

## Tips on Engaged Buddhism and Incarceration

### Support Incarcerated People

- Visit a prison sangha to support yogis and facilitators
- Consider starting a sitting group at a local prison
- Become pen-pals with an incarcerated person
- Donate bus passes or gift cards to re-entry organizations
- Connect with formerly incarcerated people
- Consider establishing a retreat scholarship for formerly incarcerated people

### Educate Yourself

- Connect with formerly and currently Incarcerated people
- Here is a short list of great research on the criminal justice system:

[Prison Policy Initiative](#)

[Sentencing Project](#)

[Coming Out of Concrete Closets](#)

[Subscribe to the Marshal Project newsletter](#)

### Bring these issues to life in your teachings and circles

- Incorporate criminal/social justice issues into your dharma talks, 1:1 with students, or conversations with friends.
- Include incarcerated people and prison strikers in guided metta meditations
- Pull relevant material about crime or the impact of systemic conditions from the texts. Here are two good anthologies:

-Angulimala, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, Chapter 8

-Establishing an Equitable Society, *Social and Communal Harmony*, Chapter 10

- Instead of a weekly sitting group, substitute a movie screening with time for discussion. (Time: The Kalief Browder Story and 13th are available on Netflix)

### Use Your Institutional Leverage

- If you are affiliated with an organization, inquire if they have hiring policies that exclude formerly incarcerated people from employment.

- Do formerly incarcerated or court-impacted people work at your organization? If not, consider having a discussion with decision-makers about why this may be.
- Does your organization have a program component that serves currently or formerly incarcerated people? If not, consider initiating a discussion about this.
- Even if your organization doesn't have capacity to start a program, consider how you might support a pre-existing program.
- Who are the decision makers in your organization? Do they come from similar backgrounds? Do they reflect the community at-large? Are they all white? These may be signs that your organization could benefit from a deeper conversation and action plan.

## Get Involved

Call your state and federal legislators and tell them you want criminal justice reform!

Attend local meetings and protests about criminal justice issues, political races for district attorneys, legislators and, in some jurisdictions, judges.

Host a reading group. I highly recommend these books:

- Are Prisons Obsolete? by Angela Davis,
- The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander
- Queer Injustice by Andrea Ritchie and Kay Whitlock

Consider starting a group to strengthen a community in need. Or support a pre-existing group that already does this work. Technical support, donations or a simple email of encouragement can be helpful.

There are many amazing grass-roots organizations across the nation that address the criminal justice system, often led by formerly incarcerated people. Many specialize in helping the most vulnerable including women and girls, trans women of color, and LGBTQIA. Here are two:

- [National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls](#)
- [Black and Pink](#)

## Donate

Here are a few organizations that work at the intersection of Buddhism and Prison:

[Heartwood Meditation Support Program](#) \* [Prison Yoga and Meditation](#)  
[Prison Mindfulness Institute](#)

I'm here as a resource or to have a conversation about any of these topics. Reach out anytime (I'll be on retreat from Sept 12-Dec 4.) [paralegalmichaelcox@gmail.com](mailto:paralegalmichaelcox@gmail.com)