



INSIDE ENGAGEMENTS

Using the Buddha's Teachings to
Break the Cycle of Incarceration



IN THIS ISSUE

REFLECTIONS

Page 1

Qigong & Tai Chi

Yoga Demands From Mom

Keys & Metal Doors

DHARMA STUDY

Page 4

Aaron

INSIGHTS

Page 5

Citta

Ajita

POEMS

Page 6

Shattered

Longest Hour

ARTWORK

Page 7

Medicine Buddha



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

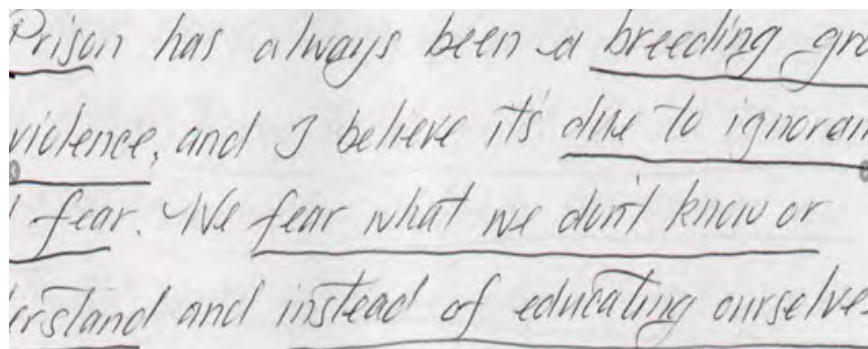
Christopher Johnson
Rachel Goodrich
Irving Relova
Eric Tan

CONTACT

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

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Tea + Joy Studio
www.teaplusjoy.net



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.

Thank you for your continued support!



Reflections
QIGONG & TAI CHI
 by Mark Scott

I want to introduce you to these two wonderful body and mind exercises. I hope you will consider adding one or both to your weekly or daily regimen when you are ready.

Qigong is a mind-body exercise form that uses meditation, breathing, and movement to increase energy and enable the body to heal itself. The exercise and healing techniques used were developed in ancient China and Tibet. It is practiced for a variety of reasons and has countless health-related benefits.

The art of Qigong (chi gung or chi kung) originated over 5,000 years ago and is based on the principles used in acupuncture and traditional Chinese Daoist medicine. It is a form of light exercise that involves repeated movements, practiced breathwork, stretching, and increasing fluid movement within the body. By doing this, qigong restores the flow of energy in the body and helps us become aware of the flow of our own life force energy, or chi.

The power of qigong has been demonstrated in China over thousands of years and has been seen by its tremendous health benefits for millions of people across the globe. Developing the life force energy, or chi is the main focus of Daoism. For most, the main benefits of qigong come from the relief or prevention it provides for a multitude of chronic health issues and concerns like diabetes, poor circulation, back pain, and even cancer.

Tai chi is an ancient Chinese tradition that, today, is practiced as a graceful form of exercise. It involves a series of movements performed in a slow, focused manner and accompanied by deep breathing. Tai chi, also called tai chi chuan, is a noncompetitive, self-paced system of gentle physical exercise and stretching.

Tai Chi is one of the best-known martial arts of the Internal systems from ancient China. Based on Qigong and martial art techniques from thousands of years ago, Chen Wangting developed the Chen Style Tai Chi around 1670. There are five main family styles of tai chi chuan: Chen, Yang, Wu, Sun, and Hao. All five styles have the same origin and share many similarities. Tai chi chuan has been called the grand ultimate fist and shadow boxing. As a martial art, it has been mainly used for defense. Today, in the West, it is best known for its numerous health benefits which include improved balance, decrease in chronic pain, anxiety & depression, improved mental health & better cognitive functioning.

Tai Chi and Qigong have been described as meditation in motion. In most Tai Chi classes, a Qigong is practiced at the beginning of the class to warm-up and at the end of the class to wind down. Traditionally in early Chinese martial arts training, Qigongs were required before the person was allowed to learn a particular martial art. The Qigong was designed to teach the person patience, correct breathing, and internal strength.

I have been practicing for 25 years and have Learned 21+ forms. I practice and learn at home and at the studio where I teach. Some of the forms are called the 8 Treasures and 8 Brocades (Qigongs), the Yang Family Short Form and Long Form, DaLu, Dui Lien, Lui He Ba Fa, Broad Sword, Narrow Blade, Fan, 3 forms of Push Hands, and 4 & 8 Gates. I have found the practice enjoyable and a good addition to my meditation practice. I have seen over the years and experienced myself, that some of us need a physical exercise to help our bodies and mind with flexibility and fluidity.

I take a weekly online Qigong class with Roshi Teja Bell. His website is called Qigong Dharma. He describes it as the confluence of the streams of qigong and meditation – embodiment and insight. It is a pathway to radiant well-being and lends access to direct knowledge of who we are in the universal sense. Practicing Qigong Dharma empowers meditators with calm, clear energy, strength, and vibrant health – bringing peace to the body, heart, and spirit.

There are thousands of Qigongs. Many can be accessed via YouTube. There are also numerous Tai Chi forms also accessed via YouTube. My Sensei at the Dojo where I was first introduced to both used to say: “Tai Chi Forms are endless; we vow to learn them all.” This saying kept us in an attitude of patience and openness because we knew that once we learned one form, there was another to which he was going to introduce us. For us as practitioners, it kept our mind and bodies active and awake.



Reflections

YOGA DEMANDS FROM MOM

by Tien Nguyen

How do I start to explain the journey of yoga for my mother and how she NOW demands it. At unpredictable hours of the day and with a commanding voice of conviction. Then there are her minions who simply froth at the mouth waiting for me to show up. My mother roars loud and it can be felt vibrating through most people, yet her body is fragile. I have come to realize her voice is the strength she musters facing a culture that she is mostly unfamiliar with due to being an immigrant. Barely speaking the language, she has navigated her way through the American life with struggles and success. This is the person I hear when she makes such demands of me. A woman of strength and fortitude. Unwilling to succumb to the fears that dwell inside of her nor does she acknowledge such fears exist.

My mother's desire for yoga started while I was still incarcerated. Over the phone I would share with her my experience of yoga, and she would say, "Someday you will show me because I have all these pains." "Be a good person and help those around you with what you have learned and help me" Those were gentle words coming from my mother over the phone. When I had a family visit my mother simply demanded that I do yoga with her. And I was more than thrilled to guide her. What I struggled with was finding words in the native tongue of Vietnamese to offer her cues and direction. Fortunately, I had predicted this scenario would occur and brought with me a sheet of paper with English to Vietnamese translations for certain words that would help with explanation. After a 5-minute opening pranayama practice and a 45-minute asana practice my mother laid in savasana not wanting to get up. I could vividly see the tension and pains of having her son in prison dissipate from her body. It was a joyous sight for me and to hear afterwards how much she enjoyed it was the cherry on top for me.

Now that I am reunited with my mother again, she does not hesitate to demand yoga from me. With that same voice that once made me cower in fear and would strike insecurity in me. Yet today I choose to hear the love and desire to spend time with me is really all she wants. So, I joke with her and say, "You just want to spend time with me, don't you?" Silence over the phone. She tells me, "Come right now." I respond, "Mom, it's 11:00pm and I am tired." With a quick response she makes sure I know and says, "I have my students all here and they are all waiting for you." I am flabbergasted by this. 11:00 pm at night and they all want to do yoga. I tell myself, "I get to do this today, I get to be present for my mother today, physically at least where in the last 10 years I was only a distant voice." With gratitude burning brightly inside of me I discover newfound energy and take the 15-minute drive over to my mother's place.

When I arrive, I see people leaving. I waited at the gate and her student ran out and told me your mother is busy. I smiled and told her student to let my mother know that I am going home to sleep because I am feeling tired, and that for my mother to call me tomorrow and I will be there for her if she still wants to do yoga. I thought I would be upset. Instead, I was joyful. My physical freedom has created this opportunity for me to have this very experience. An experience that many that I have left behind would love to have a chance at.

It has been a month since I have paroled and my mother still demands yoga, on her time of course. And I am grateful to be able to hear her demands at any time of the day and that she can choose to pick up her phone and call me.



Reflections
KEYS & METAL DOORS
 by Irv Relova

Since the development and launching of the T.I.M.E. mentoring program I have had the opportunity to speak to two different after school programs for at-risk youth. Most recently I also had the opportunity to visit and speak to someone in the Orange County Jail who was incarcerated as a juvenile lifer 14 years ago. Also, with two others T.I.M.E. mentors who were former juvenile lifers, we were invited to the Orange County juvenile hall facility to speak to a group of juveniles who are in the CELL DOGS dog training program. I have to say, going back in inside a lockup facility, it was a surreal and moving experience.

When I first visited the former juvenile lifer in the county jail, I felt somewhat apprehensive. Even though I had a court order from a Superior Court judge clearing me to visit someone in the county jail and discharging parole and knowing that my name will not come up in the system, there was still a part of me that was skeptical. Every time I go through the metal detector and a deputy goes over my pockets with a handheld metal detector/wand, I keep expecting them to strip me out. Also, every time they check my driver's license, I'm waiting for the deputy to tell me I am denied because I was on parole.

Walking down the hallways to the visiting room felt strange, I felt my body tensing up and I had to take deep breaths to remind myself that I'm not locked up anymore. Even though I was aware that I was just visiting a lock up facility, physically my body was accustomed to being in handcuffs and sometimes in leg-irons and escorted by custody officers. In an instant; the sight and sounds of keys and metal doors, vividly brought me back to doing LWOP in prison.

Talking to someone behind those glass and looking at that person in the eyes, in that moment I realized he looked the way I felt almost 30 years ago when I was fighting my case. His eyes looked exhausted. Exhausted from the years of pain, suffering, and grief. But most of all, the exhaustion from the despair of hopelessness. Once again, I had to take some deep breaths to remind myself in that moment that I'm not locked up anymore and I was there to help someone who was going through what I went through all those years ago.

A few weeks later, along with myself and two other mentors, we were invited to speak at the OC juvenile hall facility. That was

another whole new experience! Before they let us in, we had to wait for about 30 minutes at the front gate of the visiting room which had a chain and a padlock. As we went inside the visiting room the metal door slammed closed behind us. Hearing that metal door slammed, I instantly remembered the strip search before going inside the visiting room in prison. As we walked inside the visiting room, I instantly assessed how many juveniles were there and how many staff. As we sat around in a circle, out of habit or instinct I made sure I could see where all the doors and exits were and where all the staff were sitting. There was a part of me that felt like I was locked up again because everyone was watching us. As we were speaking to the juveniles there was a constant movement of staff in the out of the visiting room. Every time I would hear the fast movement sounds of keys and the metal doors slamming, I was expecting the IGI/Security Squad to come rushing in the visiting room.

Looking at the faces of all those juveniles, I could sense the all too familiar look on their faces. The impetuous look of youthful rebellion and defiance. But at the same time, I could also see and sense the look of uncertainty, anticipation, and hope. We were asked several questions but the one question that stands out the most was, what helped me get through all those years in prison.

I shared with them that through meditation I was able to makes sense and process all the trauma I experienced before, during, and after prison. I was able to take a step back and look at myself and put everything in my life into perspective. To give myself some space to find peace within myself.

The 21st of June marks the 4th-year anniversary since I made it out of prison. As a friend of mine once said, "the shock of it never goes away". I know it's only been four years since I made it out of prison, but there is a part of me that it feels like it was another lifetime ago. Mentally, emotionally, and physically I am very aware that I am not in prison anymore but each day there are subtle things that would come up and remind me where I spent most of my whole life. I know I am not locked up anymore, it stays with you, and it is a part of you.

As the Buddha once said, "having awareness is a step into enlightenment."



DHARMA STUDY

by Aaron

There are a few Buddhist teachings which have helped me to deal with trauma and stress. One teaching which stands out is the law of causation, which teaches that all things are impermanent. Since all things are impermanent, this includes my trauma, pain, and suffering.

Many of us tend to believe that there's no end to our collective sufferings. This is especially true when we are in our teenage years. Other Buddhist teachings which go hand in hand with the law of causation include the four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Four Sublime Attitudes, and the Three Marks of Existence.

The teachings have helped me to understand that people who suffer cause others to suffer. Only when one has learned that there's an ending to suffering, and a method to the ending of such suffering, can one help others with the letting go of their suffering. These teachings have helped me to gain insight as to why some family members and friends have intentionally, or unintentionally caused me mental trauma, pain, and suffering. This insight is very important to attain true forgiveness and healing.

Meditation and mindfulness practices have been and continued to be most useful tools in my dealings with trauma, stress, in understanding that our feelings, thoughts and beliefs are constantly changing.

Clinging on to memories, negative memories, and experiences have brought about anxiety, depression, hatred, and anger in my

life. Ignorance and lack of insight as to why in the past I was treated unlovingly and why I treated others and unlovingly and uncompassionately also contributed to my negative choices in life which had an adverse effect on myself and others.

Through meditation, I have learned to calm my mind and recognize that my mind can become extremely agitated which leads to unhealthy choices and behaviors. When I calm my mind, I feel at peace, and I reduce my level of stress.

When I practice mindfulness, I become aware of my state of mind be it at peace, calm, agitated, angered, stress, said or happy. I make better and healthier choices in my life which are conducive to peaceful living, when I am mindful. When I am not mindful, I react impulsively and negatively.

It is through deep insight and understanding that we eliminate or reduce our suffering and bring about compassion and true love towards all sentient beings. Through meditation, mindfulness practice and understanding that nothing is permanent, one can begin the journey towards recognizing the causes of our trauma which results in healing and reconciliation with those who have caused us harm and with those whom we have caused harm.

Ignorance and mindlessness is at the root of all traumas, harm and suffering caused and experience by all. May all beings find comfort and inner peace.



INSIGHTS

I have just completed “Thinking 4 a Change.” I can’t help but see the similarities between the curriculum of the new class and my practice. Thought replacement is a version of the Right Effort and Vitaka Sadhana. The emotional regulation is Mindfulness of the body, and the check-ins are Mindfulness of feelings and mind. Every class we start by examining how we feel and the reason why. Then close your eyes and belly breathing while consciously relaxing the tension starting from our toes all the way to the top of our head. A practice I first learned Venerable De’s mindfulness class back in 2017. ~ Citta



One of the ways my practice helps is by providing a constant for me while I deal with the uncertainty and sometimes chaos of life in prison. Mindfulness is like a place or a friend I can always turn to especially during times of doubt or confusion.

It is a refuge which is always available regardless of what is happening. When I am afraid, or pessimistic during moments of uncertainty, mindfulness helps me be present and open to what I am feeling. It invites me to listen and trust the process. Meditation is what prepares me and strengthens my capacity to move through the challenging moments. It is where I build the courage to trust in my ability to navigate my uncertain and chaotic environment.

Without my refuge I would be lost to the sensations cause by the seemingly random and sometimes arbitrary conditions of life in prison. I would be trapped in focusing on the causes of what is happening and what I’m feeling living in the delusion that causes and conditions are the source of my happiness. Without mindfulness and meditation, I would be pull in by uncertainty and chaos. But thanks to my practice I can let go before I am drawn back into the delusion. ~ Ajita

*Poetry***SHATTERED**

by Carlos

I slept atop a lost cloud last night, so far away from here,
but awoke shattered atop concrete, when morning appeared.
Wrapped in the fingers, of one more prison day again.
Not wanting to be here, wishing I were other places I had been,
as sharp as broken glass, but only ever regretting myself,
not wanting to be so all alone, or even with anyone else,
wasting my nights, wasting my days, wasting my life away.
As eyes of the watchtower, keep vigil over this soulless place;
while I search for another cloud, to take me away from here,
knowing I will only shatter atop the concrete, until I disappear.

LONGEST HOUR

by Carlos

Somewhere in the House of criminals'
Time shuffles itself along at its own pace to the tone of its own song.
Over tiers, across the yard, beneath lone gun tower,
its shadow growing ever longer in the eternal hour.



Art



“Medicine Buddha”
by José

INSIDE ENGAGEMENTS

Visiting California State Prisons since 2013.

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.