

ONE BREATH — A Dharma Exchange

A PUBLICATION FOR THE INMATES, VOLUNTEERS AND SUPPORTERS OF BUDDHIST PATHWAYS PRISON PROJECT, INC.
WINTER 2012

Realignment: comments from sangha members

Buddhist Pathways Prison Project (formerly Folsom Pathways Sangha) has been involved in bringing the Buddha's Dharma (truth of how life really is) into prison since 1997. We practice the steps the Buddha outlined; mindfulness of ethical behavior, mindfulness in meditation and mindfulness of insight and wisdom. Inmate 'sangha' (the Buddhist term for community) members have been on occasion transferred to other prisons, or were paroled and released. However, the realignment that is currently taking place has had the effect of long term prison sanghas losing a majority of their members. Of course, as the Buddha continually reminds us, life is impermanent and to expect situations will stay the same causes distress. The good news is that many of our former sangha members are now enjoying freedoms that had not been available before. However, they are writing to Buddhist Pathways Prison Project (BP3 for short) asking us to advocate for Buddhist services in their new locations. We are doing our best and contacting prisons on their behalf.

To inmates: In the future, when you write to BP3, we would like permission to publish portions of your letter. We'd like to credit you! However, we can only do this with written permission from you.

Here are a few comments we recently received from men who had been transferred from CSP-SAC:

"For the first time I live alone. I find it EXTREMELY more peaceful. ... I have a schedule of my own program. I sleep,

ATTENDING BUDDHIST SERVICES

Buddhist Services and meditation instruction are open to all inmates regardless of religious affiliation, or no religious beliefs. If the institution where you are housed does not offer Buddhist services, contact the Community Partner Manager. You have the right to request Buddhist services. Please make a formal request to the CPM and then contact us to let us know. Thank you.

"To all my friends in my sacred community. I send so many thanks for the space we held together. I will never forget."

exercise, read, clean, study the dharma and meditate regularly 3 times a day. Sweet! I am reading the Flight of the Garuda by Kieth Dowman. I am on the path of a bodhisattva... I am hoping to be a hospice volunteer and have also volunteered for the blind person's project. Making brail books and CDs."

The following reflection came from another inmate;

"Grant that I may quickly gain
The path where quietude
And insight join together;
One which quiets
My mind from being
Distracted to wrong objects,
The other which analyzes
The perfect meaning
In the correct way."

Another inmate previously at SAC:

"The transition to a level 3 yard has been going smoothly due to my past, and present practice. I really miss the many years of "sharing" that took place at SCP-SAC and most of all I miss the spiritual connections. It gets a little lonely not having that support and family so far away. However, I notice that I am more relaxed and at ease and not filled with stress. I maintain my "space" to reflect and meditate. I see us all as friends forever."

Another inmate:

"To all my friends in my sacred community. I send so many thanks for the space we held together. I will never forget. I learned a lot just by being in the circle and sharing in that peaceful way. I want to thank all the volunteers as well as the staff who shared their time and energy with us. I am in a wonderful place spiritually, mentally and physically. My celli is a great kid. We both are on our paths. My mind is clear and I am playing my guitar every day and loving it so much. I play in total peace. I am trying to find out if there is a sangha in this yard. Can you find out for me? Peace and love to you all."

Retreat Updates

A retreat in prison is a special event. Facilitated by a teacher (or teachers), it is a day of silence. Inmates are often surprised about what comes up in the mind when there are no distractions such as TVs, music and conversation. Participants take a vow of silence for the day, which includes not making eye contact with each other. Retreats feature movement meditation (yoga or qigong), sitting meditation, eating meditation and dharma talks by the teacher(s). Being in silence and observing very intimately how the mind works is a rare opportunity, both in prison and the free world.

On July 7th 2012, we offered our first daylong at CSP-Sierra Conservation Center in the main yard. Eleven men took part. Jacques Verduin from the Insight-Out and GRIP programs at San Quentin was our guest teacher. Here are a few comments from the men who participated:

“There are 2,400 inmates in this prison, and only 11 came to this daylong. It should be mandatory. These teachings show us how to be skillful in life... something the prison doesn’t do... and they wonder why recidivism is so high. We are our own stewards! Why don’t more people realize how important this is?”

“The experience was unlike any other spiritual event I have participated in. It help to quiet my mind in ways there are no words.... sitting and meditating, being silent for hours brings an awesome peace inside of me.”

“I found the daylong retreat to be helpful because the experience help me better understand how negative emotions and anger affect my mind and body.”

“I hope the next retreat is soon.”

In November 2012 we had our second retreat at CSP-Folsom. Eighteen men took part. Our teacher for the day unfortunately had a calendar malfunction and did not make it to the prison.

Buddhist Pathways Prison Project, Inc is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to bring Buddhist mindfulness practice into Northern California prisons. Communities are located at CSP- Folsom, CSP - SAC, CSP- Mule Creek, CSP- Sierra Conservation Center and CSP - Deuel Vocational Institute. The inmates in these institutions have an interest in Buddhist tradition which includes meditation and discussion of the Buddha’s teachings. The Buddha is the historical teacher, Dharma is the truth that he taught; and Sangha is the community. The volunteers and inmates meet on a regular basis to practice sitting and movement meditation and to discuss life experiences from a Buddhist perspective. People of all faiths, or no spiritual tradition are welcome to our services.

Please visit our website for more information.
www.buddhistpathways.org

You can write to us at
Buddhist Pathways Prison Project, Inc.
PO Box 19375
Sacramento, CA 95819

Two volunteer chaplains and long time dharma practitioners came up with “on-the-spot” Dharma talks. Here are some comments from men who filled out an evaluation form afterwards:

“I fell into a smooth silence. I wish it could last more than one day. I would like to be this peaceful more often.”

“I felt I got insight into myself that I cannot put into words. I’d like it to last. I am seeing that the benefits of this practice are accumulative. I am dealing with some pain from past mistakes which are coming up.”

“A breath of fresh air. Mental peace as a real break from all the “prison noise.”

“More relaxed and in touch with my true humanness. Also, tasting real food is a rare treat and gave me hope that when I get released that I can experience more days like this retreat.”

“I was more mindful of the simpler things in life and I have a new appreciation of the things that I have taken for granted, such as silence and a body that still has the ability to move and for my family.”

“Spending the entire day in meditation was nice! I enjoyed the food, the talks and the movement. I am especially grateful for the food because I had never eaten an avocado, tomatoes or mangoes inside prison.

“At first I didn’t like the silence, but now I like the fact of being mindful. I find I am more mindful about walking, talking and eating. Now I am looking forward to the next retreat.”

Friday, December 14, daylong silent retreat at CSP-Sierra Conservation Center

Update on this retreat with teachers Ayya Anandabodhi and Ayya Santacitta will be featured in the next edition of “*One Breath.*”

Service schedule:

CSP - SACRAMENTO

B yard chapel, 5 - 7:00pm - 1st/3rd Tues & 2nd/4th Fridays

C yard chapel, 5:30 - 7:30pm - 2nd & 4th Tuesdays

CSP - FOLSOM

Greystone Chapel, 6:30 - 8pm - Tuesday evenings

Greyston Chapel, 8 - 10am Wednesday mornings

CSP - MULE CREEK

A yard chapel, 9 - 11:30am every Friday morning

CSP - DEUEL VOCATIONAL INSTITUTE

A yard gym, 6:00 - 8:30pm 1st and 3rd Thursday

CSP - SIERRA CONSERVATION CENTER

Main Yard, Catholic Chapel, 1st and 3rd Wednesdays, 7 - 8:40pm

Tuolomne Yard, 2nd and 4th Thursdays, 6 - 8pm