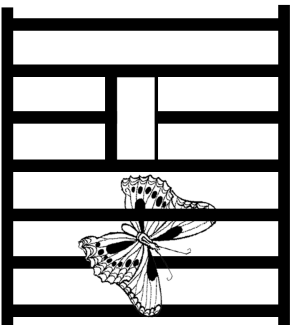


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The Power of Meditation FINDING THE FREEDOM WITHIN

In prison the body is confined. The spirit and soul need not be. Thousands of inmates around the country are using their confinement to trigger an inward journey. They are traveling to a place of greater joy, peace, and freedom. You are invited to join in.

In 2002, hundreds of folks who actively support contemplative work in jails and prisons came together to share our stories at a conference on "Imprisonment and Transformation." We wanted to find ways to better serve prisoners, their families, victims of crime, and prison staff. We believe that incarceration can be more than just serving time, wasting time, killing time. It can be a precious time for inner change.

Incarcerated men and women joined in by sending letters about their contemplative practices. They describe the freeing effects it has had on their lives. Their stories are as diverse as their spiritual orientations: Buddhist, Christian, Native American, Muslim, Jewish, and atheist. What they all have in common is the dedication to an inward journey. They are seeking to be at peace with themselves and the world around them.

The techniques they have used are simple, and usually involve sitting in silence. Focusing. Relaxing. Listening. Breathing with attention. Resting in prayer. Creating a time and space not to *do* anything, but to *be*. Such simple practices have helped those inside and outside of prison to find the freedom within. They describe letting go of what seemed the "big problems in life," and the anger and self-hate that can tear us apart. They feel in touch with the ultimate Power, however one defines it, that gifts us with life, love and joy.

We hope this will encourage you to experiment personally with sitting in silence. Change begins with you, one moment, one breath at a time. Change always happens in the now, not the past or future.

You might also be able to find or start a contemplative group in your institution. This is an inward journey but it sure helps to have companions.

To assist, we have included some inmate letters and an extensive resource list for those seeking information, help, and support in developing a meditative practice. Don't hesitate to contact one or more of these groups.

Remember, as you embark on your journey that love and energy surrounds you!



Empty spaces often allow for what is of great value to surface:

Perhaps you'd like to use this space to promote the Contemplative programs at your institution; add your personal testimony, experiences and encouragement before sharing with a friend; mail to someone who might be deeply touched by these messages of profound simplicity and great power; sketch a vision; or...

TESTIMONIES TO SILENCE

...If we wish to hear the truth of the Universe, whether or not we call it the voice of God, we must sit down and shut up to listen.

Carl, San Quentin, CA

I decided to go ahead and try the meditation class. I sat down and looked at all the different kinds of people in the room. I realized, for some reason, that we were all the same. Just human beings hoping to find a way to be at peace with the world, and all the people in it... I started to use the tools of meditations in everyday life in here. I noticed a change in my life. I began to look at things in a different lifestyle. It's hard to believe I can sit in a prison cell, on my floor, and go to a place, in the middle of all this madness, and find freedom inside myself. I can stay calm at times when everyone around me is in constant turmoil. The most difficult part of learning to meditate, and searching within, is finding out that most of my fear comes from my own insecurities, and ignorance. So much so, that when I first started to become aware of my Divine Light, I almost quit. I was given the gift of the truth about myself, and with the truth I had to take ownership for all that has gone wrong in my life. It is hard not to blame others and circumstances for my shortcomings. It would have been much easier to just quit, than to forge on to uncover even more about myself. For some reason I stuck with it, and found an even deeper truth, and that is, God does not judge, the Spirit only loves. While I am far from enlightened, I know that if I truly want a better life, I have to take the time to meditate and listen to the words of understanding and love.

*Danny, California Men's Colony,
San Luis Obispo, CA*

Hope is the anchor of my life! I have been in prison for 17 years. During this time, God has accomplished in me what I was unable to do, he restored me to life. Through prayer and meditation over the years, I formed a special relationship with God. ...Centering prayer has increased my faith in God. There is a purpose and meaning in my life. I have the strength to face all situations by the power that Christ gives me. My life today is enriched by the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Robert, San Quentin, CA

My way of life, Islam, teaches me to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave even if it takes me to China. Recently I was given the opportunity to participate in a twelve week workshop in "Living the Eternal Way." On the path of self-realization, I have come to accept that life on Earth comes down to the interaction between people, and we need the guidance of those of you who have matured on the path. It is due to your willingness to step outside societal prejudices and unite the seekers of this world—inside and out—that has allowed me to validate the humanity in myself and the men of other walks of life within prison.

*Edward, California Men's Colony,
San Luis Obispo, CA*

As a Muslim, I have been fortunate enough to be guided and have a sense of spiritual direction that I lacked before being incarcerated... In my situation, the feeling of belonging to humanity is often forgotten and diminished. This class has also reminded me of the transforming power that unchanging Truth has to offer anyone who is willing to look within themselves and others for the good nature that we all share....

*Rossie, California Men's Colony,
San Luis Obispo*

It is early morning, following my prayers and some very quiet, still meditation. There was a time in my life when "quiet" made me feel so uncomfortable because I could not stop the craziness in my head. So I simply refused to be "still." I had to keep doing "something" because I was not at peace with me. Finally, today, this morning, I understand the passage: "Be still and know that I am God." Yes, God truly is a part of all and all is a part of God.

Anonymous

I grew up in violence, the cause of my fear. The Tai Chi has helped me remove the fear and replace it with strength and balance. Now what is deepest in my core is love.

Anonymous, Old Folsom Prison, CA

Freedom is a journey... a spiritual journey of healing the wounds of the past, removing restricted beliefs and moving forward selflessly toward God. Sometimes we need guidance of a sponsor, or a good shepherd. Recovery is possible and we can find freedom. We shall do the day's work and be mindful of who we are as imperfect humans, correcting our faults, restoring peace with others, and praying openly with gratitude to God as the sun sets.

Anonymous

This past week for me was a lonely serious place to be. I had to turn my focus toward the spiritual side. I need to talk very privately with God about everything. Now, in the quietness within me, not anyone around me truly knows what or how I feel. I am seeking a balance. I wish it were possible to sit and talk with you, and then you'd understand. I'm truly in tune with all going on.

Anonymous

We are a group of inmates searching for the Divine presence within ourselves through Centering Prayer... we are ourselves, at first sight, not an inspiring conclave. We are a collection of dope dealers, bank robbers, tax evaders, murderers, and even one nefarious traitor-sinners all. Yet, we gather every Wednesday and Friday in the Chapel here at Sheridan Federal Correctional Institution, to reach out to the Divine reality through interior silence.

Centering Prayer Group, Sheridan, OR

One can through meditation achieve that bond between one's self and others, necessary for seeing oneself as part of the community outside the prison walls.

Robert, Vacaville State Prison, CA

This has helped me immensely to emerge from the prison of the mind that was my life even before entering this prison of the world...

Marty, Sheridan, OR

I wasn't born consciously until I made the choice to find silence... In drinking silence, I discovered God's buffer zone around me, relieving the pressure of the world...

Ron, Old Folsom Prison, CA

I'd tried several of the chapel and 12-step groups over the years on different prison yards: none of them seemed to touch my heart or hold my interest. One Friday night I followed a large and diverse group of prisoners into the chapel. Out in the yard, this group would be segregated by racial boundaries. But here they were greeting each other, talking to each other, as if no barriers existed. This is not what I'd learned to expect in prison... As it turned out this group had been meeting in chapel for a long time, sitting in a large circle for silent meditation together... They stressed that the group, though diverse in their beliefs, was willing to share silent meditation together...

Greg, Old Folsom Prison, CA

So how does one deal with such sufferings and pain? ...I discovered meditation in my eighth year. I read about Zen... The stressful life of prison is still here but I've changed. My understanding has grown, my ability to deal calmly with one and all flourished. I found that there was no end to suffering and pain unless you spot in time the refuge within yourself.

George, Attica, NY

I am currently a member of the Contemplative Community of Folsom Prison. When I came here I found myself alone, without all people and things that I used to define who and what I was in the world. I'm starting from scratch to rebuild who I am. I want to discover my real, eternal, and true self. I found in these groups, the resources and the community to explore, test, and expand my spiritual rebuilding. Because of the work of the men here and your support, and island of peace has been created in a stressful and dehumanizing environment.

Rick, Old Folsom Prison, CA

To obtain more copies of this brochure to distribute please:

- 1) Feel free to copy this brochure; or
- 2) If you can access the Internet, go to www.loyola.edu/BridgeProject to print out a copy of the brochure (available in several sizes & formats); or
- 3) Contact the organization from which you received this brochure; or
- 4) Only if none of the above are possible, request copies sent from:

The Bridge Project
Center for Community Service & Justice
Loyola College in Maryland
4501 North Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21210



I have been a very active part of the Contemplative Fellowship since we were blessed with our first sponsor and meeting. Through the good and bad times... the group here is strong and growing and I feel providing tremendous benefits in the lives of those involved. The changes that occur are remarkable and most of all I seldom see those who were active and get out of prison return... I feel it has also helped to change the atmosphere of this prison too. I can't remember the last time we had a death due to violence in this facility and that was a common occurrence prior to all these programs... Any man regardless of his race, belief or affiliation is welcome to come and share with us. They do not receive pressure from their peers and in fact are often supported for coming over... It is presented as God as you know him.

Phil, Old Folsom Prison, CA

I was the shy guy that would hide from large crowds and not talk to anyone because I would get so nervous no one could hear me. Well due to this group and its strength in energy, love, compassion and openness I've grown out of that state and into one that I can express myself not only in speech but in words as well... The solitude and silence that can come over such a large group of people all at one time is such an incredible sight and feeling that one has to experience it to live it.

Anthony, Old Folsom Prison, CA

Early on I struggled with many thoughts and emotionally charged feelings. I have since learned that this is a natural part of meditation... Now I experience great times of peace, joy and love deep within.

Don, California Institute for Men, Chino, CA

Centering prayer is my doorway to finding "peace." It is the true nourishment that people, places and things cannot provide me; only communion with God in privacy can.... Whispering to myself or sitting there "thinking about what I want" is not God speaking. But after I finish my prayer and meditation, I feel "different..."

Richard, Mule Creek Prison, CA

I had practiced meditation in my teens as part of my hippy phase only to abandon it... but the Folsom Contemplatives gave me more than a meditation practice, it is the opportunity to share the common journey in an uncommon way, with a group of men who have the shared experience of some of the most horrible and humiliating lives imaginable; all the hates, suspicions and fears. To be able to sit in peaceful silence with this circle of men who between them represent most of the races and religions on this planet as we walk on this path from humiliation to humility... is to know the awesome grace of the Big Empty. Today I walk this prison yard with a smile on my face, kindness in my heart and peace at my back.

K.B., Old Folsom Prison, CA

How can a prisoner's heart "change" if prisons are nothing more than hate factories? Look how meditation softened and



The letters quoted here were posted at the Imprisonment & Transformation conference.

transformed my own heart! Something wonderful happens when a resentful and bitter heart becomes softened through meditation and dharma books. My mind desires to do no harm to any human being. I have stopped hating society, and I have stopped hating myself.

Tom, Atascadero State Prison, CA

This place was no joke. So much violence and death! You see things and never see them. You need to let it go and I found it through meditation. I was deeply in love with my wife and she found someone out there and it destroyed me. But due to prayer and meditation I was able to let go... and let God... this helps out with those who want to kick drugs and alcohol. Meditation brings relief to those who lost hope.

Jim, Old Folsom Prison, CA

Now, when a strong emotion manifests in my mind, I focus my attention below my navel and practice deep breathing. If I feel anger towards another person, I remember that they suffer just like me. I remain calm, embrace my anger, and do my best to water the seeds of understanding and compassion residing in my consciousness. Before too long the emotion passes. I am finding these practices come easier as time passes. I still have a long road ahead of me, but I am growing more mindful on a daily basis.

Chris, AZ

The course you have created offered a clear and practical application to spiritual growth. It effectively demonstrates to the average layman, the innate awareness of Truth within us all. And the use of various belief systems validates; adds to the purity; and amplifies what is Truth.

Walter, Old Folsom Prison, CA

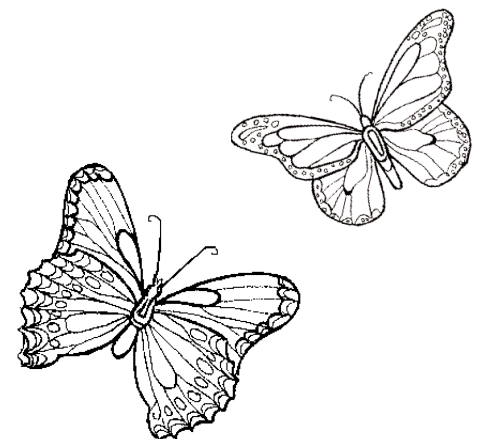
Prison is a very stressful place. The hard life I was living had a lot of violence. I tattooed my violent way of life all over my body. I lived that way of life—I talked the talk and walked the walk. Prison Life is very full of neg-

ative energy, some people actually thrive on it. I myself just woke up every morning for many years waiting for the evil to move my way. I was afraid of change, or should I say afraid that if I found a place inside me that was truly good and spiritual, what would happen to the old me? What would happen to the survival skills I had learned to make part of my everyday life? Would I be outcast? I filled my head up with a lot of reasons not to change, or try something that would help me. I look back at my life now and wish my heart and my entire being could have been the way I am now! I like the warm and peaceful feelings it gives me. I can escape the prison walls whenever I want, just by sitting on the floor and letting it all flow. I think that the man who was afraid to change, has!

Billy, California Men's Colony, San Luis Obispo, CA

Awareness of energy is a vehicle for awakening. We align ourselves with the power to change our lives for the good. I find that meditations, on a daily basis, helps me to honestly concentrate, and helps me remain calm while I'm soul searching—and then my self discipline sets in automatically.

Huero, California Men's Colony, San Luis Obispo, CA



RESOURCES FOR THOSE ON A CONTEMPLATIVE PATH INSIDE JAILS AND PRISONS



Prison Ashtam Project **Human Kindness Foundation**

P.O. Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715
(919) 304-2220 9:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. EST
Web: www.humankindness.org
Will send books and tapes free to inmates, including *We're All Doing Time: A Guide for Getting Free*, by Bo Lozoff. This book has become "the convicts' Bible" in institutions around the world.

Centering Prayer — Prison Program

Contemplative Outreach: General Info
to Park Place, and fl. Suite B
Butler, NJ 07405
Phone: (973) 838-3384
Web: www.contemplativeoutreach.org

- Resource materials and booklets free to prisoners
- Books and tapes by Fr. Thomas Keating, including *Open Mind, Open Heart*.
- Materials and volunteers to assist those interested in establishing a centering prayer program.
- Some materials available in Spanish.

Prison Dharma Network

P.O. Box 4623
Boulder, CO 80306-4623
Email: pdn@indra.com
Web: www.prisondharmanetwork.org

Nonsecularan interfaith support network for prisoners, prison staff, and volunteers engaged in contemplative spirituality and meditation practices.

- International support network.
- Publishes books and resources materials.
- Provides training to prison staff and volunteers.
- Organizes prison and jail meditation groups.
- Sends books and resource materials to prisoners including: *Sitting Inside: Buddhist Practice in America's Prisons*, by Kobai Scott Whitney and *Dharma in Hell: Prison Writings of Felicit Maull*.

Siddha Yoga Meditation Prison Project

P.O. Box 99140
Emeryville, CA 94662
Email: Prisonproject@oaklandyda.org
Phone: (510) 868 2771

- Provides a self study course in the wisdom and practice of Siddha Yoga meditation. Twelve years long with free monthly lessons to prison inmates in English and Spanish, newsletter included. Letter writers respond to inmates' inquiries about the teachings.
- Donates books, tapes & videos to prison libraries.
- Trained volunteers bring meditation programs

and spiritual support into prisons.

Buddhist Peace Fellowship

Prison Project Coordinator
P.O. Box 3470
Berkeley, CA 94703
Phone: (510) 655-6166, ext. 307
Email: prisons@bpf.org
Web: www.bpf.org (excellent list of links) (BPF has 73 national & international chapters)

- Teaching meditation, yoga, and Nonviolent Communication classes in prisons, jails, drug rehab programs, and alternative sentencing.
- Sent upon request: information to set up a meditation group inside, and Buddhist books & materials.
- Training for meditation volunteers.
- Setting up pen-pal relationships between prisoners interested in Buddhism and dharma practitioners.

Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)

1050 Selby Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104
Phone: (877) 926-8287; (651) 644-5851
Web: www.avpusa.org
Email: avp@avpusa.org

Provides volunteers for a 22-hour intensive program of exercises and discussions designed to develop self-esteem and self-confidence, teaches principles of cooperation, skills in listening speaking, and observing — and explores ways of finding nonviolent solutions that are possible in almost every conflict when approached with a caring attitude toward others. Developed from the real life experiences of prisoners and others, and building on a spiritual base, AVP encourages every person's innate power to positively transform themselves and the world.

San Francisco Zen Center

300 Page St.
San Francisco, CA 94102-5649
Phone: (415) 865-3761
Web: www.szfzc.org
Email: [sfzoutreach@yahoo.com](mailto:szfzoutreach@yahoo.com)

- Teaching meditation and yoga in jails, prisons, & drug rehabilitation programs.
- Pen-pals for inmates interested in regular correspondence about Buddhist practice.
- Free Buddhist literature.

Vipassana Meditation Courses

Vipassana Prison Trust
Web: www.viprison.dharma.org
P.O. Box 192
Petersburg, IL 62675-0192

Email: vptcontact@hotmail.com

Any prison or jail facility personnel or other person involved in corrections activities is invited to contact this organization for additional information.

- Documentary information and videotape presentation describing the North American prison courses.
- Activism to end the death penalty and change the current criminal justice system.

Centering Meditation

P.O. Box 499
Pasadena, CA 91102-0499
Phone (626) 792-2013
Email: genewekall@aol.com

Will send the book, *The Next Step*, to prisoners, family members and friends, at no cost. *The Next Step* was written for those incarcerated, and has no religious ties. We also have access to providers throughout California who will help inmates transition to civilian life.

Tricycle Foundation Prison Project

92 Vandam St
New York, NY 10013
Web: <http://www.tricycle.com>
Email: info@tricycle.com

The Tricycle Foundation distributes a free meditation kit to prisoners consisting of ten guided meditations that lead one towards increased mindfulness, tranquility, insight, and compassion. It also includes yoga session instructions with poster, and instructions for making a meditation cushion. Kits can be downloaded at <http://www.tricycle.com/meditationkitproject/download.html>. Where personal internet access is not available, we suggest providing your chaplain with the above web address so that materials can still be made available in your facility. *Tricycle.com* also provides free advertising and an online hub for organizations who run prison outreach programs.

The National Emotional Literacy Project for Prisoners

c/o Lionheart Foundation
P.O. Box 194
Back Bay, Boston, MA 02117
Phone: (781) 444-6667
Web: www.lionheart.org
Email: questions@lionheart.org

- *Houses of Healing: A Prisoner's Guide to Inner Power and Freedom*; books are available for inmates, and prison libraries. Facilitator's manual and training video series available for volunteers and corrections professionals.

- Public outreach to (1) inform the public about the current state of corrections in the U.S.; (2) encourage a more rational and productive approach to violence prevention, sentencing, and incarceration; and (3) educate the public about the need to transform prisons into places for people to heal.

Gangaji Foundation

Hart Lubin, Prison Program Manager
The Gangaji Foundation
2245 Ashland Street
Ashland, OR 97520
Phone: 541-482-3100
Web: www.gangaji.org
Email: prisonprogram@gangaji.org

- Bringing the teachings of Gangaji to those in prison so that they may find that true freedom and peace lies within and is untouched by circumstances and situations whether in prison or out in the world.
- Provides books, audio and video tapes without charge.
- Trained volunteers to facilitate groups to watch and study the Gangaji videos.
- Volunteers who correspond with inmates to deepen their understanding of Gangaji's teachings.

Four Agreements Prison Outreach

1055 West College Ave. #197
Santa Rosa, CA 95401
Prison Outreach Correspondence for inmates to deepen their practice of the *Four Agreements* by Toltec author Miguel Ruiz.

Amber-Allen Publishing

P.O. Box 6657,
San Rafael, CA 94903-0657
A publishing house that focuses exclusively on personal growth, inspirational, spiritual, and health-related books, will, when able, upon request send books that have been returned from stores and might be blighted free of charge.

- Free books authored by Miguel Ruiz
- Free books are also offered to staff within prisons, jails, and half-way houses for teaching tools.

Naljar Prison Dharma Service

www.naljarprisondharma.org
Buddhist and interfaith prison resources.

