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Engaged Buddhist Alliance



Visiting California State Prisons since 2013.



Inside Engagements

A quarterly publication of the Engaged Buddhist Alliance.

In recent months, Venerable De has continued to hold meditation sessions at the California Institute for Women, LA County State Prison, and Ironwood State Prison. In fact, in this summer, he facilitated a Buddha's birthday retreat with three of the groups at Ironwood. Additionally, a group from Hungary has reached out to Venerable De to learn more about his work.

The Lasting Impact of Daylong Meditation Retreats

A daylong meditation retreat offers something that brief daily practice sessions rarely can: the opportunity to settle deeply into stillness. When we dedicate an entire day to mindfulness practice, the mind gradually quiets, allowing us to move past surface-level distractions and into more profound states of awareness. Practitioners consistently report deeper meditation sessions, greater emotional clarity, and an enhanced sense of resilience and inner peace. Remarkably, these benefits don't end when the retreat does - the sense of well-being cultivated during a day of sustained practice can carry forward for days afterward, strengthening one's ongoing meditation practice and ability to navigate life's challenges with equanimity.

For incarcerated men and women, these retreats carry even greater significance. On the outside, those seeking deeper practice have abundant options - retreat centers, meditation communities, and programs available throughout the year. Inside prison walls, such opportunities are rare or nonexistent. When a daylong retreat is offered to incarcerated individuals, it becomes more than a chance to deepen practice; it can be a genuinely life-changing experience. In an environment marked by noise, tension, and constant vigilance, a full day devoted to silence, reflection, and inner work offers a profound respite - and the tools of resilience and peace gained there are precisely what can sustain someone through the daily realities of incarceration and support their transformation long after the retreat ends.

Included below are letters from men who have participated in daylong retreats with Venerable De. One letter captures the experience of a first-time attendee. The second letter is from a man who has been consistently practicing meditation and attending sessions led by Venerable De.

My First Daylong
by Miles

On our first daylong meditation, I had the experience of filling my body with light, wellness, safety, and a harbor of stillness. By breathing in pure light to fill my inner body, then breathing out all darkness as black smoke. Filling all areas with the guidance from our teacher, Ven. De.

I was able to quiet enough, and for the first time, to completely expel all darkness from my center and all corners of my extremities—I was astonished. I became transparent—the light shone through me. I left feeling calm and confident with no stress.

I left knowing that I could always make it back to the center—silent peace.

P/S: We just received news that Miles went home and united with his family!

Going to CSU, Sacramento

Juan

Dear De,

I hope you are doing well and continuing to bring the practice of mindfulness and meditation to all the brothers and sisters who need it, both in here and out there.

I am still practicing mindfulness and meditation. I actually have a pretty good morning routine where I get up early and have plenty of time to meditate. I get a solid 15-20 minutes in every morning. Then I listen to this motivational podcast we have on the new tablet and wait for chow (breakfast). After breakfast, I work until 2:30 pm and then go to school from 3pm-6 pm, so yeah, my days are packed.

I am sending you a copy of my university acceptance letter from Cal State University, Sacramento. I am pretty proud of this. I can't believe I am actually doing it. I used to be a mess, and now look at me 😊.

I am working on my bachelor's, and I am coming up on five years sober on Oct. 22nd.

I am grateful to be invited to the Buddhist service where you have taught me the importance of mindfulness and meditation. Your guidance and presence in these prisons is unquestionably impactful. Thank you for being you!



Thank you for your donation.

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.



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