



Prison Meditation Project

“Many, if not most, of the men have trouble showing and receiving compassion. For that to flower out of the Sangha is a very rare gift for the inmates who live in constant fear and aggression.”

Kozan, Zen Priest, Sweetwater Zen Center

Dear Friends,

Every month several of us travel to the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility, which lies in the back country roughly 20 miles south east of National City. We offer both meditation and council practice to a group of men there who voluntarily attend our program.

The goal, through teaching meditation, is to help break down the strong habits of thinking and false view of self that cause suffering. Council offers a powerful way to facilitate the deep sharing of feelings in a non-judgmental atmosphere.

In the last year we have expanded our services from biweekly Sangha in two or yards at Donovan to four. This is directly due to the generous support of friends like you and our dedicated volunteers. With the expanded services we are now offering meditation and council to more than 100 men twice a week. We have seen that men who join us regularly develop stability in practice, emotional balance and the energy of compassion as the heart is allowed to soften in the safety of our groups.

For example, Kozan, who regularly helps take the Dharma into Donovan, talks about Eric, a former prisoner there. “After Eric was released in 2010 he took the Precepts with the Dharma name of Jeong Gak. He has since married, and graduated from college with honors from Wayne Community College in Detroit. He was recently nominated to the national team of the All-Michigan Academic Team. He’s also ‘gone back to prison’ as a volunteer Zen outreach member through the Ann Arbor Zen Center.”

Rick Avery, who has been leading a Sangha in the prison called Shared Breath, tells of a long term Sangha member on the maximum security yard. The member’s nickname is Zapata; he is an older Latino man and a lifer. Zapata has a large surgical scar on one side of his skull from where he was shot in the head point blank. It is impossible to tell what permanent damage this caused, but he does have a severe seizure disorder and chronic headaches.

“When Zapata was first in our group he was angry, but mostly self-absorbed and self-aggrandizing, interested only in using the group for his own gain. Slowly he got “tenderized,” Rick said. “Today he is truly one of the leaders in the group, much more humble and able to reflect on his impulses before acting. Nothing magical happened here.

Just the slow process of meditation, having a relationship to the community, and his sincere wish to relieve suffering.”

Stories like this abound and leave no doubt the Dharma is being passed.

This invaluable program costs \$500 a month to run, or \$6,000 annually, so every year around Buddha’s Birthday we ask for your donations. Our goal is to raise annual pledges or funds of \$6,000 by August 11, 2013, the last day of our summer ango (optional, and don’t know if I have it right about the pledges since you are asking for monthly, but just thought I would set a deadline – gets people like me in gear).

Please consider an automatic monthly contribution for as much as you can comfortably give or a lump sum. Both can be made online at: <http://www.prisonmeditation.org/Donate.htm> or by check to:

Prison Meditation Project
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Sincerely,

Kozan Cummings, Peter Kuhn & Anne Seisen Saunders,

Prison Meditation Project