not only myself but those around me. We all have something in common: experiences of happiness and suffering woven together. Further, I can be happy for others without feeling jealous or hate through appreciative joy and feel joyful at the same time.

Lastly, I understand that there are times that I cannot make any difference but only accept the things as they are. I let go of my desire or expectation to change things which I cannot. This is equanimity. I notice the chain of events that one quality leads to another. They all lend themselves to one another in a balanced manner giving rise to a sense of peace and happiness that makes me feel a part of life in its entirety. ~Ullis



I want you to know that meditation practice of mindfulness has been the most impactful for me out of all my classes. because it helped open me up to deal with my past traumas and help heal me in a way that I never knew possible. It has given me my life back.

I have had many new changes in my life and because of the practice in mindfulness, I am better equipped to deal with it all. I need to put my walls down and open up my heart and be vulnerable. ~Frank



*Gratitude*  
**PAROLE**  
by Marco

My name is Marco, incarcerated since Feb. 2002. I am grateful and humbled to say that I was found suitable in Feb. 2023, and I attribute my ability to calmly hold the conversation of who I am, today, to my daily meditation.

I have been attending the mindfulness meditation, instructed by EBA's volunteer, since Oct. 2021. Meditation is one of the tools I use on a daily basis. It helps me buffer irritations, frustrations, and agitations thus I am slow to anger.

On the day of my hearing, I meditated for an hour and 40 minutes. At 11:30am, I was called out of my cell to go to the online hearing.

As I entered the room and saw the two commissioners, the district attorney, and my attorney on the screen. I sat on the chair and placed my hands (the way I sit when I meditate). I am humbled to say I was very mindful about the questions that were asked, I was in the present moment and able to stay in the conversation without letting my mind wander. I was confident enough to ask to rephrase the question(s) I did not understand.

I did not feel nervous nor frustrated because I did not know how to answer the questions. In fact, I felt calm, at ease, and peaceful. This allowed me to be transparent with the commissioners, which demonstrated the work I have done in my self-help groups (the work on myself); demonstrated the change my support letters attested.

I was able to think clearly and open my heart to the commissioners on how remorseful I am to have been the person I was, a person with so many emotional problems that I had been dealing with since childhood, resorting to drugs, alcohol, and gangs to deal with my childhood trauma.

After three hours and 15 minutes, the hearing was over. I was informed that I was found suitable. Finally, I am grateful to my meditation practice for the ability to hold my composure and be mindful in my present dealings with people. Meditation helps me to maintain my recovery. Thank you!



*Poetry*  
**LIFE LESSONS**  
by Carlos

I learned that tears won't stop a single drop of rain from falling.  
Just as reliving your yesterdays won't stop tomorrow from calling.  
For things will come to pass no matter what we might do.  
Just like lies will show with time.  
So that truth can shine through.  
So don't get stuck in the clouds or try to hide in some yesterday.  
Simply accept each moment and try to find the best way.  
To dance in the rain.  
So that it may wash away all your pain, and the greatest path, to  
greet the next tomorrow once again.  
As you will find that a smile, is easier to carry than a frown, and  
tomorrow is much easier to live once it comes around.





# INSIDE ENGAGEMENTS

Visiting California State Prisons since 2013.



"Buddha's Enlightenment"  
by  
Vu Bui

## WHAT WE DO

The Engaged Buddhist Alliance (EBA) provides college-level classes on Buddhism to incarcerated individuals in eight southern California state prisons. We employ a contemplative pedagogy that includes critical as well as experiential learning. The EBA serves as a hub to coordinate the efforts of member organizations working in California prisons and jails. We are working towards college accreditation for the classes we offer and are exploring with our member organizations how to offer reentry services. We do offer occasional reentry guidance to some of our students.



Engaged Buddhist Alliance  
1409 Walnut Grove Ave.  
Rosemead, CA 91770  
(877) 990-7455

For more information about Engaged Buddhist Alliance, access resources, and view past newsletters, please visit [www.engagedbuddhistalliance.org](http://www.engagedbuddhistalliance.org).