

Outsider Buddhism: A Study Of Buddhism and Buddhist
Education in the U.S. Prison System

by

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Declaration

I declare that *Outsider Buddhism: A Study Of Buddhism and Buddhist Education in the U.S. Prison System* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Abstract

Buddhist prison outreach is a relatively recent development, in the United States of America and elsewhere, and has yet to be chronicled satisfactorily. This thesis traces the physical, legal and social environment in which such activities take place and describes the history of Buddhist prison outreach in the USA from its earliest indications in the 1960s to the present day. The mechanics of Buddhist prison outreach are also examined. Motivations for participating in Buddhist prison outreach are discussed, including Buddhist textual supports, role models and personal benefits. This paper then proposes that volunteers active in this area are members of a liminal *communitas* as per Victor Turner and benefit from 'non-player' status, as defined by Ashis Nandy. The experiences of the inmates themselves is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Keywords

Buddhism, Prison Ministry, Prison Outreach, United States of America, Victor Turner, Ashis Nandy, Pastoral Care.

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Research questions	9
Chapter 2: Literature review	11
Chapter 3: Methodology and theoretical framework	18
Chapter 4: Buddhist principles	22
Chapter 5: Evolution of Buddhism in the United States	30
Chapter 6: The form and function of America's correctional system	41
Chapter 7: Buddhist prison outreach in Canada	65
Chapter 8: Buddhist prison outreach in the USA - a history	78
Chapter 9: How Buddhist prison outreach works	99
Chapter 10: Textual underpinnings of Buddhist social action	114
Chapter 11: Buddhist volunteers	122
Chapter 12: How volunteers explain their motivations	132
Chapter 13: Identity and community	143

Chapter 14: Modernizing American Buddhism	158
Chapter 15: Prison outreach as faith legitimation	162
Chapter 16: Conclusion	168
Glossary	173
Appendix I: Images of Buddhist prison outreach	176
Appendix II: an example of a Buddhist liturgy for use in prison	178
Works cited	207

Introduction

Maplehurst Correctional Complex is a sprawling prison located in a bedroom community 60 kilometres Northwest of Toronto. Canada's largest prison, it houses 1,100 inmates of different security levels; at one point it housed the 'Toronto 18,' a group of militant Islamist terror suspects. I volunteer here every two weeks, counseling inmates individually, coordinating a meditation class and stocking the 'library' of Buddhist books. For the past eight years I have also corresponded with six inmates in the United States, helping them maintain and develop their Buddhist practices behind the walls. Such conversations were by mail, typically resulting in monthly letter writing. In the case of one inmate, I corresponded with him for the final three years of his sentence and for three months following his release. As a member of the Prison Dharma Network, I am connected to the wider community of Buddhists who, like me, volunteer in correctional facilities or with inmates.

This has provided me with the participant-observer position that has proven useful not only to gain access to volunteers and their worlds, but also to understand (by shared experience) the environment in which they perform their outreach. It has also given me opportunity to reflect deeply on the twin questions that this dissertation seeks to answer. Put broadly, these are: on the micro level, how does Buddhist prison outreach affect the individual volunteer? On the macro level, what is the effect of Buddhist prison outreach on Buddhism in the United States?

Structurally, the dissertation begins with discussions of several subjects essential to understanding Buddhist prison outreach. These include the basic teachings of Buddhism, the history of Buddhism in the United States, the prison environment in the United States (legal and structural) and the characteristics of the inmate population. For comparative purposes, and to understand the common underpinnings of the modern corrections system in the developed world, I then provide an examination of the Canadian corrections system and approaches to outreach there. From this I next construct a history of Buddhist prison outreach in the United States and examine the mechanics of such outreach. The textual underpinnings that would justify such outreach are then examined. I then discuss the findings of the interviews I conducted, examining the characteristics of the cohort of volunteers studied here. I present the volunteers' self-reported explanations of their motivations for performing such outreach. This functions as a counterpoint to my own theoretically supported understanding of their motivations, which holds that constructing an identity is the primary motivation. Broadening the discourse to encompass American Buddhism as a whole, I propose the value of prison outreach lies with its contribution to the ongoing modernization of the faith as well as its contribution to the legitimization of the tradition. With a presence in the United States of about 160 years, the process of integration of Buddhism into American religious life (as mentioned by Kornfield in Morreale, ed. 1988, xi) is incomplete but progressing. Awareness of Buddhism as a legitimate faith practice, and the enshrining of religious rights in prison settings, is (as will be seen) well advanced. The ongoing effect of Buddhist prison outreach on this integration

process will be seen to derive from the legitimation process and, through the modernization process, which ensures the relevancy of this spiritual path.

The experiences of inmates and their paths to Buddhist practice inside the American corrections system is beyond the scope of this dissertation, which focuses on the volunteer experience. The inmate aspect will form the content for a future PhD dissertation.

Chapter 1: Research questions

This dissertation examines Buddhist prison outreach from two perspectives. The first is the on the ground view of the volunteers themselves. Here the questions that I seek to answer are (a) what motivates Buddhist practitioners to volunteer and (b) what benefit does such outreach deliver to them? As I will demonstrate, these two research questions are closely intertwined with the construction of identity as a Buddhist practitioner.

From a different vantage point I seek to understand the contributions of prison outreach to Buddhism in the United States. Is Buddhist prison outreach a marginal activity of an already marginal spiritual tradition or does it contribute in some way to the stream of North American Buddhism, going back to Shunryu Suzuki, Nyogen Senzaki and further to Blavatsky and the Theosophists and early Asian immigrants? Is any impact of prison outreach different from that of other forms of Buddhist social action, for example, environmental or anti-war activism? If so, how? There are, therefore, two points that must be addressed: (1) does this specific form of outreach have an impact on Buddhism in the United States and (2), if so, what function does such outreach have on the shaping of the direction of American Buddhism?

Before these questions can be answered, it will be necessary to understand the world in which Buddhist prison outreach operates, the nature of the people it serves and the practical challenges it faces. A comparative examination of the Canadian correction system

enables us to see common aspects of the modern penal state. It is also necessary to understand its history; to this end I have provided an outline history of outreach with the caveat that much of the early history is likely lost to history, undocumented or, if documented at all, in ephemeral small publications or privately printed books. A further basic question I answer in order to address the research problems described above is how Buddhist prison outreach works in practice, including how texts are used.

At this point there are significant gaps in our understanding of Buddhist prison outreach in the United States. The principal lacunae have been indicated above. As Christopher Queen has pointed out (Queen, 1992, 374), social action is a major feature (one of several defining elements) of American Buddhism. It is therefore of great importance to understand this particular strand of Buddhist social action, both for its effect on individual Buddhists and for its influence on the course of American Buddhism generally.

Chapter 2: Literature review

While no book-length study of Buddhism in prisons has yet emerged (although half of Kobai Scott Whitney's book (Whitney, 2003) is devoted to the topic while the other half comprises a practical manual for volunteers), several academic works include chapters on prison outreach. These situate it among anti-poverty initiatives, environmental activism, human rights and anti-discrimination projects, the emancipation of Tibet and gender and sexuality rights movements. This is useful as it provides our first frame of reference – 'off the cushion' social action, informed by Buddhist ethics and generally positioned on the 'progressive' end of the American political spectrum. However, the scholarship itself deviates rather quickly into a discussion of issues tangential to the topic at hand rather than addressing critical lacunae in our knowledge of Buddhist prison outreach. For example, Cohn-Parkum and Stultz (2000, 347-363), in their paper on Buddhist prison ministries, spend a great amount of time discussing whether or not it is appropriate to use the *Angulimala Sutta* in prison outreach rather than providing the material needed for a basic understanding of such work. It is unfortunate that we have a rich debate about Engaged Buddhism but lack the understanding of a specific social action that could constitute it. In contrast, a fuller history of the development and mechanics of Buddhist prison outreach in the United States is to be found in McIvor (2010).

Some of the literature sits halfway between academic studies and practical guides and is very fruitful. This includes Kobai Scott Whitney's *Sitting Inside: Buddhist Practice in America's*

Prisons (Whitney, 2003) as well as writings by Fleet Maull (Maull, 2005). These authors provide the first suggestions about volunteer motivation. Former inmate and founder of the Prison Dharma Network, Fleet Maull suggests two motivators for those who take up this work. The first is a belief in the practice itself as valuable, not just the intellectual study of Buddhism, “like many Westerners, I was more interested in the practice of meditation and the Buddhist teachings on the nature of the mind,” Maull states, then goes on to report his own personal epiphany “it became very clear to me that I needed to make the practice of Right Livelihood, with its underlying basis in the five lay precepts, a central focus of my training...” (2004, 15-16) Maull seems to have found that “jarring incongruities” (2004, 18) between theory and practice impeded his own Buddhist development. A second epiphany seems to have also occurred in prison – the need to make amends for past deeds first as a recognition of the impact of unskillful actions “I... realized the harm I had been doing to others” (2004, 19) and later as practice of right livelihood Maull felt able to “... make an honest wage while using some of my talents and education to help other prisoners...” (2004, 19).

Kobai Scott Whitney, a former inmate and Buddhist prison chaplain, offers insight into the benefits of Buddhist prison outreach. After cautioning “it is quite literally true that people who want to work with prisoners need to have their heads examined” (2003, 18), Whitney clarifies ‘selfish’ reasons that may draw people to such volunteer work – boredom, loneliness and unhappiness. He then cites the examples of Buddhist teachers, Joan Halifax and Robina Courtin who found the work “inspiring” and discovered that it “...had the

effect of renewing the volunteers' own commitment to practice" (2003, 119). It would appear that one practical draw of Buddhist prison outreach work is the opportunity to both sharpen and deepen one's own practice.

There have been other books intended for inmates that discuss Buddhist teachings in a prison setting. In addition to Whitney's advice directed to prisoners. The National Buddhist Prison Sangha has produced a short handbook for distribution to inmates (discussed below). Plum Mountain Refuge (in Washington State) has also produced a liturgy for use by inmates (reproduced in Appendix II). The Liberation Prison Project has published a short collection of guidance designed for inmates, called *Notes on the Buddhist Path to Enlightenment* (2007) as well as a compact disc of talks entitled *Transforming Problems Into Happiness* (2007). A fuller description of Courtin's work with the Liberation Prison Project is found below. The famed Vietnamese Zen monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, has published the text of a talk he gave at the Maryland Correctional Institution in 1999 as *Be Free Where You Are* (2002).

Memoirs provide further insight. These include several by Buddhist inmates that illuminate the reality of practice inside including those of Jarvis Jay Masters (Masters, 1997) and Calvin Malone (Malone, 2008). Masters also contributed a chapter to *Challenging Times: Stories of Buddhist Practice When Times Get Tough* (Vishvapani, 2006), which includes a section devoted to prison practice and its particular challenges. It includes the inmate experiences of Masters as well as the Buddhist practice and later execution of Arkansas-

born Frankie Parker as well as the role of prominent Buddhist volunteers, including Kobutsu Malone, in preparing Parker for his death. This gives some insight into how Buddhism can be applicable at the extreme moment of execution. Popular media coverage of the execution of Ohio Buddhist inmate, Kenneth Biros (Rodgers, 2009) provides more insight into this aspect of Buddhist volunteer work – ministering to the condemned, by describing the parts played by Biros’ two Buddhist volunteers, Eric Weinberg and Bradley Butters. A more theoretical analysis of the Buddhist view on the death penalty is found in *Of Compassion and Capital Punishment: A Buddhist Perspective on the Death Penalty* (Horigan, 1996).

One memoir in particular is valuable for understanding the early history of Buddhist prison outreach – that of pioneer, Hogen Fujimoto (Fujimoto, 1980), whose early efforts included both correspondence and in-prison work and who was involved in a seminal legal case that helped establish religious freedoms in US prisons.

Collections of writings by prisoners are also valuable. *Prison Writing in 20th century America* (Franklin, 1998) is a compendium of prisoners’ writings from what Franklin calls “the American Gulag” (Franklin, 1998, 335). It provides a good ‘inside looking out’ perspective on life inside the US penal system, which is essential to grasping the environment in which Buddhist prison outreach is situated. Especially valuable are extracts from Jack Abbott’s book, *In the Belly of the Beast*, Robert Beck’s autobiography and short pieces by Dannie Martin. Another collection, *Insights from Inside* (McAllister, 2006), is an assemblage of inmate writings and art self-published by the St. Louis, Missouri Buddhist group, Inside Dharma. This work also includes commentary by Buddhist prison volunteers, including

Kalen McAllister and the venerable Thubten Chodron, founder of Sravasti Abbey. It provides valuable insight into the perceived value of Buddhist practice within a corrections environment and the inmate experience of Buddhist practice. Another similar collection of materials, edited and self-published by a single volunteer, is Anna Cox' *Dharma Friends: No One Abandoned, No One Forgotten, No One Discarded* (Cox, 2002). This collection includes materials circulated in Cox' newsletter, Dharma Friends, as well as her own context-setting commentary. Like the Inside Dharma publication, it is a blend of the narratives of inmates and volunteers, focusing on personal experiences.

Practical manuals on the provision of prison chaplaincy generally and Buddhist prison chaplaincy specifically give insight into how the typical functions of pastoral care must be adapted for this setting. In addition to the sections in Whitney (2003) indicated above, the Zen priest, Kobutsu Malone, has self-published a short manual entitled, *Prison Chaplaincy Guidelines for Zen Buddhism: a Sourcebook for Prison Chaplains, Administrators and Security Personnel* (2006). This book identifies the religious rights of inmates before examining the tenets and practices of the Zen tradition as they may be adapted and applied in correctional settings. Chaplaincy manuals for Christian ministers involved in prisons are more plentiful. A good example is Schilder's *Inside the Fence, A Handbook for Those in Prison Ministry* (1999).

Looking specifically at Vipassana practice in prison settings, there has been scholarly research into the value of such programming, both in the United States and in India,

specifically as related to a link between Vipassana program participation and recidivism (Parks *et al*, 1997). In addition, two documentary films on Vipassana in prison have been made – *The Dhamma Brothers* and *Doing Time, Doing Vipassana*. Vipassana retreats in prison follow the same general model as those on the outside; these documentaries are of interest for the illumination thrown on the mechanics of arranging such retreats in high security settings as well as for the commentary provided by program teachers and participants. Following the success of the film, a book of letters was released: *Letters from the Dhamma Brothers: Meditation Behind Bars* (Phillips, 2008). This expands upon the commentary provided by inmates in the film.

Other forms of meditative practice in prison have been documented. The brief Transcendental Meditation program in the Texas correctional system was researched by Orme-Johnson (2003) and the similarly short-lived mindfulness-based stress reduction research project instituted in the Massachusetts system has been chronicled by Samuelson (2007).

Websites also provide useful information. These include individual organization websites, the Prison Dharma Network social networking site (a locus for discussion of issues surrounding the practice of Buddhist prison outreach) and online news sources. This provided me opportunity to read informal remarks and observations from those active in the field, track current activities of centres and temples and learn of new developments in the field. Also useful in this respect are the newsletters published by many of the

organizations active in prison outreach, such as the Dharma Friends (mentioned above), the Human Kindness Foundation and the Liberation Prison Project.

Chapter 3: Methodology and theoretical framework

None of the literature provided the baseline information needed to understand Buddhist prison outreach in the US. Because of the paucity of the literature on this subject I set myself four principal and preliminary tasks before seeking to address my research problems.

These tasks were:

1. Examine the US corrections system to understand how its structures and mechanisms shape Buddhist prison outreach (I also examine the Canadian corrections environment to illustrate the nature of the US system comparatively and to demonstrate points of commonality in corrections systems in the developed world, in support of Wacquant's thesis on correctional trends);
2. Construct an outline history of Buddhist prison outreach in the United States;
3. Understand how prison outreach is performed; and
4. Learn what sort of Buddhists are involved in this work.

Because much of Buddhist prison outreach (as will be seen) was done 'on the fly' by under-resourced organizations and lone individuals, documentation is thin. People were too busy doing the work to take time out to document it for posterity. I therefore relied on the

memories of key figures in the field, as well as my informants, to build the history included here. I complemented this with readings of such material as is available.

The remainder of my research was built on hybrid qualitative and quantitative research involving 19 informants drawn from those active in Buddhist prison outreach. I recruited through the Prison Dharma Network online database of registered volunteers, first identifying individuals who (a) had been involved in prison outreach for at least three years and (b) were actively volunteering the US prison system (two informants were located in Canada but corresponded with inmates in the US system). This was to ensure that the informants had had sufficient exposure to the prison system and a range of inmate situations, eliminating those who were just beginning to volunteer in corrections. After three years, volunteers will typically have formed relationships with inmates (and worked to address their specific needs) and also have experienced a range of situations in prison. They are thus more experienced and more mature in their volunteerism. In an initial overture I determined the length of their practice as professed Buddhists, eliminating those with less than five years of affiliation. This was because the thrust of the research – to assess what the value was to volunteers and to American Buddhism generally, necessitates a degree of experience and reflection on the part of informants and this can usually only be gained after some time as a practicing Buddhist, as opposed to a ‘dharma tourist’ who, with a short time practicing and possibly an unsteady practice, may not possess such experience and exposure to the currents of American Buddhism.

The resulting sample consisted of volunteers located in the Pacific Northwest, the West, Central, Northeast and Southeast United States as well as Western and Central Canada. The only regions not covered were the American Southwest and the West coast (I did not consider geography as overly relevant and thus did not pre-select according to location). Several informants were well-known names in Buddhist prison outreach circles, some were notable figures in their own spiritual traditions (with known connections to prominent practice centres) and some were either unaffiliated Buddhist practitioners or had no public profile at all. The specific characteristics of my research cohort, as revealed in this research process, are detailed later in this dissertation.

I gathered baseline information about age, race, gender, political orientation, religious practice, socio-economic status and views on the corrections system. I invited informants to use their own terms to define themselves; thus responses can be considered in self-reported categories. I interviewed these informants by telephone, often more than once, and occasionally followed up with additional questions posed via email. I have also relied on the website content of those organizations sophisticated enough to maintain an Internet presence.

In the quantitative data collected I allowed informants to use their own terms to describe themselves. Thus they may have indicated race as Caucasian or Hispanic or classified their socio-economic status as middle class. Informants were invited to use terms that were meaningful to them. In most cases, these terms aligned with not only those terms in

common parlance in the United States but also in official use, among census reports and corrections systems data, for example. This naturally leads to some ambiguity but I felt that it was important to allow informants to self-identify in a manner that fit with American understandings and official and unofficial usages of such labels.

It was early on apparent to me that marginality and identity construction were critical aspects in understanding the nature of Buddhist prison volunteers and their motivations. Victor Turner's work on liminality (Turner, 1969) proved useful in constructing a model to explain motivations of volunteers. The Bourdieusian scholar, Loïc Wacquant, has explored the ideological underpinnings of the prison system (Wacquant, 2009), in particular its integral place is the dismantling of the welfare state and its replacement by the penal state, and its export through the western world and has also discussed marginality at length (Wacquant, 2008); I draw on both aspects of his work to contextualize the environment in which volunteer work is situated and to illumine aspects of the motivations behind such work, specifically the construction of identity as a western Buddhist. I also refer to his intellectual predecessor, Pierre Bourdieu, for an understanding of the formation and influence of *habitus* on the informants. Further theoretical planks I rely on to understand are the thinking of Robert Bellah (Bellah, 1967) who discusses the function of modernization in order to preserve the relevancy of a spiritual tradition and that of Peter Berger (Berger, 1970), who argues that a faith's encounter with the problem of suffering is a central test of its adequacy as a religious path. These last scholars prove essential to understanding the relevance of prison outreach to modern-day American Buddhism.

Chapter 4: Buddhist principles

Some 2,500 years ago, Siddhattha Gotama¹ was born into the ruling family of the minor kingdom of Kapilavatthu, in modern-day Nepal. Tradition holds that, shocked out of the complacency of courtly life by visceral confrontation with the facts of old age, sickness and death, he abandoned the palace to take up the life of a spiritual seeker. Despite studying with several spiritual teachers and undertaking strenuous ascetic practice and self-mortification, Gotama did not obtain significant insight into the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), both in its internal origins through mental clinging and in its external forms through old age, sickness and death. He therefore refreshed himself, sat down under a tree near the town of Bodh Gaya and vowed not to cease meditation – termed *jhāna*, “a state of deep meditative absorption characterized by lucid awareness” (Keown, 2003, 76), until he had discovered the truth underlying the universe. After a reputed 49 days of uninterrupted solitary meditation, he obtained *bodhi*, or awakening, as to this underlying truth. Henceforth, Gotama was called the Buddha, the awakened one. He arose and began his teaching career, which would last until his death at about age 80.

What the Buddha actually taught after his awakening is the subject of perennial debate among scholars and Buddhist practitioners alike. The oral tradition of early Buddhism² means that we may never be certain how much of what the Buddha actually said was written down verbatim and how much of what was written down is instead a recitation of a

¹ Names and terms are given in Pali. Sanskrit equivalents may be found in the glossary.

² Scholarly opinion is that the *Tipitaka* was first committed to writing in the first century CE (Keown, 2003, 309).

commonly understood and orally repeated digest of the Buddha's teachings. However, it is reasonable to assume that his early followers accurately presented his teachings in the early *suttas* contained in the collections that comprise the *Sutta Pitaka*.

Many of the core elements of Buddhism are laid out quite clearly in the first public talk the Buddha gave, the *Dhammacakkakappavatana sutta* (the 'discourse on the setting in motion of the wheel of *dhamma*', *sutta* 11 of the 56th chapter of the *Samyutta Nikāya*). The Buddha begins by flagging the extremes of "indulgence in desirable sense objects" and "devotion to self-mortification" as "unprofitable" (SN 56:11, second verse, lines 3-6) for one seeking awakening. In their place he advocates a moderate route – the *Majjima Patipada*, or Middle Way (or path), which is more conducive to genuine spiritual development as it "leads to calm, to higher knowledge, to enlightenment, to *nibbāna* (SN 56:11, third verse, line 3).

This Middle Way is comprised of the Eightfold Path, a framework of principles with which to govern oneself. These are usually divided into three groups – moral discipline, concentration and wisdom.

1. *Sīla* – moral discipline
 - i. Right speech
 - ii. Right action
 - iii. Right livelihood
2. *Samadhi* - concentration

- i. Right effort
 - ii. Right mindfulness
 - iii. Right concentration
3. *Paññā* - wisdom
- i. Right view
 - ii. Right intention

The path should not be understood as a linear one, with the practitioner proceeding to the next level only after having mastered the previous one. Rather it is a group of interpenetrating and mutually supporting elements. It is perhaps best understood as a three-legged stool – without one leg (moral discipline, concentration or wisdom) the stool is useless. Thus a practitioner who neglects one or more elements of the Eightfold Path will not awaken.

The Eightfold Path itself constitutes the fourth of the Four Noble Truths, which are also detailed by the Buddha. As Peter Harvey notes (Harvey, 1990, 47), the Four Noble Truths position the Buddha as a spiritual physician, first diagnosing the disease – *dukkha* (suffering), then identifying its cause – *tanhā* (craving) before giving a prognosis – it is curable, and describing the best course of treatment -- the Eightfold Path. The phrasing in the *Dhammacakkakappavatana sutta* is impersonal: “This is the Noble Truth of suffering...” (SN 56:11, fifth verse, line 1). The Buddha did not claim ‘I suffer’ or ‘you suffer’ but that there is suffering in the universe, just as there is salt in the ocean. It is a statement of fact,

not a pessimistic judgement. This is reflective of much of the Buddha's teaching, which seeks to identify and make clear the operative principles of the universe, such as impermanence, not-self and the existence of *dukkha*.

The Buddha explained *dukkha* as not just ordinary forms of unsatisfactoriness stemming from the impersonal processes of the universe such as the cycle of life (birth, aging, sickness, death) but also our responses, such as the painful emotions (sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair) that can arise and the discomfort we feel upon association with unpleasant things or from separation from pleasant things. Additionally, *dukkha* arises from the five aggregates of attachment, or *upādāna-khandha* (form, feelings, perception, volitional factors and consciousness), that together comprise a person. Here we enter into the concept of *anattā*, or not-self. In Buddhist teaching, there is no unchanging, eternal element that can be isolated and deemed the self or the soul. Instead, human beings are comprised of five components that are in a constant state of flux and that pass out of existence at some point. Humans are best understood then as temporary forms subject to a constant process of change, rather than as abiding, discrete things.

All such forms are marked by impermanence or *anicca*. Living beings are born, grow old and die. Mountains are worn down, rivers run dry and new islands are born. The Buddha taught that the engine of such unceasing change is *paticcasamuppāda*, or dependent origination. The mechanics of dependent origination are spelled out in the *Samyutta Nikāya* “when this exists, that comes to be. With the arising of this, that arises. When this does not

exist, that does not come to be. With the cessation of this, that ceases” (SN 12: 61).

Together, *anicca*, *anattā* and *dukkha* comprise the three marks of existence, common to all things.

Understanding the three marks of existence and the Four Noble Truths and committing to the Eightfold Path, a Buddhist may be awakened and realize *nibbāna*, defined as the “perfect enlightenment that is supreme,” (SN 56:11, verse 22, lines 2-4). *Nibbāna* enables escape from *samsāra* (the cycle of birth, death and rebirth that proceeds without beginning or end). Because of such perfect enlightenment the Buddha was able to proclaim his escape: “This is my last birth. Now there is no more becoming.” (SN 56:11, verse 23, lines 2-3).

From these core teachings, taught in the Indian cultural landscape of the Buddha’s time, Buddhism evolved as it left India and encountered other cultures and intellectual and spiritual traditions. Moving along the ancient Silk Road, Buddhism migrated from Northern India to Afghanistan and Central Asia, where it was transmitted to China sometime around the first century CE. There, Taoist and Confucian thought encountered Buddhism. This created a prolonged intellectual ferment (interrupted by periodic persecutions against Buddhism such as in 845 CE) that yielded such Buddhist schools as San-Lun, T’ien-Tai, Hua-Yen as well as Pure Land and Ch’an (Zen in Japanese). These latter two schools have proven especially influential, passing into other Asian countries such as Vietnam, Korea and Japan where they continue to hold prominent positions in the

Buddhist landscape there (Pure Land is the dominant form of Buddhism in Japan and Zen has had a deep and lasting influence on Japanese intellectual life) and in the West among both immigrant communities and Western converts (the Buddhist Churches of America has its origins in Pure Land teachings and of course Zen gained prominence among Westerners beginning in the 1950's).

Pure Land teachings stress the idea that Buddhas existing in the Pure Lands (as described in earlier Indian texts) could intervene to help unenlightened beings reach the Pure Lands. There is thus a salvific quality to Pure Land teachings that made it popular among, for example, the Japanese peasantry. Pure Land developed in Japan when imperial power was declining and that of the provincial military aristocracy was growing (a struggle that culminated in the Genpei War and the ascendancy of the shogunate and the Kamakura era of Japanese history). Religiously there was a belief that Buddhism was in a degenerate age (*mappo*) that human efforts alone could not counter; only by relying on 'other-power' (*tariki*) could one be 'saved.' This explains the *nembutsu* practice of Pure Land schools, which involves invoking³ the name of Amida Buddha, who had taken a vow to liberate all sentient beings that call on him. A further development of Pure Land principles occurred in Japan, also during the feudal period. Nichiren Buddhism (named after its founder) is focused on a single text, The Lotus Sutra, which is seen as the culmination of all the Buddha's teachings and thus the only essential text worth studying. Liberation is thus seen as the result of chanting the title of this sutra.⁴

³ In the Japanese language this takes the form of *namu amida butsu*, or 'hail to Amida Buddha.'

⁴ *Namo myoho renge kyo* or 'hail to the scripture of the lotus of the wonderful dharma.'

This salvific nature is contrasted by Ch'an/Zen teachings, which stress *jiriki* or self-effort to realize one's own Buddha nature, either through the contemplation of koans (seemingly illogical stories or riddles) that encourage the practitioner to move beyond rational thought and come to a direct realization of the true nature of reality or by meditation (*zazen* in Japanese) to accomplish the same end. In Japan, the Rinzai school emphasizes the former while the Soto school stresses the latter.

Both Pure Land and Ch'an/Zen traditions are to be found in other Asian contexts. Korea (where Zen is called Son), Vietnam (Zen becomes Thien) have strong Pure Land and Ch'an/Zen traditions that have moved Westwards both with immigrant populations as well as with the influence of charismatic and talented teachers such as Seung Sahn and Thich Nhat Hanh.

From Kashmir (likely the same leaping off point that Buddhism took into Central Asia), another migration brought Buddhism into the remote region of Tibet in the seventh century CE. Many of the later developments in Indian Buddhism (such as Madyamaka) flowered in Tibet. As in China, a pre-existing spiritual tradition, in the case of Tibet - Bön (a form of Central Asian shamanism), encountered Buddhism with mutual influence. By the 17th century, Tibet had become a theocratic state, ruled by the Dalai Lama, with four main schools. Tibetan Buddhist influence extended to the small Himalayan states of Bhutan and Ladakh and further afield to the Tanguts, Buryats and Mongols. Tibetan

Buddhism is notable for its adoption of Vajrayana principles and practice that developed in India around the seventh century CE. Thus one finds emphasis placed on a direct relationship with a teacher (*guru*), the use of ritual gestures (*mudra*) and images (*mandala*) and a tradition of esotericism that shields many details of the teachings from the uninitiated. With the invasion and conquest of Tibet by the Chinese in 1959, Tibetan Buddhism was relocated to India. The intertwining of the political aspirations of the Tibetan people and their exiled leadership, the creation of a Tibetan diaspora in the West, the compelling public profile of the Dalai Lama as a compassionate political figure on the global stage as well as the rise of interest in Buddhism in the West have made Tibetan Buddhism very popular, with many temples, practice centres and a university (Naropa University in Colorado, USA).

The Four Noble Truths remain a constant in all forms of Buddhism, including the first, declaring that there is suffering. A spiritual tradition focused on suffering and a path out of suffering can be reasonably expected to have some appeal to prison inmates who, due to their circumstances, are mostly likely experiencing a high degree of suffering.

Impermanence of, for example, even the longest of prison sentences, may also be an attractive element of the Buddhist spiritual tradition.

Chapter 5: The Evolution of Buddhism in the United States

The exact moment when Buddhism came to the United States is lost in time. Its history in the USA is a twinned one – of ethnic Buddhists coming to America and of Westerners adopting Buddhism. Thus the interplay of East and West was and is essential to American Buddhism's evolution.

American intellectual interest in Buddhism forms part of the broader stream of Orientalism prevalent in Europe and flowering in the 18th and 19th centuries. We can assume that the researches of the British in their colonial empire would have had some effect on American intellectuals in the 1800's. This is certainly the case with Henry David Thoreau, who was familiar with the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a text from the Hindu spiritual tradition, and who had published a portion of the *Lotus Sutra* from a French translation in *The Dial* (Fields, 1992, 54-61). We may see in Thoreau's retreat to Walden Pond perhaps a form of Buddhist contemplative practice (it is certainly reminiscent of 'present moment' focused practice as well as the 14th century Japanese Buddhist hermit monk, Kenko, and his text, *Essays in Idleness*). The Transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, too was interested for a time in Indian spirituality. During its brief life, issues of the Transcendentalist journal, *The Dial*, included translations of Indian texts. Mistranslations of Buddhist terminology, confusion about which texts were actually Buddhist and perhaps an antipathy towards non-theistic spiritual paths, however led Emerson to a severe and negative view of Buddhism, believing it to be a negating faith, focused on annihilation

(Tweed, 1992, 1). Later, more accurate interpretations of Buddhism, such as Arnold's long poem, *The Light of Asia*, corrected this view and helped popularize Buddhism in America. Academically, the teaching of Sanskrit in the United States dates to the 19th century; Harvard University offered courses in Sanskrit in 1872 and established a department of Indic Philology (teaching Pali) in 1902 (Harvard, 2011), giving the study of Indian cultural history a higher profile.

We may assume that elements of Buddhism came with the first Asian immigrants to the United States; thus the first temple that we know of dates to 1853 in San Francisco, serving Chinese immigrants (Fields, 1992, 73). An 1889 Japanese Jodo Shinshu mission to Hawaii consisted of a single priest who ministered to the local Buddhist Japanese. At that time there was also a Chinese temple operating in Hawaii. A Jodo Shinshu temple was built there in 1896 as well (Fields, 1992, 78-79).

We may assume too that a Buddhist presence steadily grew through the latter part of the 19th century and into the 20th century as immigrants came to the USA, principally from China and Japan (at least until exclusionary legislation temporarily stemmed the flow of Asian immigration). Buddhist practice faced discrimination, as the California Supreme Court case of *John Eldridge v. Sze Yup Company* (1859) (Fields, 1992, 75) demonstrates. Certainly Western xenophobia and the insular nature of the Asian immigrant communities of the time would have prevented any Western conversion to Buddhism under the tutelage of an Asian teacher. As we shall see, such a first conversion instead came

through a Western encounter with, and interpretation of, Asian spiritual traditions through Western eyes.

Western adoption of Buddhism as a spiritual path (as opposed to a philosophy to be intellectualized) began in the late 19th century in the United States with the presence of Olcott, Blavatsky and the Theosophists. Although both Olcott and Blavatsky converted to Buddhism in British India (Murphet, 1988, 84), it is difficult to say with certitude what degree of penetration Buddhist beliefs had within the community of interested westerners, such as there was, and what forms of practice were engaged in. We do know that theirs was an idiosyncratic form of Buddhism, encompassing many aspects of Indian spirituality and that Olcott saw the possibility of a unified Buddhism, embracing common elements of all traditions (Murphet, 1988, 132).

The American public gained wider knowledge of Buddhism in 1893 at the World's Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago, at which Buddhist delegates such as Anagarika Dharmapala, a young D.T. Suzuki and Soyen Shaku attended along with delegates representing Nichiren, Tendai and Shingon traditions (Seager, 1994, 406-420). The result of this increased public profile was the first conversion to Buddhism (immediately following the Parliament) of a Westerner on American soil – a New York businessman of Jewish extraction named Charles Strauss (Fields, 1992, 129). Additionally, it gave a broader segment of the American public some familiarity with at least the term, Buddhism, if not the general beliefs of the tradition, and thus prepared the ground for later penetration.

The insular Tokugawa Shogunate ‘opened’ to the West in 1853 with the arrival of American ships ending a self-imposed period of isolation. The resulting rush to understand the West produced a high degree of interest in and knowledge of its history, sciences and institutions. Scholars visited and studied in the United States and the first Japanese embassy visited the country in 1860. At the same time, Japanese immigrants settled in the United States, principally in Hawaii and the West coast, including California. With their familiarity with the US, a history of ministry to other overseas Japanese (viz. Manchuria and Korea) and immigrant populations in the US, Japanese religious authorities (principally Nishi Honganji) initiated ministry missions to Japanese living in Hawaii and California (Bloom in Clarke, 2000, 258). In addition to addressing the spiritual needs of immigrants (and providing a sense of contact to the homeland), such ministry had a spillover effect, providing opportunities for interested Westerners to encounter Buddhism and practice it in an authentically Japanese setting.

We may cite Soyen Shaku, Nyogen Senzaki and Shigetsu Sasaki as key Zen figures in this wave of Japanese teachers to come to the West. Soyen Shaku arrived in 1905 and was active near San Francisco (Shaku, 2004, xiii and Fields, 1992, 168). Senzaki accompanied Soyen Shaku on this trip and remained in the US for the remainder of his life, initially establishing his “floating zendo” in a San Francisco apartment in 1922 before later relocating it to Los Angeles where he taught, among others, Robert Aitken (Ford, 2006, 71). Shigetsu Sasaki (aka Sokei-an) arrived in the US in 1906 as part of a Buddhist mission to the country. He remained, initially on the West coast, but later relocating to New York

City. By 1925, having returned from study in Japan under Soyen Shaku, he began giving talks in New York as a lay teacher before being ordained in the Rinzai tradition in 1928. In 1930 he and several American-born students established the Buddhist Society of America (later to be renamed the First Zen Institute of America) (Ford, 2006, 66). This was to become a locus for Buddhist teaching, counting among its students Alan Watts.

The influence of these pioneers may, in fact, have been much more pronounced on Western Buddhists (and the course of Buddhism in the USA) than on the Japanese immigrant community. Other missions specifically targeted immigrant Japanese. Nishi Honganji missions eventually prompted the establishment of the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) in 1914 (originally under the name of Buddhist Mission of North America) (Seager, 1999, 51). A Soto Zen temple, Sokoji, had also been established in San Francisco in 1934 (Fields, 1992, 226) by the missionary Hosen Isobe and Japanese-speaking parishioners. He also founded the Zenshuji Soto Mission in Los Angeles in 1922 (Fields, 1992, 235).

Up until the 1950's, Buddhism remained the province of Asian immigrants and a small circle of Westerners located in major centres such as Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York. The postwar period expanded this and saw three new developments: interest in Buddhism among the Beats and their circle, a further wave of Japanese teachers coming to America and the arrival of a second wave of Western importers of Buddhism.

The literary movement that would come to be known as the Beat Generation functioned as a bridge, bringing its enthusiasm towards Buddhism forward to influence the later counter-culture movement of the 1960's and 1970's and introducing many Buddhist terms and concepts. It also created an association between the free-form spontaneity of the Beats' artistic practice and the exotic and supra-rational thinking of Zen (e.g. koans that cannot be resolved through rational thought) as well as the 'crazy Zen' of figures who stood outside the Buddhist mainstream, such as Ikkyu. Among those Beat figures who expressed sympathy for Buddhism or who studied it were Jack Kerouac, Philip Whalen, Allan Ginsberg and Gary Snyder. Poet Philip Whalen explored Vedanta and Tibetan Buddhism before settling into Soto Zen after Gary Snyder loaned him books by D.T. Suzuki (Suiter, 2002, 68-70). He was affiliated with the San Francisco Zen Center and Richard Baker. Snyder himself studied Zen in Kyoto, Japan in 1955 and formally converted that year (Suiter, 2002, 208). Ginsberg expressed Buddhist sympathies and was later involved with Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and his Naropa University (Trigilio, 2007, 27-28). Kerouac of course authored *The Dharma Bums*, which includes a thinly veiled portrayal of Snyder. A collection of his musings on Buddhism (found in notebooks etc.) was collected and published under the title, *Some of the Dharma*.

The next Japanese teachers to arrive in the United States continued the dominance of Zen. Taizan Maezumi came to the United States in 1956 and served the primarily Japanese-American congregation at Zenshuji Soto Mission in Los Angeles. From this position he began teaching Westerners in the early 1960's. This led to the foundation of the Zen

Center of Los Angeles in 1967. Maezumi's dharma heirs include: Bernard Glassman (founder of the Zen Peacemakers), Charlotte Joko Beck and John Daido Looi (founder of the Mountains and Rivers Order) (Ford, 2006, 162). Shunryu Suzuki arrived in San Francisco in 1959 to minister to members of the Sokoji temple there. He began to attract Western students and a split developed with the ethnically Japanese-American congregation remaining as Sokoji and the Western congregation reorganizing as the San Francisco Zen Center with Suzuki installed as abbot there. Many of Suzuki's talks are contained in the very influential text, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Among his more notable students were Sojun Mel Weitzman, Richard Baker and Reb Anderson, all now major figures in American Zen (Chadwick, 1999, 165 *passim*). Eido Shimano arrived somewhat later. After a brief sojourn in Hawaii with Robert Aitken in 1960, he returned to Japan, eventually coming back to the USA to settle in New York City. There he was installed as abbot of the Zen Studies Society, a post he held until 2010 when a sex scandal forced him to resign (Ford, 2006, 113). Despite this, he was a major figure in the dissemination of Zen on the East coast. A notable, non-Japanese Zen teacher is the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, who lectured at Columbia and Cornell universities in the early 1960's (Nhat Hanh, 1966).

The second wave of Western importers of Buddhism (the first being Olcott and company) to America became active after World War Two. Robert Aitken, who had been interned in Japan during the war, returned to the United States with an interest in Zen. He studied in California under Nyogen Senzaki and in Japan under Nakagawa Soen, before returning to

Hawaii to found a zendo there in 1959 (Fields, 1992, 200-203). Philip Kapleau, who had been interested in Buddhism and attended lectures in New York City, went to Japan as a court reporter during the war crimes trials. There he attended several lectures by D.T. Suzuki before returning to the USA. In 1953 he returned to Japan to study under Nakagawa, Daiun Harada and Haku'un Yasutani. He remained in Japan until 1966, when he returned to the United States, settling in Rochester, New York, and founding the Rochester Zen Center, a highly influential locus, inspiring other centers such as the Toronto and Montréal Zen Centres in Canada and training new teachers such as Albert Low and Toni Packer (Fields, 1992, 239-242). He edited and translated *The Three Pillars of Zen* (first published in 1965), one of the most influential modern English-language works on Zen Buddhism. Of interest for the course of American Buddhism, is Kapleau's connection to the Yasutani school of Zen, called Sanbokyodan, founded in 1954. As Sharf notes, "... the influence of the Sanbokyodan on Western conceptions of Zen has been far out of proportion to its relatively marginal status in Japan" (Sharf, 1995, 3). This indicates one of the many divergences between the source of American Buddhism and its evolution on American soil.

These initiatives created the ground for a wider public familiarity with Buddhism, an increasing acceptance of it as well as the generation of the infrastructure to support teaching and practice under Japanese-trained individuals. From the limited number of Buddhist centres and teachers, others would grow. All of this must be set against the

backdrop of a religious pluralism that was, in the 1950's, beginning to move away from a Protestant basis.

Buddhism truly flowered in the US in the 1960's and early 1970's. Attendance grew at many of the centres and some, such as San Francisco Zen Center, expanded, acquiring new properties and even businesses. Fueled by the counterculture of the time and temperamentally aligned with the anti-materialist views of the era, Buddhism was becoming mainstream. The 1970's would also see the rise of new figures from the East, including Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a charismatic Tibetan teacher, and Seung Sahn, who established the first Korean Kwan Um center in the United States in 1972 (Ford, 2007, 99). Counterculture figures such as Ginsberg came to Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's newly founded Naropa Institute (later university), putting it on the map as a centre of American Buddhism. Additionally, his Shambhala tradition of Buddhist practice became highly influential in Western Buddhism.

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche was also the first major non-Japanese teacher of Buddhism in the West. Others would follow, bringing Korean, Thai and Vietnamese Buddhist traditions to the United States and contributing to the diversity of the American Buddhist landscape. Other trends helped expand the scale and range of American Buddhism. In the wake of the Vietnam War, refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos arrived in the United States. Coming from countries where Buddhism was a majority (or significant) faith, they replicated structures from their homelands, including a monastic-centred model. This was

different from the lay centre model, which had so far been the most prevalent form of practice centre in the United States (usually centred around a single teacher). Additionally, the torch was being passed from Asian teachers to their Western disciples while other Westerners were returning from periods of training in Asia to found new practice centres. At the San Francisco Zen Center, Richard Baker took over from Shunryu Suzuki in 1971 (Fields, 1992, 256). In Massachusetts, Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield and Sharon Salzberg founded the Insight Meditation Center in 1972, bringing Theravadin practices to Westerners (Fields, 1992, 320).

With less than a century and a half of presence in the United States, Buddhism was beginning to mature by the 1980's as an established presence in the American religious landscape. New Western teachers began to train and instruct, such as John Daido Looi (ordained in 1983) and Gil Fronsdal (ordained in 1982). Westerners continued to take on leadership roles and succeed Asian-born teachers; Ozel Tendzin (Thomas Rich) succeeded Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in 1987. This is not to suggest that the cord connecting American Buddhism to Asia was cut: Thich Nhat Hanh's presence has steadily grown in the US and would lead to the founding of many affiliated local sanghas (a dharma center was founded in 1998 and a monastery in 2002). And perhaps as a mark of its maturity, American Buddhism developed its own scandals, including the sexual indiscretions of Richard Baker that forced his departure from the San Francisco Zen Center (Prebish, 1999. 15).

This pattern of growth and indigenization has continued down to the present. In the 1990's Western teachers such as Pema Chödrön have appeared. Students of the first Western Zen teachers have now become teachers in their own right. There is now an association for such teachers – the American Zen Teachers Association. Connection with Asia is still maintained, allowing for cross-pollination. Shodo Harada Roshi, for example, maintains a strong connection to the West both from his Japanese centre and from a base in Washington State. The first Thai Forest tradition monastery in America was established in California by Ajahn Chah's organization in 1995. At the time of writing there are 374 Theravada, 1,072 Mahayana, 622 Vajrayana and 184 non-sectarian Buddhist centres in the United States registered with the World Buddhist Directory, making for 2,252 centres in total (World Buddhist Directory, 2011).

Chapter 6: The form and function of America's correctional system

In the American correctional system few things are permitted and much is forbidden... at least until challenged through the efforts of inmates and sympathetic outsiders. This has been the experience of many of the volunteers I interviewed. To understand the starting point of such challenges as well as to throw light on both Buddhist volunteers and their work, we need to understand something of the corrections system – the correctional facilities, those who work in them, those who make their homes within their walls as well as the legal framework which continues to help define acceptable spiritual practice ‘on the inside.’

The practice environment – America's correctional facilities⁵

Buddhist prison outreach and practice happen within the confines of a byzantine system of correctional facilities spread across the United States. It is not possible to understand Buddhist prison outreach without first grasping the basic characteristics of the prison environment. This is because the nature of the system shapes the sort of volunteer initiatives possible both in terms of what can be offered and what is needed by Buddhists practicing on the inside. It also may in part explain why volunteers work within it.

⁵ This is of necessity a thumbnail sketch of the US correctional system and one focused on the interstices with Buddhist prison outreach. For more detailed discussion see Bosworth, Mary. *The US Federal Prison System*. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, CA. 2002.

The consensus view of the volunteers I interviewed is that this is a punitive system, seen as functioning for the economic benefit of private corporations⁶ and the towns where prisons are located⁷ – “warehousing people for profit,”⁸ as one informant put it. Former Washington state Buddhist prison chaplain and current volunteer, Kobai Scott Whitney, states flatly “there is nothing healing or corrective about prisons in the United States” (2003, 15). Whether or not these perspectives are accurate, the fact remains that this is the lens through which volunteers view the American corrections system.

Physically, the US corrections system is, to use Solzhenitsyn’s term, a vast ‘archipelago’ of facilities across the country, administered by different agencies, both public and private, and providing many different security levels from minimum to administrative maximum.⁹ As of 2005 there were 1,719 prisons operated by the states and 102 run by the federal government (through the Bureau of Prisons). Private corporations managed 415 of these prisons (Stephan, 2008, 2). Counties or cities typically manage the 2,876 jails across the USA (Sabol and Minton, 2008, 2). In addition, tribal authorities and the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs operate 83 facilities throughout the country for aboriginal peoples (Minton,

⁶ It is difficult to contest this perspective. For example, Corrections Corporation of America, a large private contractor, set “a new record for revenue” and posted a net profit of more than US\$130 million in 2007. Corrections Corporation of America. *Annual Report*. Nashville: 2007: 1-12.

⁷ Fremont county Colorado actually purchased the land for the construction of ADX Florence, a federal prison, in large part because of the expected economic contributions and jobs the prison would bring. Time Magazine, 5 Nov. 2006, online edition).

⁸ Volunteer A interviewed by telephone with notes taken. November 10, 2008. Except where informants have given explicit permission to be quoted by name I will refer to them anonymously.

⁹ Administrative maximum, or ‘ADMAX,’ is the highest level of security in the US corrections system. Only ADX Florence (Colorado) is rated at this level. It is essentially a prison within a prison that houses inmates, typically terrorists, organized crime and gang figures as well as violent and disruptive offenders, in solitary confinement.

2008, 3). The total number of correctional facilities in the United States is 4,780 or about one for every 63,000 people.¹⁰ In absolute numbers, the United States imprisons more people than any other country on the globe, as this table demonstrates:

Jurisdiction	Prison population per 100,000 people
World	145
United States	756
Mexico	207
New Zealand	185
England and Wales	153
Australia	129
Canada	116
France	96
Germany	89
Japan	63

Source: International Centre for Prison Studies (Walmsley, 2007, 2-18).

Thus, not only is there a certain scale to the US penal system by virtue of the size of the country's population but there is an intensity to the system derived by the 'race to incarcerate' reflected in the ratio of inmates to general population.

¹⁰ Counting only jails and prisons and excluding juvenile facilities and military prisons (many of which are located outside the United States on military bases). By way of comparison there are 5,708 registered hospitals in the USA, or about one for every 53,000 people, according to the American Hospital Association (2008, 1).

Structurally, the United States differs from many other nations in the complexity of its corrections system and the many-layered facility management accountabilities – local, state, federal and military. By contrast, Canada has a two-tiered correctional system comprised of federal facilities and provincial institutions (there is also one small military detention barracks (Government of Canada, 2006)). Because of sentencing rules (offenders sentenced to two or more years serve time in a federal facility), the two layers collaborate closely. Australia uses a fully devolved model with responsibility for corrections entirely in the hands of state governments with the exception of a military detention barracks managed by the Australian Defence Force (Government of Australia, 2008). Other jurisdictions operate a single national system, such as Ireland, whose 14 prisons are all administered by one national body – the Irish Prison Service (Government of Ireland, 2007). In the United Kingdom, the National Offender Management Service (United Kingdom government, 2009), part of the Ministry of Justice, has responsibility for all prisons, public and private in the country. South Africa’s 240 prisons are administered by a single entity – the Department of Correctional Services, using a regionalized approach (with six regions), reporting to a Commissioner of Correctional Services and ultimately the Minister of Correctional Services (South Africa, government of, 2008).

Each element of the US corrections system is governed differently – county and city jails answerable to the governing municipality, state prisons to the relevant state correctional authority, private facilities answerable to the contracting organization (state or federal),

federal facilities answerable to the Bureau of Prisons, aboriginal facilities to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and military prisons to the relevant arm of the US military (air force, army, marine corps or navy). Structurally, there is coordination between elements that must collaborate. Local authorities may, for example, house for a time inmates who have been committed to state authority following sentencing. Military corrections authorities, such as the US Air Force, may collaborate with local law enforcement and the federal Bureau of Prisons (United States, government of, US Air Force, 2009). And 15 per cent of federal inmates are not housed in Bureau of Prisons-managed facilities but instead in local, state or private institutions (United States, government of, Bureau of Prisons, 2009). There is also some coordination, largely through organizations such as the North American Association of Wardens and Superintendants, the American Correctional Association, the National Institute of Corrections and the American Correctional Chaplains' Association. But there is no monolithic national corrections authority or even a cohesive national network. It is a large and complex collection of correctional facilities with different administrations and policies, posing challenges for volunteers seeking to navigate and access it.

This corrections system is broken down into federal, state and local administrations, each with facilities of varying levels of security. In the nomenclature of corrections there are prisons – facilities for housing inmates sentenced to more than a year of incarceration (or awaiting execution), and there are jails – facilities for housing inmates awaiting trial, sentencing or transfer to other facilities (psychiatric hospitals or juvenile facilities, for example) or those serving sentences of less than a year. An example of a prison is Pulaski

State Prison, a maximum-security facility for 1,048 women operated by the Georgia Department of Corrections (government of Georgia, 2008). An example of a jail is the Erie County Correctional Facility of Western New York state, operated by the Erie County Sheriff's Office and housing 1,070 inmates (2008). Prison inmate populations tend to be more stable while those in jails are more transient. This transiency, according to several of my informants, can inhibit development of Buddhist outreach programs.

The security level of a prison also affects access and can shape the nature of any Buddhist outreach offered. While rating systems differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, there is typically a progression from minimum, relatively open security to maximum, close, security. An inmate at a minimum security facility like California Men's Colony's West Facility will typically live in a dormitory setting while an inmate housed in a Security Housing Unit¹¹ or similar 'supermax' facility such as at California State Prison, Corcoran (California state government, 2008) will be confined alone in a cell for much of the day and may be escorted to and from a shower or exercise yard in handcuffs. Inmates housed at ADX Florence, the nation's most secure facility, are so isolated that they participate in religious services through closed circuit television connecting them to a chapel elsewhere in the prison (Taylor, 1998). Even the physical space allotted in a less intensive security environment challenges an inmate's opportunity to practice, as Buddhist practitioner, Calvin Malone, notes:

¹¹ A Security Housing Unit (SHU) is the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's equivalent of a 'Supermax' security level, above maximum.

Imagine, for a moment, living in a 60 square foot room. Put in that room a steel table, shelves and coat racks, a steel bench bolted to the floor, bunk beds running the width of the room, and a TV stand against one wall and a ladder on the opposite wall. This leaves about 28 square feet of unobstructed floor space. Now add to this two people – yourself and a cellmate.

(Malone, 2008, 55)

The very structure of a prison may also affect outreach programs; for example, in a prison with many widely-spaced units it would be difficult to coordinate a group practice for inmates from different units, who each may have different visiting and recreational schedules. In Florida the Marion Correctional Institution benefits from multi-purpose building with education rooms and an auditorium. This means that there is more space for volunteers to run programs simultaneously, instead of competing for access to a single chapel.¹² Volunteers working in a high security facility may not be able to organize meditation groups at all while those working with inmates rated high risk may have to participate in ‘non-contact’ meetings through Plexiglas. Prisons are challenging practice environments for inmates and equally challenging outreach locales for volunteers. The adaptation strategies used by both are varied and include correspondence, telephone conversations, one-on-one visits and group sessions.

¹² Rev. Larry Durham, Senior Chaplain, Marion Correctional Institution. Personal communication, telephone interview. Notes taken. March 18, 2009.

There is one other dimension of this environment worth discussing – the human, comprised of the administrators, correctional officers, chaplains, social workers and others who staff correctional facilities. Volunteers and employees themselves report a wide variance in attitudes and experience among corrections staff. The general view among volunteers, inmates and some prison employees is that correctional officers (COs), the ‘front-line’ workers in prisons and jails, hold regressive attitudes about corrections, often act arbitrarily and generally dislike inmates. Once again, this may be disputed by corrections officers, administrators and others but the fact remains that this is how volunteers perceive these human elements of the corrections system. Fleet Maull, founder of the Prison Dharma Network, observes “the dominant culture among security staff ... tends toward negative and demeaning treatment of inmates and other staff.”¹³ Religious staff confirm this position – “COs are part of the problem,” reported one prison chaplain.¹⁴ Diana Lion, founder of the Buddhist Peace Foundation’s prison program, concurs: “One of my first times inside, a correctional officer was painfully arrogant to several prisoners” (2008, 31). In many instances inmates also agree with this assessment and give a possible motivation for the behaviour: “ ... some of the guards feel that we are bad criminals and deserve to be abused...”¹⁵ Such abuse takes many forms including intimidation as well as physical and sexual assault. This contributes to a pervasive atmosphere of potential threat from correctional officers as well as causing “deep psychological and emotional trauma” (United States, government of, Department of Justice, 2005, 7) to the affected inmate.

¹³ Maull, Fleet. Comment posted on the Prison Dharma Network social networking website. Accessed December 19, 2008. <http://prisondharmanetwork.ning.com/forum/topics/787784:Topic:30091>

¹⁴ Chaplain A, located in the mid-west. Personal communication. Interviewed by telephone with notes taken. April 10, 2008.

¹⁵ Inmate R, housed in a California prison. Personal communication. October 5, 2008.

In addition to confrontational encounters, inmates report a lack of respect for their spiritual practices, including correctional officers seizing religious paraphernalia for alleged security reasons (United States, government of, Department of Justice, 2004, section 14) when the actual intent was to antagonize or upset. In one instance, inmate R stated that his prayer beads had been seized for security reasons and not returned. In R's opinion, the seizure was punishment for a vocal complaint regarding an instance of sexual assault.¹⁶

Prison chaplains, working under the authority of the warden, manage the spiritual dimension of inmates' lives. Although the warden or superintendant has ultimate oversight over all aspects of religious and spiritual practice (and indeed over every operational aspect of a facility), "institution chaplains are responsible for managing religious activities within the institution" (United States, government of, Department of Justice, 2004, section 10). Unlike faith-based volunteers, when chaplains are compensated by the state or federal governments they have a duty that extends beyond the faith group they emerge from and represent; they must enable the exercise of all sincere religious traditions, a principle enshrined in federal regulation. When addressing the needs of a faith different than his or her own, a chaplain may either rely on an external volunteer or contractor or appoint an inmate to lead a service (United States, government of, Department of Justice, 2004, section 10). This means that it is the chaplain (possibly working with a coordinator of volunteers or manager of inmate affairs, if available) who assembles, trains and coordinates religious volunteers (Drum, 2007, 5). The chaplain may also oversee the recruitment and

¹⁶ Inmate R housed in a California prison. Personal communication by letter. September 10, 2008.

deployment of contract religious providers (usually hired to supplement the chaplain's capacity or to address the needs of a large religious faith in the facility, such as Islam, for example) (Beckford and Gilliat, 1998, 182). This puts the chaplain in a gatekeeper role for volunteers and contractors, including those of other faiths. This role may extend to enabling access (through screening of volunteers and assessment of need) and shaping practice (by determining reasonable meeting times and locations). However, there is a cost in terms of time and effort as Nieto observed in California: "state chaplains spend considerable time organizing and training volunteers to assist in their institutional programs" (Nieto and Johnston-Dodds, 2001, 11).

Chaplains see themselves as "professionals" (Drum, 2007, 5) as distinct from the religious volunteers they may work alongside and rely on. They have a professional association with a long and established history (the American Correctional Chaplains' Association), codified responsibilities and regulated pay scales. In the federal system a chaplain may be paid in the range of US\$57,700 to US\$89,200 (United States, government of, Office of Personnel Management, 2009). State compensation varies and appears to be lower than equivalent federal positions. A recent job posting by the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services offered US\$38,594 to US\$61,427 for a chaplain position (2007) while the state of Pennsylvania offered a range of US\$41,017 to US\$62,338 for a chaplain in its corrections system (2009).

Chaplains are overwhelmingly Christian.¹⁷ Jewish, Muslim and Native American chaplain positions also exist in some systems.¹⁸ There have been several Buddhist chaplains in the correctional system – Kobai Scott Whitney served in the Washington state corrections system. Richard Torres is a chaplain in the Oregon state corrections system, following Karuna Thompson who held the first Buddhist chaplain role in Oregon. This appears to have been largely due to the individual initiative of Tom O’Connor, administrator of religious services.¹⁹ Reverend Alan Urasaki is employed in the federal system in Hawaii and a 2001 survey of the California corrections system reported one contract employee (not officially classified as a civil service chaplain) providing Buddhist spiritual care, but they have been few in number (Nieto and Johnston-Dodds, 2001, 6).

Chaplains have a multi-faith mandate to accommodate all “sincere religious exercise” (Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, 2007, 1).²⁰ Although the policy as it exists in the federal corrections system (US government, Department of Justice, 2004) is quite clear about ecumenism, the on-the-ground reality is often quite different. Familiarity with Christianity likely makes chaplains and prison administration more inclined to encourage this faith in their facilities and programs. This is evidenced by the development of so-called ‘God pods’ – segregated units of a prison where adherence to Christianity

¹⁷ Journalist Silva J.A. Talvi notes that, at least among the prisons administered by Corrections Corporation of America, the “... vast majority...[of chaplains] are indeed Christian” (2005). This opinion is confirmed by Chaplain Gary Friedman, director of communications for the American Correctional Chaplains’ Association and a Jewish Chaplain in the Washington state corrections system. “It is my observation that in most places they are overwhelmingly Christians.” Personal communication, December 21, 2008.

¹⁸ For example, California introduced the Muslim chaplain position in 1981 and the Native American chaplain role in 1990 (Nieto, Marcus and Johnston-Dodds, 2001, 3).

¹⁹ Telephone interview with Richard Torres, March 25, 2009. Notes taken.

²⁰ The emphasis is in the original, suggesting a degree of distrust of prisoners’ motivations for adopting spiritual traditions.

(often Protestant and fundamentalist) is a condition of residency and rewarded with perks²¹. Private prison contractor, Corrections Corporation of America, has an established relationship with several evangelistic Christian organizations, such as the Institute in Basic Life Principles.²² Furthermore, a review of faith-based groups accredited with the Georgia Department of Corrections for its Faith and Character program shows 59 Protestant Christian organizations, two Muslim and 11 of undefined affiliation (Georgia state government, n.d.). Protestant Christian organizations thus represent 82 per cent of the total number of partner agencies in Georgia, significantly higher than the national prevalence of this faith – 51.3 per cent (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008, 5). Even accounting for regional differences in prevalence, this would still suggest a bias in favour of Protestant Christian faith partners. Chaplain Gary Friedman, responsible for attending to the spiritual needs of the Jewish inmates of Washington state, notes that although in theory a chaplain of any faith should be able to satisfy all religious needs within a facility (with the assistance of outside contractors and volunteers, if needed), “how this actually manifests itself, however, is something else as unprofessional staff chaplains are notorious for proselytizing and/or obstructing minority faith practices.”²³ Kobai Scott Whitney calls this “peevish power plays” (Whitney, 2003, 64) and quotes Ohio Buddhist inmate, Gunaratna Sarika’s experience with a chaplain as an example:

²¹ Such arrangements began in Texas in 1997 and have flourished under the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives established in 1998 by the Bush Administration. Henriques and Lehren.

²² See Talvi.

²³ Personal communication by email. December 21, 2008.

On one occasion he [the chaplain] sort of went off the deep-end and called us all Satanists, idol-worshipers, and a few other things... Sometimes our meetings would be canceled without prior notice or without a reason. For a time the administration would not work with our outside volunteers.

(Whitney, 2003, 64-5)

Yet corrections authorities are highly reliant on volunteers, as one Texas-based chaplain observes: “there is no way I could adequately provide for the religious needs of the offenders there without lots of help” (Drum, 2007, 5). In fact, as Dr. Vance Drum observes, volunteers contribute the equivalent of 312 full-time positions each year (Drum, 2007, 5). A relationship exists that enables paid chaplains to deliver the mandated religious services that are either not of their particular faith or beyond their capacities. In addition, although chaplains often identify with and support the custodial role of prisons (Sundt and Cullen, 1998, 271), they share with Buddhist volunteers a common view of spiritual work as reformative, and of rehabilitation as important (Sundt and Cullen, 2002, 380-1).²⁴

While spiritual counseling to inmates may contain elements of traditional counseling as practiced by mental health professionals and social workers, there remains a divide between religious figures and health care providers. This is driven by a perceived difference between evidence-based health care and faith-based practices and takes the form of distrust and lack of cooperation between social workers and mental health workers and chaplains

²⁴ Compare with the Prison Dharma Network’s self-defined mission to “provide prisoners, and those who work with them, with the most effective contemplative tools for self-transformation and rehabilitation.” <http://www.prisondharmanetwork.org> Accessed March 9, 2009.

and spiritual volunteers. Thus, although spiritual counseling and pastoral care can be substitutes for mental health services where they are lacking or in short supply, there is limited cooperation, support or recognition for religious volunteers (including Buddhists) from mental health professionals. However, where Buddhist practices are secularized as contemplative (such as mindfulness-based stress reduction), they do find greater acceptance.²⁵

Prison administrators and chaplains are caught in the tension caused by balancing religious freedom and the orderly functioning of the facility. It is unsurprising that much of the discussion of faiths outside of the 'mainstream' focuses on assessing the legitimacy of traditions and their specific practices, paraphernalia (prayer mats, headwear, prayer beads etc.) and visitors and determining 'permissible' spiritual practice.²⁶ A chaplain interviewed for this thesis indicated that fear of cults, politicized faiths and of encouraging unauthorized or disruptive behaviour (particularly among Muslims) caused him to be cautious and conservative in evaluating faiths outside of Christianity and Judaism and permitting them access²⁷. Although the need to rely on volunteers and frequent alignment of principles on the value of spiritual programming may suggest that chaplains would support Buddhist volunteers, lack of familiarity with Buddhist tradition and practice and religious prejudice may mute such support.

²⁵ Reverend David Robinson, telephone interview. April 14, 2009. Notes taken.

²⁶ See, for example, the discussion of federal accreditation and security screening of Muslim religious services providers. *A Review of the Bureau of Prison's Selection of Muslim Religious Service Providers*. US government. Department of Justice. Office of the Inspector General. Washington, DC: 2004.

²⁷ Chaplain A, located in the mid-west. Personal communication. Interviewed by telephone with notes taken. April 10, 2008.

The portrait that emerges is of a system of correctional facilities managed by different agencies with differing approaches and staffed by people with widely varying opinions about non-Christian faiths, the balance of facility security and freedom of religious expression as well as the rights of prisoners. Volunteers must manage the personalities, forge relationships and negotiate the biases of correctional officers, senior administration as well as chaplains in order to access a facility.

The sangha - inmate profiles

The inmate population in the US is not a mirror of society at large but rather a highly selective sampling of its members with specific health concerns, ethnicities, social backgrounds and life experiences vastly over-represented. While there are many aspects of an inmate profile that may be considered, it would seem that those affecting familiarity with, and perception of, Buddhism as well as cognitive and learning ability would be most relevant in understanding how Buddhist prison outreach programs are developed and implemented.²⁸

A survey of state and federal prisons conducted in 2007 (West and Sabol, 2008, 5) found that 39 per cent of sentenced male inmates (the overwhelming majority of prisoners) are African-American, 21 per cent Hispanic and 33 per cent white. The remaining seven per cent represented Asians, Aboriginal peoples, those reporting as two races and Pacific

Islanders. More recent data from the states themselves confirms this portrait with some variations – Californian inmates, for example, are more likely to be Hispanic (38.9 per cent) (California state government, 2009) while those in New York are more likely to be African-American (61 per cent) (New York state government, 2007, i-ii). What is clear is that there are few Asians, the group from which ethnic Buddhists are most commonly drawn, in the US corrections system. They are typically classified as ‘other’ along with a range of other minorities, and (together with the other ethnic groups in that category) accounting for less than six per cent of any state prison population. We can expect that there would be regional variations, reflecting higher concentrations of Asians in the un-imprisoned population, in states such as Hawaii, Washington, California and New York, for example, as this table shows:

Jurisdiction	Asian population (%)
USA	4.4
Hawaii	39.9
California	12.4
Washington	6.7
New York	6.7

Source: United States government, US Census, 2007, Table M0204.

The spiritual traditions inmates declare further suggest unfamiliarity with Buddhism. Most inmates claim Christianity as their faith – for example, 57 per cent of New York state inmates are Protestant or Catholic Christians (New York state government, 2007, i-ii).²⁹ Islam remains the second most prevalent spiritual tradition in the US corrections system (New York state government, 2007, i-ii).³⁰ Very few states report religious traditions of inmates in great detail; of those that do, Buddhism remains very much a minority spiritual tradition (Georgia, for example, reports a prevalence of 0.12 per cent, or 102 inmates) (Georgia state government, 2009, 10).

Most US inmates have low levels of academic achievement and limited literacy skills; many may also suffer from learning disabilities. Examining data from 1990 to 2003, the Illinois Department of Corrections found that “the typical... inmate [has] an eleventh grade education” (Small, 2003, 9).³¹ The federal government found that 39 per cent of inmates in state and federal facilities had not graduated from high school (United States, government of, General Accounting Office, 1997, 47). In contrast the majority (84 per cent) of Americans 25 or older have obtained a high school diploma (Crissey, 2009, 3). Admittedly there is variation by race with whites most likely to have completed high school (87 per cent), African-Americans less likely (80 per cent) and Hispanics least likely (61 per cent) (Crissey, 2009, 3). From a functional level, California reports a seventh grade inmate

²⁹ Religious affiliation is typically self-reported at the time of admission to prison so it is a good indicator of the spiritual tradition an individual was raised in or most familiar with at that time.

³⁰ Looking at New York state data alone, Islam is claimed by 13 per cent of inmates.

³¹ Admittedly, the profiles apply only to those who participated in this intervention program but I would contend that the variance between this sub-set of the prison population and the larger inmate population is small.

literacy level (California state government, 2009) while New York state claims that 33 per cent of its inmates read at an eighth grade level or lower (New York state government, 2007). Exacerbating this situation is the largely unreported issue of learning disabilities among inmates. Raymond Brown, at the time director of the National Institute of Corrections, wrote in 1989 that: “although the precise number of inmates who are mentally retarded or learning disabled is unknown, studies have shown that a significant percentage of prison inmates are among this special needs population” (Coffey, 1989, ix). An earlier study of Louisiana inmates found 42 per cent were “learning deficient” (Bell, 1984, 37). While recent data are lacking, it does seem clear that the prevalence of learning disabilities is much higher in prisons than in the non-incarcerated population.

Similarly, severe mental illness is much more common in correctional facilities than in American society in general – six to 15 per cent of persons in city and county jails and 10 to 15 per cent of persons in state prisons have a severe mental illness (Lamb and Weinberger, 1998, 483) versus a prevalence of five per cent in the United States as a whole (Kessler, Chiu Demler and Walters, 2005, 617). When the definition is loosened to simply ‘mental illness’ the prevalence jumps – 56 per cent of state and 45 per cent of federal inmates suffer from mental illness (James and Glaze, 2005, 1).

Buddhist prison outreach programs are thus delivered to people who may be unfamiliar with Buddhism (initially at least, unless the inmate is from a Buddhist background), under-

educated, potentially with a learning disability or possibly mentally ill. To complicate factors, many inmates also have a history of alcohol or substance abuse.³²

It has been suggested that prisons are a form of monastery (Brahm, 2005, 207-8). In a poetic way this may be so but the reality is far different on both philosophical and functional levels. The Theravadin monk, Ajahn Brahm, notes the dimension of free will that divides the two institutions – monks and nuns choose to live an ascetic lifestyle, at least at North American monastic institutions such as Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, while inmates have it thrust upon them (Brahm, 2005, 207-8). There are also functional differences. Few confined to a correctional facility abide by either Buddhist ethical principles or *vinaya* (monastic rules). In fact, as Buddhist inmate, Calvin Malone, notes, “prison is a... microcosm of life outside prison walls without the veneer of societal civility – and race is a constant issue.” He further contends that the prison environment serves to “... [r]emove the laws that help maintain equality, remove human rights, destroy hope and nurture despair” (Malone, 2008, 17). Prison Dharma Network founder (and former inmate), Fleet Maull, also contests this view:

Apart from the similarities, prison is nothing like a monastery or any other environment designed for dharma practice, and it could be just a fantasy trip to view it as such. Noise and chaos are its most pervasive qualities. Next come anger and hostility, and finally there is anxious boredom and an attitude of seeking

³² New York state reports that 71 per cent of inmates have a history of substance abuse and 37 per cent suffer from alcoholism. New York state government. 2007.

entertainment and “killing time.” There is also a feeling of hopelessness that casts a pall over the prison population, especially during the long winter months when the recreation yards close early and there is less to do.

(Mauil, 2005, 4).

The majority of inmates in general do not work to create an environment conducive to Buddhist practice. “I was a monster. I’ve caught so many write-ups I can’t even count,”³³ said one inmate of his criminal activities and violations of prison rules while incarcerated. Part of this is derived from responses to the prison environment and part from the characteristics of the inmates themselves (see above). Prison is an inherently dangerous place and one must adapt simply to survive. In the California corrections system about 9,600 inmates (out of a total of about 172,000) were assaulted in 2006 (California state government, 2009). A study completed in 2000 found that sexual assault is commonplace with one in five inmates in the US Midwest having experienced “pressured or forced sexual contact” (Struckman-Johnson, 2000, 379). Inmates often turn to membership in gangs and race identification to protect themselves. Not showing weakness or allowing loss of face or respect also mitigates the risk of victimization, making confrontational encounters commonplace and often causing petty situations to escalate, as a simple dispute over a stolen object in a cell reveals: “my cellie stole my shit so I had to put my hands on him in a real way.”³⁴ In essence, the inmate who turns the other cheek risks being shanked.³⁵

³³ Inmate B. Quoted in the Human Kindness Foundation newsletter. Spring 2008. A write-up is issued for infractions of prison regulations.

³⁴ M, an inmate at Pelican Bay, a supermax prison in California. Personal communication by letter. May 2006. A cellie is, quite obviously, slang for a cellmate.

Inmates drawn to Buddhism must wrestle with very serious issues such as reconciling Buddhist principles with gang membership or racial affiliation, often with a traditionally non-Buddhist group (for example, African-American groups are often drawn to Islam). They must also determine what amount of overt Buddhist practice is acceptable or if dissimulation is necessary and, if so, to what degree. More fundamentally, the question for inmates is how to practice the compassion that Buddhism calls for in an environment that targets the weak and cultivates violence. For volunteers involved in Buddhist programming, the practice environment and the practitioners will shape the design and provision of outreach efforts and ultimately determine what is possible.

The legal dimension

Prisons and inmates determine the practical impediments and enablers of Buddhist prison outreach. Legal considerations form another dimension, often limiting such outreach by restricting the practice of Buddhism within prison.

Todd Clear, Distinguished Professor of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, writes “I do not know that there was ever a time, in recent history at least, that Buddhism was not allowed to be practiced [in prisons].”³⁵ This is true enough – Buddhism has never

³⁵ A ‘shank’ is an improvised weapon used for puncturing or slashing.

³⁶ Personal communication by email. October 8, 2008.

been formally prohibited in the US correctional system, at least as a belief system distinct from actual practice. However, the nature of what constitutes acceptable practice has been hotly debated.

Buddhist prison outreach has operated in the context of the broader debate about freedom of religious practice in the United States. This has not been reserved to prison settings. The First Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees free exercise of religion and prohibits constraints with the now famous words “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Later views, however, separated the *act* of believing, which is deemed absolute, from the *practice* of a religion, which is not seen in the same light. In *Reynolds v. United States* (1879), the presiding judge wrote that “laws are made for the government of actions, and while they cannot interfere with mere religious belief and opinions, they may with practices.” In *Cantwell v. State of Connecticut* (310 US 296, 1940), the presiding judge similarly found that “[religious] conduct remains subject to regulation for the protection of society.”

This line of reasoning has prevailed and, although the *Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act* (1980) authorizes the Attorney General of the United States to investigate instances of “egregious or flagrant conditions” that would deprive an inmate of his or her constitutional rights, subsequent legislation has reiterated the societal interest argument. Thus the *Religious Freedoms Restoration Act* (1993, partly overturned in 1997) states that the government “shall not substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion” except to further “compelling government interest” and only then in the “least restrictive” way. The

Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (2000) that followed made essentially the same claim: “no government shall impose a substantial burden on the religious exercise of a person residing in or confined to an institution... unless the government demonstrates that imposition of the burden on that person is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest...”

In a prison setting it is typically the administration that determines what is a ‘compelling state interest’ requiring a ‘substantial burden’ on an inmate’s religious freedoms and that imposes the ‘least restrictive’ corrective solution. Court challenges from inmates and their advocates have resulted from perceived unreasonable restrictions, claiming that the principle of compelling government interest has been arbitrarily applied. One such case is that of Douglas Spies, an inmate in North Central Correctional Institution in Marion, Ohio who in 1998 argued that the prison’s informal ‘rule of five’ violated his First Amendment rights. This prison principle required that at least five inmates would have to self-identify as Buddhists and request religious services in order to be able to access the prison chapel and obtain permission for a Buddhist authority from outside the prison to conduct services (Douglas Spies v. George Voinovich *et al*, 1998).

For Buddhism in prison the landmark case is *Cruz. v. Beto* of 1971. Fred Arispe Cruz was an inmate of the Texas Department of Corrections, which, he claimed was “... obstructing [his] efforts to adhere to his religious faith, Buddhism...” The Supreme Court confirmed

Cruz' First Amendment rights during a time of review of law enforcement standards and practices³⁷ as well as challenges from groups such as American Indians.³⁸

Cruz. v. Beto “helped make it clear that non-Christian inmates must be accorded some rights within US penal institutions. But in practice *some rights* is the operative phrase – not *equal rights* with Christian inmates” (Whitney, 2003, 19).³⁹ This is the reality for Buddhist volunteers. Their spiritual tradition is often viewed as strange and potentially threatening, in some instances requiring inmates to mount legal challenges to press for religious freedoms. It is a reality too of restrictions on practice with the invocation of facility security as rationale as chaplains often functioning as gatekeepers controlling access.

³⁷ Such as the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, established in 1971 and which reported its findings in 1974.

³⁸ Aboriginal challenges led to the 1978 *American Indian Religious Freedom Act*.

³⁹ Italics in the original.

Chapter 7: Buddhist prison outreach in Canada⁴⁰

Although my research interest (and the focus of this dissertation) is Buddhism in US prisons, my personal experience is as a volunteer in the Canadian corrections system, specifically the system of the central province of Ontario. I have found commonalities and divergences between the Canadian and the US environments, which are described below. Of principal interest is that, although the corrections environment in the United States has very high rates of incarceration, persistent elements such as racism and incipient dangers are common to both the Canadian and the US systems, and most probably those of other developed nations.

The practice environment

On the surface Canada operates a relatively benign correctional system in comparison with many other nations, such as the United States. As a nation, Canada imprisons fewer people than most. While the world prison population rate is 158 per 100,000, Canada's rate falls well below, coming in at 116 per 100,000. The United States, lead the world with a prison population rate of 756 per 100,000. Comparator countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom have rates of 129 and 153 per 100,000, respectively (Walmsley: 2008).

⁴⁰ This chapter is based on 'Buddhism Behind Bars,' a paper I presented at the Buddhism in Canada conference at the University of British Columbia, Canada, on October 15th 2010. Publication of this paper in a volume of the proceedings of the conference (by McGill University Press) is pending.

The most current figures we have on the scale of the corrections system are drawn from 2004. At that time there were 12,641 inmates housed in 70 federal institutions and 19,366 inmates in 116 provincial or territorial institutions (Canada, government of, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 18, 22, 41 and 43). Institutions are classified according to security level, from the ultra-secure Special Handling Unit within the Regional Reception Centre in Quebec to the minimum security Pê Sâkâstêw Centre in Alberta.

Inmates in provincial and territorial facilities typically serve sentences of two years or less. They may also be housed in these facilities on remand, meaning they are awaiting trial. Federal inmates typically serve sentences of longer than two years. This means that provincial and territorial facilities experience more ‘churn’ in their populations while federal facilities have more stable inmate populations. This has implications for outreach services and other programming as populations are unstable and membership in groups like meditation classes fluctuates.

The physical structures of prisons also affect outreach efforts. Traditional cellblock architecture (or ‘Auburn’ architecture, after the New York state prison that served as a model for other facilities) such as at Kingston Penitentiary or ‘pod’ unit design such as at Maplehurst Correctional Complex pose challenges for inmate movement and segregation that shape what sort of program delivery is feasible. For example, Maplehurst houses inmates in 11 units, each physically separate from the other. Therefore, any program

delivered in the prison, such as a sangha meeting or meditation class, would need to be focused on one unit only, thereby limiting the number of inmates who could participate. Security level also affects the sort of outreach that is possible, as the Office of the Correctional Investigator notes: “The physical conditions of confinement are becoming more restrictive. There are limited opportunities for inmate association, movement and assembly at the higher security levels.” (Sapers: 2010, 32).

A dangerous place to practice

Although the incarceration rates may suggest a benign correctional environment, there is evidence to the contrary. In the United States federal inmates murdered 13 fellow prisoners in 2008, giving a homicide rate of 7.5 per 100,000 (United States, government of, Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics). State level homicide rates (from 2002) were lower at four per 100,000 (Mumola, 2005, 3). Statistics Canada reports just two inmate murders in provincial and territorial facilities from 2001 to 2004 (the most recent year for which data are available), yielding a homicide rate of 10 per 100,000 (based on actual-in counts of inmates) (Canada, government of, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 39). Yet there were 11 in custody inmate murders in the federal system over the same period, yielding a homicide rate of 29 per 100,000 (48). When this is compared to the homicide rate for Canada as whole – two deaths per 100,000 (Silver, 2006, 3), we can see that federal correctional facilities are sometimes dangerous places, more so than their American counterparts. This is obliquely acknowledged by the Correctional Service of

Canada, which claims: “some deaths in custody may not be preventable.” (Canada, government of, Correctional Service Canada, 2009).

Homicide isn't the only threat to inmates. In just the first six months of 2008 there were 151 incidents of violence in the federal prison system, including not only murder but also hostage taking, assaults and fights (Canada, government of, Correctional Service Canada, 2008). Prison sexual assault is also an acknowledged problem, with concomitant implications for health, such as HIV infection.

Gangs also exacerbate the level of violence. A 2004 Correctional Service of Canada report found that five per cent of inmates in the federal system had an affiliation with organized crime and that these inmates were more likely to be responsible for in-prison crimes such as assaults on inmates and staff (Nakekh and Stys, 2004, i, 3).

Inmates may also be exposed to violence from the prison administration. In 2009-2010, there were 1,372 ‘use of force’ incidents in the federal system, in which correctional authorities applied physical measures to ensure compliance with facility policies. During these, inmates may find themselves on the receiving end of the Institutional Emergency Response Team (a tactical unit). They may also be exposed to an inflammatory agent. Inmates were injured in 14 per cent of the use of force interventions that occurred in 2009-2010 (Canada, government of, Correctional Service Canada, 2010, 3, 6).

On a more banal level, prisons are noisy, crowded places. Privacy is at a minimum; most acts, including spiritual practice, are conducted under the eyes of other inmates. Facilities for spiritual practice may be limited. A multi-use room may, for example, need to be shared among various faith groups, including Buddhists. These features of the prison landscape affect practice and outreach opportunities. So too does the potential for violence that rests beneath the surface of Canada's correctional facilities and which has implications for Buddhist practice on the inside. While violence is seldom directed against spiritual volunteers, for inmates the practice and maintenance of such an overtly pacific faith as Buddhism poses challenges, especially in light of the potential violence inherent in the correctional system.

Inmate characteristics⁴¹

The vast majority of prison inmates are men – just 11 per cent of those confined to a provincial or territorial facility are women and only 4.7 per cent of those in the federal system were female. Most of these inmates are between the ages of 20 and 39. In the federal system 69 per cent of inmates are in this age bracket; in the provincial and territorial systems 65 per cent of sentenced and 67 per cent of remanded inmates are in this cohort. Racially, Canada's prisons do not reflect the racial profile of the country outside the walls. First Nations people are vastly over-represented – 21 per cent of inmates in Canadian prisons are Aboriginal as opposed to 4.4 per cent of the national population as a whole. Most inmates are single – 62 per cent of those in provincial or territorial

⁴¹ Inmate statistics in this section are drawn from Calverley, 2010, table 9.

systems and 51 per cent of those in the federal system. They are likely to be poorly educated with almost half (45 per cent) lacking a high school diploma.

Inmates are usually assessed for 'needs,' meaning special characteristics that warrant the provision of services to enable the prisoner to adapt to the correctional environment.

Inmates are screened for seven needs: attitude, social interaction with criminal associates, substance abuse, employment issues, family or marital concerns, community functioning and emotional stability. Almost all inmates suffer from some form of substance abuse – 92 per cent in provincial and territorial systems and 73 per cent in the federal system. The majority of inmates also have attitudes that would make prison challenging for them – 77 per cent and 68 per cent in the provincial and territorial and federal systems respectively. Mental illness is also prevalent at rates above the national norm – one in four inmates has a diagnosed mental illness compared to a prevalence of one in five in the general population. The Office of the Correctional Investigator notes “federal penitentiaries are fast becoming our nation's largest psychiatric facilities and repositories for the mentally ill.” (Sapers, 2010, 6).

From a faith perspective, most inmates who declare a religion at the time of admission to a correctional system are Christian. The following table shows the faith affiliations of those federal inmates who declared a religion (as at 2005) (Canada, government of, Corrections Service Canada, 2006, 3):

Faith	Number of Inmates
Christian - Catholic	9,194
Christian - Protestant	4,519
Muslim	761
Native Spiritual	753
Buddhist	387
Jewish	159
Sikh	102

We can cautiously estimate the number of Buddhist inmates in the entire correctional system of Canada using the caveat that the federal numbers are five years old, that there are no equivalent data from provincial and territorial systems and that inmate populations fluctuate. Using the ratio of inmates in both the federal and provincial/territorial systems and the number of Buddhist inmates in the federal system (and assuming that the proportion of Buddhist inmates in the systems would be the same), we can deduce that there were 592 Buddhist inmates in the provincial/territorial systems, making for a rough total of 1,000 declared Buddhist prisoners in all Canadian prisons.

In sum then, the typical inmate who might be served by Buddhist prison outreach is likely to be a young man with limited supports outside of prison, a social network comprised on criminal peers, low education and a possible mental illness. In addition to coping with his

time behind bars, he may also be struggling with substance abuse and other pressures. His faith at the time of incarceration is unlikely to be Buddhist.

The right to believe, permission to practice

As a nation, Canada offers almost unfettered opportunity for religious belief. Section two of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms enshrines this:

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

(a) Freedom of conscience and religion

The *Canadian Human Rights Act* (s. 3(1)) strengthens this by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of religion.

Furthermore, Canada takes its multicultural position seriously and, since religion is often bound tightly together with ethnic identity – as with Judaism and Sikhism for example, policy within Canadian government institutions has reflected this, emphasizing tolerance, diversity and accommodation of both faith and ethnicity. Correctional systems are no exception. For example, Correctional Service Canada has produced an official Religious and Spiritual Accommodation Manual for the use of its staff, especially chaplains.

However, the Charter does contain language that can act as a brake on religious freedom, subjecting it to “reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society” (section one). In the corrections environment these reasonable limits are articulated thusly:

An inmate is entitled to reasonable opportunities to freely and openly participate in, and express, religion or spirituality, subject to such reasonable limits as proscribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons. (*Corrections and Conditional Release Act 1992 c20, section 25*).

We see then that, on a practical level, there is a security trump card, offering opportunity to restrict spiritual practice in the name of protecting the safety of the facility, staff and inmates. Freedom of religious practice is, therefore, in the hands of the administration both for policy and execution. Security is *sin qua non* for corrections and it is unsurprising that religious and spiritual practice would be secondary to it. On an official policy level this may take the form of restricting group gatherings (limiting group size or preventing intermingling of inmates from different units within a facility). On an informal basis, it may take the shape of correctional officers disposing of religious materials during a cell search or rejection of some religious literature because it advocates intolerance.

Inmates then are free to believe what they wish but their practice is defined by the institutions they are confined to. For Buddhist prison outreach this means that all programming will be shaped, influenced, defined and approved by administration both at the conceptual, design level and ‘on the ground’ in the facilities.

Approaches to outreach

Inmates, faced with the challenges described above, may find solo Buddhist practice a daunting task within the prison system. They may turn to the facility chaplain. He or she, although ‘multi-faith-competent,’ is not usually equipped to support non-Christian spiritual practice beyond the delivery of reading materials, coordination of religious services for specific holy days (if applicable) and ensuring some form of access to volunteers. He or she is also likely to be extremely busy – for example, there are two full-time chaplains at Ontario’s Maplehurst Correctional Complex, yielding a ratio of one chaplain for 650 inmates.

Inmates must then rely on contractors and volunteers to meet their spiritual needs and support their practices on the inside. Only the federal correctional system uses paid external contractors – one for each of its administrative regions (Pacific, Prairie, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic). This means that these resources are stretched thinly. Kelsang Donsang of the Kuluta Buddhist Centre holds the contract for the Ontario region. His

location in Kingston is practical, given the constellation of federal facilities near there.⁴² He functions as a Buddhist chaplain, providing pastoral care to inmates. However, other institutions are further afield, such as the Grand River Institution, a federal women's facility, which is located in Kitchener, 350 kilometres away from Kingston. Contractors in areas like the Prairie region are even more challenged by such distances. In addition to a paid contractor for actual service delivery, the Prairie region of Correctional Service Canada has engaged James Mullens of the University of Saskatchewan to advise on Buddhist matters.⁴³

It's obvious, even with these meagre paid resources, that federal facilities must supplement them with Buddhist volunteers; provincial and territorial corrections systems are entirely reliant on them. We may estimate the number of such volunteers at between 150 and 200. There are 100 volunteers active with Freeing the Human Spirit (an outreach organization that is not explicitly Buddhist)⁴⁴ and 53 Canadian members of the Prison Dharma Network⁴⁵ so this number seems reasonable.

These volunteers must navigate a complex system with its own internal logic, negotiate access, balance rules and religious freedoms, devise and execute outreach methods that do not conflict with the operating environment, tailor them to the capacities and interests of the inmates they serve, all the while remaining cognizant of the often threat-filled world of

⁴² Telephone interview with Kelsang Donsang, conducted September 10, 2010. Notes taken.

⁴³ Telephone interview with Deborah Tanasiechuk, Regional Chaplain, Prairie Region, Correctional Service Canada, conducted September 27, 2010. Notes taken.

⁴⁴ Cheryl Vanderburg, Program Director, Freeing the Human Spirit, email message to author, December 21, 2010.

⁴⁵ <http://www.prisondharmanetwork.net/> As at January 7, 2011.

prison in which the Buddhist practices and values they teach are to be lived. Their support activities follow a scale of intensity. At the most informal, a volunteer may correspond with an inmate. This may be occasional or regular letter writing, covering a wide range of Buddhist and related topics as well as their application to a prison environment. A volunteer may also provide literature to the inmate by coordinating its delivery or by arranging for a correctional facility to receive book donations from organizations like the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation in Taiwan. Volunteers may also run groups within prisons. These can be both sangha and non-Buddhist meditation groups. For example, since 2004 the Freeing the Human Spirit organization has been running combined meditation and yoga programs in 21 federal, provincial and territorial facilities.⁴⁶ Volunteers may also advise chaplains and prison administration on matters of religious accommodation, such as diet. At its most intense, volunteers may counsel inmates in a Buddhist equivalent of pastoral care. This is a blend of support for spiritual practice and counseling such as that delivered by psychotherapists.

Comparing the US and the Canadian corrections environments, we find striking points of commonality. This is unsurprising. Physically, the design and construction of prisons is a trans-national affair as the spread of the early Auburn style of prison of the 1800s and the sharing of more modern architectural solutions show. Legally, while religious freedoms may be enshrined in the respective constitution and charter, the practical rules of the corrections environments limit them. Socially, they also share the same elements of racism and classism. Ideologically, we can also situate both correctional systems in the same

⁴⁶ Vanderburg. Op. cit.

context of destabilization and erosion of the welfare state and the growth of correctional structures and measures. That this process continues unabated can be seen in the tabling of legislation in Canada to curtail credits for time spent in custody prior to sentencing (the so-called '*Truth in Sentencing Act*,' bill c26, introduced in 2009); this legislation would have the effect of substantially increasing the prison population and require the construction of new facilities to house inmates at a time when crime rates have actually dropped by 17 per cent over the past decade (Canada, government of, 2010). Given this, it is difficult not to concur with Wacquant when he concludes that the rise of the carceral state is part of a larger, concerted effort by neo-liberal governments to manage marginalized populations (Wacquant, 2009, 58 *passim*). From this perspective, the restriction of welfare (and the introduction of 'workfare'), unrestricted globalization that preserves mainly low-end service jobs for the former working class and unskilled (see Ehrenreich 2006 and 2008), criminalization of minor offences in the name of social order (Wacquant cites New York's bogus 'squeegee kid' threat, a 'threat' that was touted in Toronto as well) and a 'tough on crime' approach to law enforcement may be seen as a concerted effort to generate social insecurity and to dismantle the modern welfare state in both countries (Wacquant notes that this pattern is also repeated in the United Kingdom and France). We shall see that this shapes the perspectives informants have of the corrections system they volunteer in.

Chapter 8: Buddhist prison outreach in the USA – a history

Early years

While the history of Buddhism in the United States begins at least 150 years ago, organized Buddhist prison outreach has much later origins. It would not be until Buddhism had penetrated significant portions of American culture in the 1960s that Buddhism in prisons became visible.

As we have seen, at no point was Buddhism expressly prohibited in US prisons, at least as a belief (practice is a different story). Equally, we have seen that the authority, perspectives and prejudices of prison administrators (wardens, guards and chaplains, principally) have defined access for Buddhist volunteers. This would have also been the case, if not more so, in the early age of Buddhism in the United States (from the 1800s to about 1960). So it is *possible* that incarcerated ethnic Buddhists would have had the opportunity to receive visits from Buddhist clergy. For example, a Buddhist priest or lay leader of the congregation from Sze Yap Temple in San Francisco (built in 1853) (Prebish and Tanaka, 1998, 199) could have made the 28-kilometer trip to San Quentin prison (opened in 1852) to visit with a Chinese inmate. But the prevailing prejudices and anti-Asian sentiment of American society of the time would, in all likelihood, have militated against overtly Asian spiritual counseling, whether ministering to Asians or propagating an Asian spiritual tradition.

A brief digression into expressions of anti-Asian sentiment of the time reveals evidence to support the idea of prejudice acting as a brake on Buddhist prison outreach. Newspapers such as the *San Francisco Chronicle* and William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner* propagated the idea of the 'yellow peril' from the 1870s onwards, supporting widespread anti-Asian sentiment and spurring the passage of the 1882 *Chinese Exclusion Act*, which prohibited further immigration from China. Similar restrictive legislation was passed to prevent Japanese immigrants from owning property or gaining citizenship⁴⁷. It would be no surprise then that the spiritual tradition of many of these Asian immigrants would be poorly understood, denigrated and prevented from entering correctional facilities, especially when we see that such prejudices exist today in many American prisons (Whitney, 2003, 66-7).

Further muddying the waters is the lack of statistical data on US prisons during this early period. We simply do not know the ethnic composition of prison populations of the time. We cannot say with certainty that there would even have been much need for Buddhist prison outreach if we do not know how many Asians were incarcerated in the 19th and early 20th centuries. US Census data show that Asian immigrants to the United States accounted for a very small portion of the population prior to 1960 - 1,135 in 1850, rising to 27,665 in 1930 (Gibson and Lennon, 1999, table 2). City-based censuses of the same period show a clustering of Asian populations on the West coast. San Francisco, for example, was home to 2,719 Asian people in 1860, growing to 27,549 by 1930. New York

⁴⁷ The *Asian Exclusion Act* of 1924 prevented further immigration from Asia and denied Asian immigrants the opportunity to become naturalized citizens, including Japanese-Americans.

City, by comparison, had an Asian population of only 12 in 1870, which grew to 12,872 by 1930 (Gibson and Jung, 2005, tables 5 and 33). If we assume that this representation would hold true in the prison population there would have been few imprisoned ethnic Buddhists prior to 1960 and those inmates would have been concentrated in the California correctional system. Yet they are invisible due to statistical lacunae and so too is their spiritual practice inside the walls.

In contrast to many of the Chinese and Japanese labourers practicing Buddhism in the United States, the typical Westerner attracted to Buddhism in the 19th and early 20th centuries was often middle if not upper class and an intellectual. He or she was certainly not the sort of person commonly found in prison. Early practitioners included the theosophists, Henry Steel Olcott and Helena Blavatsky (Fields, 1992, 83). Similarly, those attracted to Buddhism in the 1930s were mainly spiritually minded intellectuals like Paul Reps and G. Manley Hall.⁴⁸ Even in the 1950s Buddhism was still the preserve of writers and thinkers like Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac⁴⁹. It is unsurprising then that Buddhist converts of Western origin seem absent from America's prisons before 1960.

⁴⁸ Both studied with the Japanese Zen monk, Nyogen Senzaki. See Fields, 183.

⁴⁹ Snyder studied Buddhism in Japan in 1955 (see Suiter, 2002, 202). Kerouac of course wrote the Buddhist-inspired *Dharma Bums* in 1958 and was well known as a Buddhist 'fellow-traveler.'

1960 to 1970

This leaves us to focus on what we do know – the development of Buddhist prison outreach in the years following 1960. This is an important decade because it saw a significant flowering of Buddhism among Westerners, supported by the arrival of new teachers like Shunryu Suzuki, the return of Eastern-educated Western teachers like Philip Kapleau and the founding of important new centres like the Rochester Zen Meditation Center (established in 1966), the Los Angeles *zendo* (incorporated in 1968) and Robert Aitken’s Maui *zendo* (founded in 1967). Zen dominated; “[d]espite the presence of [Tibetan Buddhist] lamas in Seattle, New Jersey and Wisconsin, American Buddhists saw the sixties primarily as the decade of Zen” (Fields, 1992, 294). As we will later see, many influential figures in Buddhist prison outreach, and many volunteers, were strongly affected by the rise of Buddhism in the 1960s.

Equally as important was the presence of the Buddhist spiritual tradition in popular culture. In the ferment of the counter-culture, elements of Buddhism mixed with Hinduism to form an eclectic spiritual blend, often fueled by drugs.⁵⁰ Figures like Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary incorporated Buddhist elements into their work, thus giving it profile⁵¹. We can expect then that a certain portion of Westerners entering the prison system during and after the 1960s would have been familiar to a greater or lesser degree

⁵⁰ Robert Aitken notes the ubiquity of drugs among those trying to discover a spiritual path in the 1960s: “Virtually all the young people who knocked on our front door have tried LSD, mescaline or psilocybin.” Quoted in Fields, 252.

⁵¹ For example, in 1964 Leary blended hallucinogenic drug use with the Bardo Thodol in his book, *The Psychedelic Experience: a Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

with Buddhist ideas and would have formed the earliest cohort of Buddhist practitioners in prison.

The decade is also important as the earliest documented point in the history of Buddhist prison outreach – the work of a Japanese Shin priest in California – the Reverend Hogen Fujimoto. Leading the Japanese-American *Hongwanji* congregation of San Francisco, Fujimoto was heir to a tradition that valued prison outreach (in the late 1800s the organization began supplying chaplains to prisons in Japan) (Nishi Honwanji, 2009). Although he is unlikely to have been the only Buddhist performing prison outreach during this time, he is the only one (thanks to his book) to have been documented.

He corresponded with inmates who had written to the Buddhist Churches of America (the Japanese Shin Buddhist organization) between 1963 and 1979 (Whitney, 2003, 17). Most notably he corresponded with Fred Arispe Cruz in 1967. That conversation – interrupted by prison administrators in Texas, formed part of the case for the recognition of Buddhism in prisons discussed above (Cruz. v. Beto). While serving at the national headquarters of the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), Fujimoto found himself responsible for responding to “several letters a day from prisoners” (Fujimoto, 1980, 1). He claims “... by far the major part of my relationship with prisoners was through correspondence” (Fujimoto, 1980, 1). He also volunteered at several California correctional facilities including the California Correctional Training Facility (where he held dharma meetings for two years), San Quentin (where he taught a class on Buddhism for three years before a

riot shut the program down), as well as conducting dharma meetings at California Men's Colony, the Federal Correctional Institution at Lompoc and the California Conservation Center (Fujimoto, 1980, 1). His experience is similar to that of many of the volunteers I interviewed in that his outreach efforts were a blend of face-to-face meetings and correspondence and that such efforts began quite by chance (through his work at the BCA head office) often as a result of prisoner-initiated correspondence. Fujimoto also worked alone, initiating programs and managing correspondence, much like many volunteers today. There is no evidence that he built any formal prison outreach structures within the BCA and no formal structure remained after his departure from the national office. This too mirrors many of the initiatives that followed – they are typically initiated by a single, highly motivated individual, may not become institutionalized and indeed may not survive once the force of will of the originator is absent.

For 16 years Hogen Fujimoto performed outreach to inmates interested in Buddhism. His work spanned the 1960s and the 1970s. During this time the so-called 'counterculture' that included elements of Buddhism and other Eastern spirituality became part of mainstream American culture. Several early initiatives developed in the 1970s, inspired by these Eastern spiritual traditions and practices. Indeed the 1970s could properly be called the age of Hindu-inspired prison outreach. It is important to more explicitly Buddhist initiatives because it helped normalize non-Western spirituality as well as actual spiritual practices such as meditation and chanting that often form integral parts of Buddhist practice.

Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a meditative practice based, according to its developer (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi) on Indian Vedic tradition. It uses *mantras* and well as sitting to quiet the mind.⁵² In 1971 a TM practitioner, David Orme-Johnson, initiated a brief TM intervention for 17 inmates at La Tuna Federal Correctional Institution in Texas. The program ran two months and resulted in a paper on the efficacy of TM in a prison setting (Orme-Johnson, 2003, 89-95). Although intended as a clinical research project to demonstrate the value of TM rather than as an ongoing outreach program, it is indicative of the permissive atmosphere in at least some US prisons at the time (La Tuna's warden and staff psychologist both approved of the initiative, which obviously owed much to Hindu spiritual practices). It is also an early example of meditation being taught to inmates.

Another initiative, also owing much to Hindu spirituality but incorporating elements of Buddhism, was also launched in the 1970s. Bo Lozoff established the Human Kindness Foundation in 1973 with initial funding from Ram Dass (George Alpert) an American spiritual teacher and author of the influential text, *Be Here Now*. Human Kindness Foundation's Prison Ashram Project, inspired by Lozoff's sense of responsibility for the incarceration of his brother-in-law, initially generated high-level interest – Lozoff met with Norm Carlson, the then-director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. By 1975 he and his wife, Sita, were working full-time on prison initiatives including inmate correspondence and Lozoff was visiting prisons throughout the US (Lozoff, 1985, xvi).⁵³ The Prison

⁵² For a fuller description of TM see Maharishi, Mahesh Yogi. *The Science of Being and Art of Living*.

⁵³ Bo Lozoff, telephone interview. Notes taken. 8 Mar. 2009.

Ashram Project continues to this day, making it the longest-lived Buddhist prison outreach initiative (albeit it is a syncretic view of Buddhism incorporating many other spiritual traditions). Although the Prison Ashram Project is a registered non-profit organization, it is Lozoff's personal initiative that appears to have launched it and enabled it to continue, much as Fujimoto's work at the BCA resulted from his personal drive. In both cases the person and the project are inextricably linked.

Aside from Lozoff and some further sporadic TM initiatives (including a 14-week program at Folsom Prison) (Abrams and Siegel, 1978, 3-20) the only other related initiative during the 1970s to have been recorded was the SYDA Foundation's Prison Project yoga program, launched in 1979 and still in existence at the time of writing (Siddha Yoga, 2009). The focus is on *Siddha* yoga, an explicitly spiritual teaching involving meditation, chanting and contemplation. This is notable for the inclusion of spiritual practices closely related to Buddhist practices.

The 1980's

The next decade saw the birth of two formally Buddhist organizations, each claiming national reach. This occurred during a time of growing conservatism in corrections and criminal justice policy, countering the permissive atmosphere of the previous years⁵⁴. For

⁵⁴ Although it must be admitted that the 1970s saw extensive use of the term, 'war on drugs,' by President Nixon and others and the creation of the Drug Enforcement Agency.

example, during the Reagan administration⁵⁵ the *Comprehensive Crime Control Act* was passed (in 1984), which included provisions for mandatory sentencing guidelines. In 1986 the *Anti-Drug Abuse Act* was passed; it contained mandatory minimum sentences for drug offences. At the same time, the corrections system was continuing an evolution toward a more “punitive” (Maxwell, 1999, 401) structure.

It was during America’s turn towards conservatism under Ronald Reagan that John Daido Loori, founder of the Mountains and Rivers Order (established in 1980), created the National Buddhist Prison Sangha in 1984.⁵⁶ This is an explicitly Zen organization. It began, as with Fujimoto, with a chance letter. An inmate who had established a Buddhist study group in Green Haven Correctional Facility in New York State wrote to ask Loori to authenticate it for the benefit of the prison administration. There is another parallel with the Fujimoto situation in that a legal issue resulted from the outreach work. Loori’s involvement led (in 1987) to a successful challenge to prison restrictions on inmates’ freedom to practice Buddhism in New York correctional facilities. Loori’s work initially took the form of regular prison visits to conduct services and talks and to instruct prisoners in *zazen*. The in-person outreach was focused on correctional facilities in New York State and this remains so. In 1986 Geoffrey Shugen Arnold, a senior Zen teacher at Zen Mountain Monastery and the New York Zen Center (part of the Mountains and Rivers Order), became director of the National Buddhist Prison Sangha. Loori then became an

⁵⁵ See the former president’s State of the Union address of February 6, 1985 for an indication of Reagan’s punitive sentencing and incarceration sentiment.

⁵⁶ This history, organization and mechanics of the National Buddhist Prison Sangha described here and below are based on a telephone interview with Geoffrey Shugen Arnold, with notes taken. October 10, 2008.

advisor on spiritual issues to the New York State Department of Correctional Services. Today, Shugen Arnold coordinates outreach and support for Zen groups and inmates in ten facilities in New York state and also oversees the inmate correspondence program, which receives between 75 and 150 letters a month from prisoners across the US.

Following the growth of its correspondence program (which Shugen Arnold originally handled himself), the National Buddhist Prison Sangha instituted a very centralized model, managed by Shugen Arnold. Sangha members who, in the opinion of Shugen Arnold, would be good at interacting with inmates, are asked to consider the role and to commit to at least one year of service. Volunteers are trained and supervised by senior students. Senior students review each outgoing letter; difficult questions are referred to Shugen Arnold. According to him this makes for a “more coherent assembly of information.”⁵⁷ A computerized database tracks inmates, logs incoming and outgoing mail and records what support materials have been sent. It is a very disciplined working method, contrasting with the model employed by the next outreach organization to appear.

A year after the founding of the National Buddhist Prison Sangha, Fleet Maull was sentenced to 25 years for cocaine trafficking.⁵⁸ Although a student and assistant to the legendary Tibetan teacher, Trungpa Rinpoche, since 1979 and a graduate of Naropa University, Maull was at the same time traveling to and from Bolivia to smuggle cocaine into the US. Following his conviction, he settled in to life in a federal prison, where he

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Maull's biography is based on “The Prison Monk: an Interview with Buddhist Activist and Former Prisoner, Fleet Maull.” *Tricycle*, spring, 2004: 70-76.

continued his practice and started a meditation group. In 1989, while still incarcerated, he founded the Prison Dharma Network (PDN). Maull noted that Buddhist centres were receiving regular requests for Buddhist information and advice and the PDN was created in part to respond to this growing inmate interest. Maull directed the PDN from the inside with the assistance of volunteers. Initially the PDN was located in Hartford, Connecticut but when Dan Barrett (then a senior vice-president at Shambhala Publications, a publisher of Buddhist-oriented books) assumed responsibility for prisoner services it was relocated to Boston, Massachusetts. Barrett continued in this role until Maull was released from prison in 1999, at which time the PDN moved again, this time to its current home in Boulder, Colorado, and Kate Crisp became responsible for its day-to-day operations (Prison Dharma Network, 2009). Maull's release from prison was, says Bo Lozoff, "an enormous shot in the arm"⁵⁹ for Buddhist prison outreach.

Although the PDN grew from Maull's encounter with Buddhism, Buddhist teachings are prominent and all the members I interviewed defined themselves as Buddhists, it does not portray itself as an explicitly Buddhist organization. The PDN "...is an international, nonsectarian, contemplative support network for prisoners, prison volunteers, and corrections professionals (Prison Dharma Network, 2009)." The emphasis is on helping inmates cultivate a contemplative practice, whether Buddhist or drawn from "other wisdom traditions (Prison Dharma Network, 2009)." Those members who self-identify as Buddhists come from a wide range of Buddhist traditions.

⁵⁹ Lozoff. 8 Mar. 2009.

Functionally, it is the most well developed Buddhist prison outreach organization in the United States, conducting a range of activities to support inmates, volunteers and prison chaplains and connecting 2,500 volunteers to each other. This includes its Books Behind Bars program, which supplies books (those published by the PDN as well as donated books) to inmates and prison libraries, resources for prison chaplains, pen-pal coordination (connecting inmates and volunteers, who then maintain an independent correspondence), the Prison Dharma Press (which publishes a limited number of books) as well as in-person visits to prisons and jails in Colorado. The PDN also runs a program for incarcerated youth and youth at risk called Path of Freedom.

The 1990's

The 1990's saw an increase in organized Buddhist prison outreach services, some of which flowered and declined and some of which continued into the 21st century in one form or another. We can categorize these efforts as local initiatives, often based in a temple or practice centre, extensions of larger Buddhist groups (several of which also perform non-prison volunteer social services of some fashion) and quasi-Buddhist projects.

In the first category are projects such as the Gateless Gate Prison Project, founded by Kinloch Walpole and serving Florida and Massachusetts, the Triple Gem Prison Ministries, founded by John Mulligan and serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey and the Dharma Friends Prison Project in Little Rock, Arkansas. Typically there is a forceful personality or

highly committed person behind these types of organizations. This appears to be both a strength and a weakness, depending on the health and continued commitment of the key figure in a project. Instability may result. For example, the Engaged Zen Foundation, which was established in 1990 initially at Sing Sing Prison in New York, was wound down by its founder, Kobutsu Malone, in 2003 due to ill health⁶⁰. And the Upaya Institute's Prison Outreach Project suffered an interregnum of about five years after it was first established by Joan Halifax; the program "lagged and stopped in the mid-2000's"⁶¹ before being restarted by energetic volunteer, Ray Olson, in 2006. On the other hand, the success of the Gateless Gate Prison Project owes much to the efforts of Kinloch Walpole, a former career army and marine Special Forces officer (Gateless Gate, "Abbot's Bio," 2009). The Little Rock-based Dharma Friends Prison Outreach Project has also benefited from the presence of a strong personality – author, speaker and certified religious advisor with the Arkansas Department of Corrections, Anna Cox. Formed in 1996 as a response to the execution of Frankie Parker and initially named the Jusan Prison Education Project (Jusan being Parker's dharma name), this project started life as a newsletter largely generated by Cox, who was overwhelmed with the volume of correspondence she was receiving and no longer able to effectively offer individual responses to letters. As of 2009 it had published 146 issues of its newsletter and has 2,000 subscribers (Dharma Friends Prison Outreach Project, 2011).

⁶⁰ Kobutsu Malone. Personal communication. October 7, 2008. Malone also cites his disillusionment following the execution of inmate, Amos King, in 2003 as a reason for the curtailment of his prison work.

⁶¹ Ray Olson. Personal communication by email. October 7, 2008.

In most cases the priority of these local projects is face-to-face interaction with inmates. One such program is the Triple Gem Prison Ministries, which serves inmates at six correctional facilities in Pennsylvania and New Jersey (Triple Gem Prison Ministries, 2008). Walpole's Gateless Gate Prison Ministries blends both Zen-focused in-person sessions at four Florida prisons and secular mindfulness-based stress reduction programs at one facility (Gateless Gate, "Prison Program," 2009).

At the same time as local initiatives were springing up, in the 1990's many larger Buddhist organizations expanded their social outreach efforts to include prison initiatives. These included the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, Shambhala International, Vipassana as taught by S.N. Goenka and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

In 1996 two Tibetan Buddhist organizations initiated prison outreach programs: Shambhala International (under Sakyong Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche) and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (under Lama Thubten Yeshe). These efforts (the Shambhala Prison Community and the Liberation Prison Project respectively) were positioned as extensions of the organizations' existing social outreach work.

Venerable Robina Courtin, an Australian nun in the Tibetan tradition, initiated the Liberation Prison Project after some early exchanges of letters with inmates. It has now grown from her solitary efforts to an organization serving 1,000 inmates in the United States, Australia, Mongolia, Spain and Mexico. The approach involves in-person visits,

correspondence, supply of Buddhist books and magazines as well as post-release assistance. Structurally, it is a centrally managed organization (with a head office in San Francisco) with (at the time of writing) nine paid staff (Liberation Prison Project, 2009).

The Shambhala Prison Community is, by contrast, somewhat more diffuse. Although there is a Boulder, Colorado office, which under executive director, William (Bill) Karelis, has initiated in-person prison visits in Colorado, Florida and Oregon (Shambhala Prison Community, 2009), there are also many local groups working on their own initiative.⁶² Several of these local Shambhala groups are also active in prison outreach including centres in Vancouver (Canada),⁶³ Alaska and Texas.

One of the more vigorous champions of the value of meditative practice in prison is the Vipassana organization centred on the teachings of S.N. Goenka. Although claiming not to be an explicitly spiritual path, Goenka's organization traces the origin of its approach back to the Buddha (North American Vipassana Prison Project, 2009). In 1997 it launched the Vipassana Prison Trust. Early efforts included a 10-day retreat held at King County North Rehabilitation Facility in Washington State that spawned a significant research project. Subsequent retreats were held in prisons in California and Alabama. Published research aims to demonstrate links between insight meditation and negative behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse as well as depression (Parks, 2003, 13).

⁶² Vivian Sovinsky, Milwaukee Shambhala Center. Personal communication by email. September 20, 2008.

⁶³ Awake in Action, an initiative of the Vancouver Shambhala Centre, is active in Alouette Correctional Centre for Women in Canada (Awake in Action, 2009).

At around the same time another initiative was launched on the West coast, based within an organization originally established in Hawaii. Founded in 1978 by Robert Aitken (a seminal figure in the history of American Buddhism), his wife Anne Aitken and Nelson Foster, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) was informed by the previous decade of turmoil (e.g. the Vietnam War, US civil rights) and by the example of Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh and his Order of Interbeing. Other major figures in American Buddhism, such as Gary Snyder and Alan Senauke, also joined the BPF. In 1998 Maylie Scott, an influential California-based Zen teacher and advocate for prison outreach (Skinner Keller, 2006, 644), invited Diana Lion to found the BPF's Prison Program (Lion, 2008, 31), now called the Transformative Justice Program. The "program started out teaching a couple of jail classes" (Lion, 2008, 32) but grew to encompass several prisons in Northern California and "hundreds" (Lion, 2008, 32) of inmates, both men and women. A correspondence program extending across the United States was also initiated as well as a book-sending initiative. The Prison Program is also notable for its adoption of an advocacy role, particularly surrounding the death penalty issue. This is somewhat unusual as activists may find that a highly visible oppositional stance may cause prison access problems. In 2001 Lion established Sangha X with the help of the San Francisco Zen Center. This was a Buddhist group for former inmates. It survived until 2003. This sort of provision of post-release assistance is not universal in Buddhist prison outreach. Lion left the BPF Prison Program in 2005 due to ill health. The program has since been re-focused on young offenders and the correspondence component terminated (Buddhist Peace Fellowship, 2009).

Several aspects of the Buddhist spiritual tradition – the emphasis on the present moment, the idea that mind and body are linked and the practice of meditative techniques grounded in mindfulness of breath (*ānāpānasati*) (*Samyutta Nikaya* 54:13 in Bodhi, 2005, 290) were adapted and ‘secularized’ in the 1990’s. This may have been done in part to gain access to correctional facilities where administrators were hesitant about Buddhism but saw value in contemplative practice.⁶⁴ In the case of Jon Kabat-Zinn, then teaching at the University of Massachusetts and running the Stress Reduction Clinic there, it seems more likely that the secularization and adaptation had occurred earlier as he developed his Buddhist-derived methodology. The prison project he initiated in 1992 was intended to demonstrate the utility of his approach to contemplative practice in a very challenging setting. Concluded in 1996, the pilot project involved instructing 1,350 inmates in six prisons in Massachusetts state prisons in the techniques of mindfulness-based stress reduction (Samuelson, 2007, 254). The results of the pilot suggest that the benefits of mindfulness-based stress reduction (and possibly meditation in general) are greatest in lower security facilities. As indicated earlier, the Gateless Gate also operates mindfulness-based stress reduction programs, including a retreat, at a Florida facility.

Another initiative taking a secular approach to a contemplative tradition is the Insight Prison Project, which operates exclusively (with the exception of a book-sending program) in San Quentin State Prison, California. It offers prisoners meditation and yoga as well as a

⁶⁴ K.C. Walpole. Personal communication. April 10, 2008.

series of restorative justice, substance abuse counseling, cognitive behavioural therapy and violence prevention programs. The program was launched in 1997.

The 21st century

The new century saw continuity, decline, rebirth and new initiatives in Buddhist prison outreach. Malone's Engaged Zen Foundation was dissolved, as we have seen. The Buddhist Relief Mission curtailed its activities in the United States in 2005 when its founders, Ken and Visakha Kawasaki, moved to Sri Lanka. This organization had been founded in 1988, began sending books to inmates and corresponding with them (including, notably, Calvin Malone) in 1995 and served a jail in Flint, Michigan. A limited correspondence effort continues as does the provision of books to prison libraries⁶⁵. The Upaya Prison Outreach Project was restarted in 2005; the Upaya Zen Center also now offers a chaplaincy training program in collaboration with Bernie Glassman's Zen Peacemaker Order and co-directed by Fleet Maull (of the Prison Dharma Network) and Joan Halifax (Upaya, 2009). The BPF has restructured its prison outreach efforts following the departure of Diana Lion.

New projects were also initiated in the 2000's. In Missouri Kalen McAllister created Inside Dharma (Inside Dharma, 2009),⁶⁶ a non-sectarian Buddhist group, in 2000 and began work in local prisons in 2002. Inside Dharma collaborates with the Rime Buddhist Center (headed by Lama Chuck Stanford), which also performs Buddhist prison outreach in the

⁶⁵ Ken Kawasaki. Personal communication by email. October 6, 2008.

⁶⁶ Kalen McAllister. Personal communication. April 10, 2008.

state,⁶⁷ as well as with the Shinzo Sangha and Missouri Zen Center⁶⁸. In Mount Shasta, California Neil Cohen began sending inmates books and resources through the Naljor Prison Dharma Service, launched in 2001.⁶⁹ Another personal effort is Betty Lu Buck's Oregon-based Buddhist Inmate Sangha, which focuses on supplying books and corresponding with inmates as well as coordinating with other Buddhist prison outreach groups⁷⁰. She also began her work in 2001. In the realm of secularized Buddhist teachings, Noah Levine founded the Mind Body Awareness Project in the Bay area of California in 2000. This group teaches mindfulness-based stress reduction, yoga and meditation to incarcerated youth at four facilities in California. Its advisory board includes Jon Kabat-Zinn, Joan Halifax and Bo Lozoff (Mind Body Awareness Project, 2009).

In addition to the organizations described here, there may have been solitary or small group initiatives, possibly restricted to a local correctional facility or active for a short time, which escaped notice and remain undocumented. This challenges efforts to construct a comprehensive history of Buddhist prison outreach in the United States.

Looking across the history as we do know it and examining the major groups that have arisen, we can deduce several characteristics common to many. They are often local or regional, serving one facility or several in one or two adjacent states. Although many organizations may conduct letter-writing and book sending programs across the country,

⁶⁷ Lama Chuck Stanford. Personal communication by email. September 27, 2008.

⁶⁸ Kalen McAllister. Personal communication by email. March 5, 2009.

⁶⁹ Neil Steven Cohen. Personal communication by email. October 6, 2008.

⁷⁰ Betty Lu Buck (aka Chanter Kyo). Personal communication by email. October 7, 2008.

only the Prison Dharma Network can be said to have a national in-prison presence and that only as a result of its diffuse nature which brings together volunteers working more or less autonomously (or affiliated with another local or regional project). Outreach organizations may start haphazardly as a result of a chance interaction or communication with an inmate. And they may be driven by a single, motivated individual with the initiative and capacity to build the initial structures (c.f. Bo Lozoff, Diana Lion, Fleet Maull, Geoffrey Shugen Arnold and Hogen Fujimoto). Several of these organizations may mature to the point where they have paid staff to a greater or lesser degree (c.f. the Liberation Prison Project and the Mind-Body Awareness Project).

Financing of some sort is required at this level of maturity. Organizations like the Liberation Prison Project, the Prison Dharma Network, Gateless Gate Zen Center, the Human Kindness Foundation, Inside Dharma and the Mind-Body Awareness Project are non-profit organizations registered as such with the Internal Revenue Service and able to issue tax receipts for donations received. This increases fund-raising opportunities by providing a reward (reduced tax burden) to those donating. Formal, periodic fund-raising is a source of operating revenue, as is individual giving. The Mind-Body Awareness Project receives funding from 23 different supporters ranging from government-run community services agencies to foundations (Mind Body Awareness Project, 2009). Smaller initiatives rely on more informal support from individuals or temples and centres. This may take the form of small cash donations or donations in kind, such as books for distribution in prison. Outreach programs can also benefit from dedicated book donation programs such

as that operated by the Taiwanese Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, which sends books in a variety of languages free of charge to prisons and prison outreach programs.

Chapter 9: How Buddhist prison outreach works

The structures of the prison environment to a great degree shape outreach work. For example, although a volunteer might wish to implement a disciplined, graduated reading program in Buddhism, the lack of texts in the prison library or the circulation system used may mean that an inmate does not have access to the requisite texts or may access them only haphazardly. Or the physical configuration of the facility and the security classification of the inmates may prohibit group meetings. The rules-based world of corrections, which seeks to apply common regulations for the treatment of volunteers, functions as a limiting factor reducing the opportunity for many forms of outreach common outside prison walls, such as retreats. Kinloch C. Walpole states “in 10 years and 30 prisons, I have only found three prisons that would let me do retreats and only one of those would let me do the MBSR program.”⁷¹ In practical terms, the nature of the corrections system and specific facility narrow the options available for outreach. More imaginative initiatives run against the grain of the systems and would require a forceful personality, sympathetic prison administration and the persistence to press for them. Unconventional approaches, such as Walpole’s 20 to 78 person retreats, appear as outliers with the vast majority of outreach involving smaller groups or individuals.

Despite these impediments correctional systems often speak of the essential role of volunteers in the administration of prisons. This appears to be reflected in the on-the-

⁷¹ Walpole, Kinloch C. Personal communication by email. March 25, 2009. The MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) program he cites is a group program.

ground reality. Chaplains are often, as we have also seen, the gatekeepers and coordinators for volunteers. Florida's Marion Correctional Institution, a men's facility built in 1959, houses 1,282 adult inmates (Florida state government, 2009). A single chaplain – Reverend Larry Durham, is responsible for the spiritual lives of all these inmates. According to the Florida Department of Corrections, Reverend Durham “plans, coordinates and supervises all religious activities and services at the institution. He is responsible for the moral and spiritual well-being of all inmates, including the non-religious” (Florida state government, 2008). Durham believes that an aspect of serving his God effectively is “enabling others to follow their faiths.”⁷² This is echoed by other chaplains such as the Reverend David Robinson, facility chaplain at Elmwood Correctional Center for Men in northern California, who sees his role as enabling inmates to “grow in their faith as they define it.”⁷³

In addition to conducting Christian services, Durham coordinates the activities of 1,100 volunteers. Of these, about 200 are very active, visiting the facility once a week or more. The volunteer program at Marion CI is one of the largest in the state. Durham believes this is due to the physical configuration of the prison, which includes a multi-purpose room, an auditorium, a chapel and education rooms. The majority of volunteers are Christian, which is similar to the situation in Santa Clara County. Kinloch C. Walpole, abbot of the Gateless Gate Zen Center, is the only Buddhist volunteer for the facility, running what Durham calls a “calm, good group of Buddhists” inside the prison since 1999. Thus,

⁷² This section is based on a telephone interview conducted with Rev. Durham on March 18, 2009. Notes taken. All quotations cited here are attributed to Rev. Durham.

⁷³ Reverend David Robinson, telephone interview. April 14, 2009. Notes taken.

although an inmate may follow a specific Buddhist tradition other than Kwan Um Zen (Korean), because Walpole is the only volunteer at this facility, it would be the only Buddhist outreach available to such an inmate. There may of course be literature and correspondence services available from other lineages but the small number of volunteers available constrains the range of Buddhist traditions accessible to inmates. This situation is likely replicated in other facilities where Buddhist volunteers are thin on the ground.

There is also a practical reason for Rev. Durham's support for volunteers. We have seen how volunteers ease the work pressure of chaplains. Durham confirms this, indicating the volunteers help a "stretched chaplain" do his job effectively. It seems to be a reciprocal relationship with Durham enabling volunteers to minister to their constituencies and they in turn reducing work burdens for him.

Volunteers at Marion CI work autonomously. Following a security screening and orientation process they devise programs and determine scheduling. They "need good relationships" with the facility's security in order to maintain access to the prison. It is correctional officers who coordinate the movement of prisoners and entry into facility rooms. Because of his own work constraints, Durham does not closely supervise individual volunteer programs once they have been established or oversee their meetings. This situation is similar to Chaplain Richard Torre's experience in the Oregon state correctional system. Volunteers affiliated with Soka Gakkai International, Shambhala International and a local Zen group all visit Oregon State Penitentiary, Salem. They do so with limited

direction following initial orientation.⁷⁴ Santa Clara County Reverend David Robinson actively recruits volunteers to meet the diverse spiritual needs of his facilities and to augment his limited resources. This includes volunteers from the Buddhist Churches of America (ethnically Japanese Shin Buddhism) as well as individual Vietnamese Buddhists. Volunteers work autonomously after a period of orientation that may last from a few months to a year. Screening is intended to weed out individuals with “particular agendas.”⁷⁵ Volunteers are observed at work to ensure they do not proselytize and they respect individuals regardless of faith, background, race or sexual orientation.

Inmates in the Florida correctional system access volunteers by declaring an affiliation to a specific spiritual tradition. They must be ‘on the callout,’ meaning they must register as members of a particular faith in order to be eligible to attend services. At Marion CI this only applies to members of “secondary religions,” minority faiths including Buddhism; Christians need not declare their faith. This creates an interesting situation as inmates may register as Buddhists, attend meditation sessions and also participate in Christian services. In Santa Clara County, inmates access volunteers by submitting a visit request to the facility chaplain who functions as a clearinghouse of sorts, connecting volunteers of particular faith traditions with inmates.⁷⁶

Being on the callout enables volunteers to engage with inmates through services and formal programs. Such volunteers would have typically gone through an orientation and screening

⁷⁴ Richard Torres, telephone interview. March 25, 2009. Notes taken.

⁷⁵ Reverend David Robinson, telephone interview. April 14, 2009. Notes taken.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

process to ensure familiarity with the prison environment, rules and expectations of volunteers. Programs and services would have been discussed fully with the chaplain in order to ensure compliance with prison regulations. This would include aspects such as room use as well as provision of items such as *zabutons*, mats, books and pictures. Volunteers are also usually subjected to a background check to determine if they have a previous criminal convictions or a history of behaviour considered unacceptable in prison. Chaplain A indicated that unacceptable behaviour commonly consists of openly antagonistic views of the corrections system or radical interpretations of faith (such as Islam).⁷⁷

Although rare, should a facility's physical structure and security profile permit it, an inmate-led sangha may exist. In this circumstance, volunteers would play a supporting role, guiding the functioning of the sangha and trying to ensure access to desired reading materials. At the time of writing, although there are (and were) Buddhists with a high degree of knowledge and long histories of practice behind bars (viz. Masters and Maull), there is no indication of a significant inmate-to-inmate Buddhist prison program formally existing in the corrections system. The majority of Buddhist support still comes from outside the prison walls.

Volunteers may pursue another avenue and meet individually with inmates, following standard visitation procedures. In such a case no prior screening or training would be

⁷⁷ Chaplain A, located in the mid-west. Personal communication. Interviewed by telephone with notes taken. April 10, 2008.

required. These may vary from facility to facility and from system to system. These rules determine how an inmate requests a visit, how a visitor accesses a facility and how he or she must comport him or herself (including dress codes) and also provide the facility administration with the authority to override any scheduled or previously approved visitation in the interest of security where there is “reasonable suspicion that the inmate has acted in a way that would indicate a threat to the good order or security of the institution” (United States government, Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2003, 1). In general, an inmate would request a visitor be added to his list of approved visitors, that person would be screened by administration and, if approved, the visit would be permitted. Such visits are short (usually half an hour) and confined to a visiting room or hall, which may be private or semi-private. As we have seen earlier, the security level of a facility will also determine if the volunteer is in the same room as the inmate or not. In this circumstance a volunteer would have to have a prior relationship with an inmate or be introduced in some fashion in order for an inmate to request a visit. This would appear to function as a limiting factor for outreach work although it would enable personal visits where a relationship between inmate and volunteer exists, such as Alan Senauke and inmate, Jarvis Jay Masters at San Quentin.⁷⁸

Volunteers also interact with inmates through correspondence and, less frequently, by phone and email.⁷⁹ Correspondence, as we have seen in the case of the National Buddhist Prison Sangha, can involve a formalized letter-writing program with multiple layers of

⁷⁸ Alan Senauke, telephone interview. March 20, 2008. Recorded with interviewee’s prior consent.

⁷⁹ Not every correctional facility provides computer access to inmates. Inmates are also often charged high fees for telephone and Internet use.

approval at the temple to ensure that the responses are in accord with doctrine. Or they may simply be unsupervised individual ‘pen-pal’ relationships such as those fostered by the Prison Dharma Network. In this circumstance an online clearinghouse enables the PDN to post inmate requests and volunteers to select an inmate they believe is a good match.

Volunteers commit to correspond with inmates for one year.⁸⁰ Volunteers also facilitate the supply of books and other reading materials to inmates, either sending them directly or, where regulations require, coordinating direct delivery from a bookseller or publisher.

Supporting the multi-faith mission of paid chaplains also forms a part of the work of many volunteers. This may take the form of advice on the Buddhist tradition as well as sourcing and provision of texts for dissemination to inmates. Most prison libraries rely on donations to stock their shelves. Mainstream faith traditions and those with a missionary approach often supply prisons with a large volume of literature. The uncoordinated nature of Buddhist prison outreach means that most prisons rely on individuals to collect and supply Buddhist books. In some circumstances, such as the Prison Dharma Network’s Books Behind Bars program, prisons (usually through a chaplain) may request Buddhist books. Books Behind Bars relies on donations from Buddhists. The PDN collects books of all sorts from individuals and then ships a selection to those facilities that have requested Buddhist books.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Kate Crisp, telephone interview. October 8, 2008. Notes taken.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Some volunteers may also provide post-release support for inmates in those circumstances where prison regulations permit contact. At the Gateless Gate Zen Center in Florida Kinloch Walpole operates a residence that enables released inmates to stay and participate in temple life. For a time the Human Kindness Foundation ran a similar post-release residence. The program was terminated in 2008 following allegations of abusive behaviour on the part of Bo Lozoff, the founder (Saldaña, 27 Aug. 2008).

Volunteers also bring secularized Buddhist teachings into prisons. There are blurred lines between explicitly Buddhist projects and those borrowing Buddhist elements, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). Kinloch Walpole suggests that this is an adaptation to the prison administration, which may find MBSR programs more palatable than an overtly Buddhist approach even though core elements such as meditation are common to both.⁸² Walpole's Gateless Gate Zen Center collaborates with Horizon Communities in Prison (a Florida-based not-for-profit organization that establishes predominantly Christian faith-based communities within prisons) to offer MBSR programs to women housed at Lowell Correctional Institution in Florida (Gateless Gate, 2009).

Buddhist texts used by volunteers to support their work fall into two categories – 'sacred' and explanatory. Sacred texts include sutras, instructions and commentaries (such as Dogen's *Shobogenzo*) as well as devotional literature (such as Shantideva's *Way of the Bodhisattva*). Explanatory texts encompass a vast literature from all Buddhist traditions, pre-modern and modern, Eastern and Western. Most prominent are writers such as Thich

⁸² KC Walpole. Telephone interview. Notes taken. 25 Mar. 2009.

Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama and Pema Chödrön. These are highly influential public faces of Buddhism whose books are bestsellers and commonly available. For example, the Dalai Lama's *The Heart of Happiness* is ranked 1,029th in sales on Amazon.com while Thich Nhat Hanh's *Peace is Every Step* ranks 1,428.^{th83} Less well-known public figures whose books are cited by volunteers as influential and useful include Bernie Glassman, a successor to Taizan Maezumi and founder of the Zen Peacemakers, an association for "socially engaged spirituality" (Zen Peacemakers, 2009). Glassman is noted for his street retreats with the homeless (Project Ananda Productions, 2009) and for his pilgrimages to Auschwitz.

Volunteers make use of a range of 'basic' texts that introduce Buddhism and its core concepts such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts. Manuals of meditation are also common as are *gathas*, either those in common use (such as those found in Thich Nhat Hanh's *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment*, 2004) or those composed by volunteers themselves.

There are also several texts written specifically for use in prison. Bo Lozoff's *We're All Doing Time* (1985) is likely the most recognizable book in this category, having been published in 1984 and now in its 17th printing. It is also available in Spanish. This text is divided into three sections. The first, "The Big View," is a brief discussion of what Lozoff calls the "profoundest common sense" truths of the universe. It includes several Buddhist concepts such as *karma* and *dharma*. The second section, "Getting Free," is a handbook of practices including meditation to cultivate mindfulness. The final section, "Dear Bo," is a collection

⁸³ <http://www.amazon.com>. Accessed April 22, 2009.

of letters Lozoff has received from inmates, coupled with his own replies. While about half of the informants I interviewed were familiar with Bo Lozoff, the Human Kindness Foundation and Lozoff's books, none of them make specific use of the books although some indicated they had encountered it in prisons. However, all of the prison chaplains interviewed reported that *We're All Doing Time* is present in their facilities. This makes sense as Bo Lozoff has indicated the Human Kindness Foundation largely works directly with inmates and prison administration or chaplains to supply its materials upon request, sometimes free of charge.

Fleet Maull's personal narrative of his own experience with prison and Buddhist practice inside, *Dharma in Hell* (2005), is available to prisoners through his organization, the Prison Dharma Network, which donates three copies to inmates for every one sold to an unincarcerated person. The PDN also donates copies of Kobai Scott Whitney's practical manual, *Sitting Inside: Buddhist Practice in America's Prisons* (2002) in the same manner.

There is also a growing literature by inmates themselves. Jarvis Jay Masters, an inmate on death row in San Quentin, has written *Finding Freedom – Writings From Death Row* (1997). This is a chronicle of his life in prison, his discovery of Buddhism and his conversion in 1989. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship donates copies of Masters' book to inmates through a sponsorship program. For a donation of less than the cover price of the book, BPF sends a copy to an inmate. *Razor-Wire Dharma: a Buddhist Life in Prison*, written by inmate Calvin

Malone and edited by Sunyana Graef (founder of the Vermont Zen Center) was published in 2008. Excepting Graef, none of the volunteers I interviewed was aware of the book.

Volunteers also use personal narratives composed by modern Buddhist figures, which many indicate are popular with inmates. One such figure is Claude Anshin Thomas, an American Vietnam veteran and Zen monk (ordained by Bernie Glassman). He documented his coming to Buddhism in the book, *At Hell's Gate* (2006). Thomas' dysfunctional childhood, struggles with alcoholism and spiritual seeking seem to resonate with inmates. Another figure is Brad Warner, ordained in the Zen lineage of Gudo Nishijima. His story takes him from the Ohio punk scene of the 1980's to Tokyo and Los Angeles working for a Japanese *anime* production company. His simple, irreverent writing style, punctuated with personal anecdotes and revelations of his own failings, also appears to attract inmates. He has written three books, of which two⁸⁴ were cited by two volunteers interviewed for this project as texts they had provided.

Among sacred texts there are three that are very popular. Obviously the *Angulimala Sutra*, by virtue of its subject finds common use as volunteer Diane Wilde confirms: "I think most of us who are involved in Buddhist prison work use it a lot and the men love it."⁸⁵ This sutra is a narrative of a serial murderer who was inspired by an encounter with the Buddha to change his ways and become a monk. It speaks to the issue of acceptance of those who committed serious crimes and their potential to find liberation. For an inmate this appears

⁸⁴ Hardcore Zen and Sit Down and Shut Up. Warner's third book, Zen Wrapped in Karma Dipped in Chocolate, was published after research for this thesis was completed.

⁸⁵ Diane Wilde. Telephone interview, February 20, 2008. Recorded with interviewee's prior consent..

to be a powerful message. The *Mettā Sutta*, a text from the *Sutta Nipata* of the Pali Canon, is also widely used. This text is popular in the Theravadin tradition where it is often chanted by monks and lay people. Its teachings on the way of practicing loving kindness and its benefits are considered to be beneficial by many volunteers. The *Dhammapada*, the second book of the *Khuddaka Nikaya* in the Pali Canon, is less commonly used although several volunteers noted its simplicity of language, its verse form, moral exhortations and subject matter (chapters on anger and evil, for example) make it understandable to inmates with little previous experience of Buddhism.

In addition to these varieties of texts there are several that are specific to a tradition. These include the *Heart Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra*. The *Heart Sutra* is an influential text in Tibetan and East Asian traditions. It is often used as liturgical text and recited or chanted. A short summary of *prajñāpāramitā* (perfection of wisdom) with a concluding mantra for chanting, opinion among volunteers as to its utility is split. Some believe the difficult nature of the sutra makes it hard to explain and that “it needs to be experienced deeply”⁸⁶ to be understood while others argue that “it has everything there”⁸⁷ for a true understanding of Buddhism. The *Lotus Sutra* is also influential in East Asia. It is commonly used by volunteers of the Nichiren and Soka Gakkai traditions because of its key role in those schools.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Lisa Hill. Telephone interview, February 18, 2008. Recorded with interviewee’s prior consent., notes taken.

Some volunteers also produce their own chapbooks, either as liturgies or as manuals for use by inmates. This provides a greater degree of control over reading material, enabling it to be tailored to the volunteer's sense of what would be beneficial as well as a particular Buddhist tradition. Kobai Scott Whitney has produced an eclectic but largely Theravadin leaning liturgy (see Appendix II) that includes the Three Refuges, the Five Precepts, both the *Angulimala* and *Mettā Suttas* as well as the *Purabheda Sutta*, selections from the *Dhammapada*, dedications, devotions, *gathas* and a Chinook blessing (Whitney works in the Pacific Northwest). He indicates that the liturgy was assembled largely by trial and error, based on inmate response to texts and always a work in progress. In this sense it was a participatory liturgy, created by the sangha of Buddhists he works with. Whitney added and later removed some texts, such as the *Heart Sutra*, which he deemed too complex for use.⁸⁸ The National Buddhist Prison Sangha has produced a text that reflects its own Zen orientation. It includes the *Heart Sutra*, extended texts by John Daido Looi, Taizan Maezumi and Charlotte Joko Beck, a glossary of Buddhist terms, answers to common questions as well as a sample inmate practice routine.⁸⁹ Venerable Robina Courtin and the Liberation Prison Project have produced a text for use by inmates, entitled *Notes on the Buddhist Path to Enlightenment* (2007). This text is structured in two parts. The first is an extended discussion of the core teachings of Buddhism such as not-self, and kamma as well as a review of meditation principles and practical guidance on dealing with anger and negative emotions. This is followed by an exposition of the practice of Tibetan Buddhism,

⁸⁸ Whitney, Kobai Scott. Personal communication by telephone, notes taken. January 26, 2009.

⁸⁹ The National Buddhist Inmate Sangha has asked that I not include this document in the appendix.

including meditation (on the breath, on the image of the Buddha and on Tara, a female bodhisattva) and prayer.

There are a number of factors shaping the sort of literature used. The spiritual tradition of the volunteer or organization influences the selection of texts; a Zen Buddhist is likely to have Zen literature on hand (or have access to it through an affiliation to a temple or centre) and to be familiar with it. In the same way a follower of a Tibetan tradition would likely have access to Tibetan literature. The individual personalities of volunteers also play a role in determining which texts will be used; a volunteer given to more eclectic reading tastes may include texts outside his or her tradition.

An inmate's reading ability, familiarity with Buddhism and personal preferences will also influence the selection of texts. Not every inmate is a *tabula rasa*, with no prior knowledge of Buddhism. Some may be advanced practitioners or at least have read widely in the subject. They may hold to a particular tradition and wish to continue practicing in it. A volunteer would then have to be sensitive to those needs and adapt his or her book choices accordingly.

There is also a practical limiting factor – the physical availability of literature. If a facility has a library with a multi-faith collection including Buddhist books then inmates would have access to a range of spiritual traditions and literature of varying quality. The selection and provision of books can be somewhat random; inmates may not be able to physically

visit the library or may not be able to specify on the book request form what title they wish to receive. In such a circumstance the inmate would likely receive the most immediately available Buddhist book, regardless of tradition. Non-English texts may not be available, depending on the facility. This would limit access to Buddhist reading material for non-English speaking Buddhists.

Volunteers differ not only in their choice of text but also in how they use them. They may supplement the content of a prison library by providing books directly to inmates, using specific texts in services and counseling, quoting from texts in correspondence, creating their own chapbooks containing selected texts or arranging for an organization to send books directly to an inmate. Some, such as Alan Senauke, do not use texts at all in their visits. Senauke may use Buddhist stories and quotations in his talks to inmates but he feels there is no time to “really unpack it [a text] fully”⁹⁰ in the time available during a visit.

Diane Wilde, on the other hand, makes extensive use of texts in a more formal service that includes recitation of the Precepts.⁹¹ Genko Blackman works in a similar fashion, leading inmate groups in sutra chanting (*Angulimala* and *Mettā Suttas*), recitation of the Refuges and the Precepts and the reading of a dedication.⁹²

⁹⁰ Alan Senauke. Telephone interview, March 22, 2008. Recorded with interviewee’s prior consent..

⁹¹ Diane Wilde. Telephone interview, February 20, 2008. Recorded with interviewee’s prior consent..

⁹² Genko Blackman. Telephone interview, February 18, 2008. Recorded with interviewee’s prior consent..

Chapter 10: Textual underpinnings of Buddhist social action

It seems obvious that the Buddha viewed virtuous moral action as helpful to those seeking liberation, teaching that it is “by deed one becomes a brahman” (*Vesala Sutta*, SnP 1.7, 21, 29) and the cultivation of loving-kindness towards others as essential: “Thus... to all as to himself, he [a disciple] dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness” (*Anguttara Nikaya* AN 3:65, I, 188-93). However, Buddhism lacks a system of divinely communicated rules to govern one’s moral life or to guide social action. Instead, it posits a concept of *kusala* (wholesome) or *akusala* (unwholesome) thought and action and makes the individual the ‘owner’ of his or her actions and their consequences. The focus is on the karmic effect of one’s actions, wholesome or unwholesome. “Beings are reborn according to the nature and quality of their past actions; they are ‘heir’ to their actions” (Harvey, 1990, 39). This, and the concept of resulting rebirth, is common to all schools of Buddhism (Keown, 2003, 235). The Buddha clearly delineated a course that would lead to a cessation of rebirth – the Eightfold Path, and this contains moral guidelines, although, as Bhikkhu Bodhi points out, “ethical principles are subordinate to the path’s governing goal, final deliverance from suffering” (Bodhi, 1994, 43).

The first division of this path – the *silakkhandha*, concerns itself with *sīla* – moral discipline or virtue. It is comprised of *sammā-vācā*, *sammā-kammanta* and *sammā-ājīva*, or right speech, right action and right livelihood. Although the conventional Buddhist discussion of right

action seems to suggest a reductive, negating approach to morality – not intentionally killing, not taking what is not given and not engaging in the wrongful pursuit of sensual pleasures, there is a more generous interpretation, as Peter Harvey explains: “Influenced and inspired by good examples, a person’s first commitment will be to develop virtue, a generous and self-controlled way of life for the benefit of self and others” (Harvey, 2004, 41). Harvey goes on to cite the differences between *kusala* and *akusala*, wholesome or unwholesome, actions:

1. The individual’s motivation for doing the action;
2. The direct benefit or harm caused by the action; and
3. The action’s contribution to spiritual development along the path to *nirvana*.

(Harvey, 2004, 46).

In this sense, the Eightfold Path equips the Buddhist to develop a path of social action in order to further his or her own escape from suffering. There is a simple filter to identify wholesome actions, which it is known will help deliver one from suffering. In addition, a Buddhist may accept a number of rules, or precepts. These are explicit moral guides (e.g. do not take what is not given). Similarly, texts such as the *Sigalovada Sutta* (DN 31, III, 180) provide specific guidance on moral conduct and right relationships. However, they are largely silent on social action.

Another potential motivator for Buddhists to engage in social action is the principle of *anatman*, or non-self. Very early (in the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, SN 22.59, III, 66) the Buddha taught the principles of the five *skandhas*, or aggregates, and the essential ‘non-selfness’ of each. To identify the aggregates as anything other than temporary phenomena, in other words, to believe in a permanent self (*satkaya-drsti*) is to be bound by a *samyojana*, or fetter, that will hold one to *samsāra* (the cycle of rebirth). Such *sakkayaditthi*, or personality view, is thus not conducive to liberation. If all phenomena (including human beings) are impermanent and lacking an enduring, separate and autonomous self, then the duality of individual and the rest of the world must, as a matter of course, be illusory. This strand of reasoning as extensively developed in the Mahayana tradition, finding expression in the *Madhyamaka* school and in such texts as the *Heart Sutra* (Red Pine, 2004), which asserts that emptiness is form and form is emptiness, and the *Vajracchedika* (Diamond) *Sutra* (Red Pine, 2001). The inter-connectedness of all things is further strengthened by the Buddhist concept of *patīccasamuppāda*, or dependent origination, which stresses that every thing comes into existence due to the presence or action of something else. Taking this further, what then is the essential difference between a volunteer and an inmate if there is no duality? Claude Anshin Thomas asserts there is none and that this fact motivates his social actions.⁹³ It is possible that the same realization of a common nature motivates others engaged in prison outreach in the manner of Thomas although the practical application of this concept is likely not universal as a personal experience reveals. In 2007 an inmate I corresponded with came up for release from the California correctional system. He expressed interest in maintaining his meditative practice following his release. I

⁹³ Claude Anshin Thomas, telephone interview. October 2, 2008. Notes taken.

contacted three Buddhist centres in the area he intended to settle in, with the goal of facilitating an introduction. None of the centres was interested in having a former prison inmate practice with its sangha. In one case a representative told me that a former inmate had stolen money from the centre several years ago and, because of this, an unofficial policy of discouraging former inmates from attending the centre had been instituted. This suggests that the principle of non-duality is likely not a strong motivator for Buddhist prison outreach. However, non-duality remains as an ideal at least, a mark of a mature Buddhist. As Thich Nhat Hanh puts it, “... a true practitioner helps all living beings in a natural and spontaneous way, without distinguishing between the one who is helping and the one who is being helped” (Nhat Hanh, 1992, 36).

Supporting these concepts are several Buddhist principles that, in the ideal sense, inform and possibly inspire social action such as prison outreach. *Punna* (Skt. *Punya*) – the merit of an action, is linked to the notion of karma. The Buddha taught: “Monks do not fear meritorious deeds,” (*Ituvittaka* It 22, 14-16) suggesting that serious Buddhists would strive to cultivate *punna*. The three factors of *punna* (giving, moral discipline and meditation) together comprise *punna kiriya vatthuni* (the basis of meritorious action). *Dāna* – giving or generosity, is the first factor named by the Buddha, suggesting an emphasis. *Dāna* is the “primary ethical activity which a Buddhist learns to develop” (Harvey, 2004, 61) and may take the form of support for monks, temples and other institutions. It also radiates outwards from the keepers of the dharma to family, friends, co-workers, the poor and the homeless. Including inmates as proper recipients of *dāna* does not seem unreasonable. In

the *Jivaka Sutta*, the Buddha encourages lay followers to be “consummate in generosity” (AN 8:36, IV, 241-43). *Dāna* is also an element of the “higher spiritual ideals” (Saddhatissa, 1970, 47) of Buddhism, as formulated in the *dasaparamitas* (the ten perfections). Harvey points out that, in addition to the value of giving in the context of accruing merit, it is useful for weakening possessiveness, developing empathy towards others less fortunate and for cultivating morality (Harvey, 2004, 62).

Within the Mahayana tradition, the principle of *dāna* has special significance in that those who take the Bodhisattva Vow – promising to liberate others from *samsāra* before themselves, are advised to “... be joyful and unstinting in giving” (Harvey, 2004, 64). The *Brahmajala Sutra* (Thanh and Leigh, 2000), a Mahayana text of the fifth century CE, is a moral guide for Bodhisattvas although Keown points out that in this context the term, Bodhisattva, should be read to mean the “ordinary practitioner of the Mahayana path” (Keown, 2003, 93) thus making the precepts contained therein applicable to all Buddhists in the Mahayana tradition. The eighth major precept of this sutra is an admonition to practitioners to be generous:

A disciple of the Buddha must not be stingy or encourage others to be stingy. He should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of stinginess. As a Bodhisattva, whenever a destitute person comes for help, he should give that person what he needs. If instead, out of anger and resentment, he denies all assistance ~ refusing to help with even a penny, a needle, a blade of grass, even a

single sentence or verse or a phrase of Dharma, but instead scolds and abuses that person ~ he commits a *Parajika* offense.

(Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1981)⁹⁴

Related to giving, and the inspirations for doing so, are *mettā* – loving-kindness, and *karunā* – compassion. *Mettā* is to be practiced towards all living beings without self-interest. It is “an altruistic attitude of love and friendliness as distinguished from mere amiability based on self-interest” (Buddharakkhita, 1989). *Mettā* is indiscriminate and applicable to all beings, not just those deemed worthy of receiving love. This would obviously include prison inmates, even those convicted of heinous crimes. Similarly, *karunā* is applicable to all and an essential support for spiritual development: “compassion is the basis of all good dharmas” (Heng-ching, 1994, 13). Keown points out (Keown, 2003, 115) that, in the Buddhist debate about human rights, *karunā* is cited by some as the more appropriate grounding for an ethical framework rather than Western approaches that emphasize the individual.

Traditions within Buddhism have their own views of ethics and morality that can drive social action. For example, the legendary practicality of Zen leads us to a perspective that seems more action-oriented although still silent on social action. Dogen, in his essay, *Shoaku-makusa*, reprises the Buddha’s exhortation to “practice the many kinds of right” (Dogen, trans. Nishijima, 1994). Modern Zen teacher and follower of Dogen, Gudo Nishijima, takes up this point and stresses the grounded nature of morality in Zen:

⁹⁴ A *parajika* offence is a serious violation of discipline; in a monastic setting it could lead to expulsion.

... Buddhist morality has no basis other than Buddhist morality itself. To understand this point we must realize that morality is not a theoretical or intellectual problem. Morality is a practical problem – a real problem. What to do here and now is the problem and the answer is contained in the situation itself.

This is the fact, and facts are the basis of Buddhist morality itself.

(Warner, 2009, 180).

Once again though, the teachings are silent on social action such as Buddhist prison outreach, leaving it to the practitioner to interpret for him or herself.

In addition to sutras and commentaries there are several exemplars who, through their actions and writings, serve to inform Buddhist social action. The two most prominent figures are the Vietnamese Zen monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Dalai Lama. As leaders during terrible times (the Vietnam war and the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet, respectively) and voices for human rights, they have helped spur a debate in American Buddhism about the role of social action, a debate that has made explicit many of the concepts inherent in the Buddhist texts cited above. In fact, “the question of social action has... become one of the most important marks of the new American Buddhists...” (Fields, 1992, 374). Responsibility for addressing suffering is a common thread in the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, as this quotation shows:

Do not avoid suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, including personal contact, visits, images and sounds. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.

(Nhat Hanh, 1993, 12).

Thich Nhat Hanh has been forthright about the necessity of responding to situations, asking: “if you know what is going on, how can you avoid acting to change the situation?” (Fields, 1992, 375).

This thrust has taken two major directions. The first is to spark a largely intellectual debate about ‘Engaged Buddhism’ among scholars. The second is to bring moral concepts more to the fore such as Zen abbot John Daido Looi has done, arguing that “there is an intimacy between the Buddhadharma and a moral and ethical life” (Looi, 2007, 5). Given that none of the volunteers interviewed used the phrase, ‘Engaged Buddhism,’ unprompted and several were unfamiliar with the term (which suggests that the debate amongst intellectuals has not trickled down to mainstream American Buddhism), it may be that it is the second strand that is more important in motivating social action on the ground and that the first strand is limited to academia and a smaller circle of interested Buddhists.

Chapter 11: Buddhist Volunteers

We have seen what Buddhist organizations have developed to provide outreach to inmates and we have examined both the methods commonly used as well as the Buddhist principles guiding such work. Let us now examine the engines of these networks – the volunteers themselves.

Putting absolute numbers to the volunteers working in US corrections is challenging. Imprecise estimates put the number at about 1,000 individual volunteers⁹⁵ and 60 temples and/or practice centres.⁹⁶ This would translate into a slender portion of the total US Buddhist population engaging in prison outreach – 0.05 per cent of the 2.1 million US Buddhists (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008, 5).⁹⁷ Chaplains such as Larry Durham indicate that, in general, there is always a small pool of active volunteers regardless of faith.⁹⁸ Writing in 2001, Nieto and Johnston-Dodds observed that there were 9,000 volunteers assisting chaplains in the California correctional system, of which less than one per cent ministered to non-Christian faiths (Nieto and Johnston-Dodds, 2001, 11). Assuming that Buddhism represents a third of this one per cent, we arrive at a low number of 30 active Buddhist volunteers in California in 2001. There has likely been some growth in the intervening years. Overall, Buddhist prison outreach is an activity engaged in by a minority of American Buddhists and Buddhist centres.

⁹⁵ Kate Crisp, telephone interview. October 7, 2008. Notes taken.

⁹⁶ Or about three per cent of the 2,117 US-based centres registered with the World Buddhist Directory.

⁹⁷ Pew reports that 0.7 per cent of the US population is Buddhist.

⁹⁸ Rev. Larry Durham. Personal communication. March 18, 2009. Notes taken.

Of the informants I interviewed, 17 of 19 were affiliated in some fashion with the Prison Dharma Network, if only as members of that organization's online social network. A little over a third of these informants (7 of 19) had founded their own initiatives of varying scale, sometimes with other volunteers and sometimes with connections to other local groups. Slightly more than half (10 of 19) worked on their own initiative, either in solitary fashion or linked to a local group. Only one informant was solely reliant on a relationship with a large organization (Prison Dharma Network) to conduct volunteer work (obtaining contact information for inmates to correspond with).

For a significant minority of individuals, there was a natural progression from independent volunteer work to the founding of a formal initiative, often registered as a charitable organization. This may take the form of a new entity, an organization spun-off from a temple or practice centre or simply the addition of a prison outreach mandate to an existing temple or centre's outreach programs. In most cases these initiatives were focused on one or a few correctional facilities.

This evolution seems to have been driven by the growing scale of the volunteer work, which outstripped the individual's resources of time and money. The change to a formal structure has enabled greater access to the human and financial wherewithal needed to advance the volunteer work. These structures continue to be driven by a single, strong personality; in one instance the departure of the informant resulted in the decline and

subsequent restructuring of the organization, suggesting a high degree of reliance on the drive of the key volunteer and the power of a charismatic figure to motivate other volunteers (this pattern was also repeated at the Upaya Zen Center, as discussed above). In one instance, an informant began prison volunteer work after practicing at a local centre for seven years. She coordinated three different Buddhist practice centres in the state and negotiated with the correctional authorities for an extended period to obtain access to facilities and to devise an outreach program. Over two years she had progressed to a formal structure (that subsequently obtained charitable status) that now provides non-sectarian Buddhist outreach to inmates in the state and mailings to inmates out of state.⁹⁹

It must be asked why there has been no aggregation of these local organizations into larger structures with greater (perhaps national) reach. Why do volunteers not collaborate beyond the state or regional levels? We have seen that truly national activities are typically limited to coordination (like the Prison Dharma Network) or correspondence (like the National Buddhist Prison Sangha) and sometimes the dissemination of literature. Some informants suggested this was due to the natural disinclination of Buddhists to coordinate formally for any purpose, especially given the many different traditions at play. Leaving this speculation aside, there appear to be three major reasons why this is so. The first, already alluded to, is the local power base of volunteer organizations, often driven by a single, charismatic individual. The second is the different environments that volunteers must work in, each with distinct regulations, volunteer orientation and screening processes, administrative preferences and operating procedures. And third, much of prison volunteer work is reliant

⁹⁹ Email interview with 'K,' March 5, 2009.

on personal relationships with chaplains, volunteer coordinators, wardens and correctional officers. This means that approaches need to be tailored to specific states, if not individual correctional facilities (even for the theoretically monolithic federal system). Without significant commonality in the operating environment, it is difficult to see what the benefit of a national or larger regional structure would be, beyond the sharing of experiences and best practices (which is essentially what the Prison Dharma Network's social network offers).

In instances where volunteers worked independently of a group, network or practice centre, the most commonly cited reasons were the nature of the volunteer work – corresponding with inmates does not require extensive supports or collaboration, unsupportive practice centres (either committed to other social action or disinterested in any such activity) or the need to integrate volunteerism into a busy lifestyle.

In most cases prison outreach was one of several social action activities performed. About three quarters (14 of 19) of informants are involved in social actions outside of prisons. Volunteer work included advocacy for women and transgendered people, assistance programs for the homeless, help for Tibetan refugees, advocacy for democracy in Burma, environmentalism, addictions counseling and assistance in AIDS hospices. This suggests that prison outreach work is part of a larger pattern of social service.

To understand more about the volunteers in US prisons I conducted interviews with 19 informants who were all active volunteers in US corrections. I applied a two-part questionnaire consisting of biographical queries and more open-ended questions about their beliefs and volunteer work. In several instances I interviewed informants repeatedly. Looking at the data (and acknowledging the limitations of the small sample size – about two per cent of the estimated total number of active volunteers), we can see definite patterns. Most volunteers are fifty or older. There is an interesting division of informants into two cohorts – those 30 to 39 and a larger group 50 and older. This may correspond to two distinct periods of intense activism in the US – the 1960s and 1970s and the 1990s and 2000s, which perhaps inculcated a sense of social action in informants during their youth. Robert Bellah has attributed a rebellious sensibility common to both practitioners of Asian-derived spiritual traditions and to political activists in the 1960s and 1970s, arguing that “Sympathizers of the Asian religions tend to be as critical of American society as political activists far more critical of the norm (Bellah, 2006, 275).” Almost all informants are Caucasian.¹⁰⁰ They are largely from Christian backgrounds. They are typically well educated at the university level. And they largely define themselves as lower to middle class. Politically almost all place themselves on the left to far left of the spectrum, often to the left of the US Democratic Party (under President Obama). Their Buddhist

¹⁰⁰ Informants were invited to supply their own terms that were meaningful to them to define their ethnicity, prior religious affiliation, political orientation and socio-economic status as well as when they considered themselves to have become Buddhist. Hispanic is a term with wide currency in the US, typically applied to those tracing ancestry to Mexico, Central and South America and the Spanish-speaking islands of the Caribbean (such as Cuba and Puerto Rico). It is also a term used in officialdom to classify race, including by the Bureau of Prisons.

practices are mature and many have gone beyond membership in a temple or centre to take on leadership or supervisory responsibilities.

Gender

Male	9	47%
Female	9	47%
Transgendered	1	6%

Age

30-39	4	21%
40-49	0	0%
50-59	6	32%
60-69	9	47%

Ethnicity

Caucasian	14	74%
Jewish	3	16%
Hispanic	1	5%
African-American	1	5%

Prior religious faith

Christian	14	74%
Jewish	3	16%
Muslim	1	5%
Unknown ¹⁰¹	1	5%

Educational attainment

High school or less	2	11%
University, undergraduate	4	21%
University, graduate or some graduate	8	42%
University, doctorate	1	5%
Unknown	1	5%

Socio-economic status

Lower	3	16%
Lower middle	1	5%
Middle	11	58%
Unknown	4	21%

¹⁰¹ If respondents declined to respond to the question I reported it as 'unknown.'

Political orientation

Far left	6	32%
Left	8	42%
Liberal	1	5%
Unknown	4	21%

About a third of informants (6 of 19) had some form of criminal conviction and had served a custodial sentence, if only briefly. Only one had been convicted of a violent crime. Instead the majority of offences were politically motivated, minor in nature and committed during a period of activism in the 1960s and 1970s or the 1990s and 2000s. A minority (4 of 19) had some other relationship with the corrections environment, whether a relative or friend incarcerated or, more rarely, a friend or relative employed in corrections.

More than half of the informants practiced in the Zen tradition. They included followers of both Soto and Rinzai schools as well as syncretic Zen paths integrating Rinzai and Soto, such as those taught by Philip Kapleau and Taizan Maezumi. Although the Japanese-derived schools dominated (accounting for 90 per cent of Zen practitioners and 47 per cent of all informants), one informant practiced in the Korean Kwan Um school. Those in the Tibetan tradition accounted for about a sixth of informants. They included followers of key figures such as Trungpa Rinpoche as well as the Shambhala and the ecumenical Rime schools. The Theravadin tradition was represented by a little over a tenth of informants who followed the Thai forest tradition made prominent by Ajahn Chah and others. A

further sixth of the informants follow a spiritual path that incorporates Buddhist elements along with Hindu, Muslim, Christian and aboriginal traditions in an eclectic blend. And one informant adhered to a non-sectarian Buddhist path. In contrast to the dominance of Zen among informants, the Pew Foundation reports that the US Buddhist population in general is fairly evenly distributed with Theravadin, Zen and Tibetan traditions each representing less than 0.3 per cent of the total US population (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008, 5).

Spiritual traditions

Korean Zen	1	5%
Japanese Zen	9	47%
Theravadin - Thai forest	2	11%
Tibetan	3	16%
Non-sectarian Buddhist	1	5%
Eclectic, incorporating non-Buddhist elements	3	16%

The majority of informants are long-time Buddhist practitioners. The average length of time they considered themselves to be Buddhist is 20 years.

Length of time as a Buddhist

0-10 years	3
11-20 years	6
21-30 years	3
30 or more years	3
Unknown/NA	4

Most (14 of 19, or 74 per cent) informants currently hold (or recently held) leadership roles of some fashion with a local group or with the prison outreach organization they are affiliated with. This may range from formal executive roles, representation on a board of directors or a management or supervisory function to more informal positions such as a practice leader or occasional speaker.

The length of time practicing Buddhism as well as the leadership roles suggests that a maturing process occurs – an incremental ‘ripening,’ that can lead to volunteer work in prison and in other settings. Familiarity with the corrections system – as an offender or worker within it, or through friends and family involved in it, does not seem to be a significant motivator. In the next chapter I will explore the reasons given by volunteers themselves for their work in corrections and present hypotheses to explain such involvement.

Chapter 12: How volunteers explain their motivations

We have seen that there are several factors that may predispose American Buddhists to volunteer in some capacity, whether in corrections or in other environments. Now let us turn to the informants' own explanations for their actions. Many informants had not given this much consideration, were initially unclear about it or found that the motivation shifted over time. Claude Anshin Thomas states that he “was not always sure what the motivation is”¹⁰² for his work.

When asked to identify figures or organizations that served as models for their own behaviour, informants identified groups and personages within and without Buddhism that often were perceived as outsiders or peripheral figures either within their societies or within their own organizations, that served the marginalized or that had in some fashion run as a countercurrent to the mainstream. One informant even went so far as to state that he “identifies with the losers and the rejects.”¹⁰³

Several informants identified Christian organizations as models, for example, the Congregation of Christian Brothers. This is a lay organization within the Catholic Church, founded in 1802 with a mandate to provide education to poor youth. According to the Brothers, they “...stand in solidarity with, and open our hearts to, Christ present in people marginalized by poverty and injustice” (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 2009).

¹⁰² Claude Anshin Thomas. Telephone interview. October 2, 2008. Notes taken.

¹⁰³ Informant JM. Telephone interview. November 4, 2008. Notes taken.

Another Christian example identified is Liberation Theology. This emerged in Latin America during the 1960s and has sought to assist the poor and marginalized. Of interest is Liberation Theology's attempt to integrate social praxis with theology and to locate the (Catholic) Church within the reality faced by poor believers – *los pobres*.¹⁰⁴ This involves identification and solidarity with the oppressed, reflection on the application of the Gospel to their situation and subsequent “liberating practice” (Boff, 1987, 7). As Brazilian theologians, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, explain: faith “is verified, made true, when it is informed by love, solidarity, thirst and hunger for justice” (Boff, 1987, 7). Liberation Theology's stance on exploitative Capitalism and class hierarchy (particularly in post-colonial Latin American countries) and its relationship with Marxism have drawn criticism from, among others, the present Pope who (as Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) condemned “deviations” from true interpretations of Christianity. (Ratzinger, 1984).

Several figures within Buddhism were cited as influential. As with Christian exemplars, these too were often outside the mainstream of Buddhism. They include Asian figures such as Buddhadasa and A.T. Ariyaratne as well as Western individuals such as Jarvis Jay Masters, Issan Dorsey and Claude Anshin Thomas. Interestingly, Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama, two very high profile Buddhist public figures, were not mentioned. A different sample of informants may have yielded different results.

¹⁰⁴ See Gustavo Gutierrez. *A Theology of Liberation* (1971).

Buddhadasa was a reforming Thai monk, active during many of the key periods of Thailand's development, including its transition from Siam to Thailand, World War Two, the Vietnam War and the Communist insurgency. Widely seen as a revisionist interpreter of Buddhism, he "emphasized ethical conduct over metaphysical beliefs..." (Keown, 2003, 43). Buddhadasa was also well known as a critic of the established Buddhist monastic order and as a political activist. He coined the term "dhammic socialism," (Changkhwanyuen, 2003, 116) by which he meant a non-Marxist communitarianism, grounded in the principles of the *Aggañña Sutta*, and applied this conception to critiques of the social order in Thailand. Buddhadasa also took an interest in teaching Westerners, starting in the 1970s, and it is at that time that his prominence in Western Buddhist circles began to grow. In essence, he was a reforming and an oppositional figure committed to a progressive and inclusive vision of society, one with profile in the West.

A.T. Ariyaratne is the founder of Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka. This is a grassroots social organization founded on Buddhist and Gandhian principles. Ariyaratne devoted great effort both to advocating for a bottom-up model of social development that is inclusive of marginalized peoples and to devising and executing social programs such as disaster relief.¹⁰⁵

Issan Dorsey was in many ways the polar opposite of Buddhadasa and Ariyaratne, one known as the 'little Gandhi,' the other a monk in Thailand since the age of 20. Dorsey by

¹⁰⁵ See Bond, George. Buddhism at Work: Community Development, Social Empowerment, and the Sarvodaya Movement.

contrast, was a former drug addict, prostitute and drag queen. But there are several points of commonality, namely a commitment to the application of Buddhist principles to guide social action and an interest in marginalized people. As he himself puts it: “When I say I was in the gutter, I mean this body here – this me – was actually in the gutter” (Schneider, 1993, 120). Dorsey began practicing Zen following an LSD-inspired spiritual experience. He sat zazen with, and received instruction from, Shunryu Suzuki and his successor at the San Francisco Zen Center, Richard Baker. He later practiced at the Hartford Street Zen Center, in the predominantly gay Castro section of San Francisco, becoming abbot there in 1989. He died a year later from AIDS-related lymphoma.

Dorsey’s own outreach work included founding Maitri, a hospice for those with AIDS. Steve Allen explains the centre’s name – Sanskrit for loving-kindness, in the context of the work done there: “We use the term with that sense of joy, the joy that arises when we come together to do something to support each other, to take care of each other, our individual lives together and our wider body of society” (Schneider, 1993, 192). Some informants cited Dorsey’s work in the face of this epidemic as a key facet of his exemplar role. Dorsey’s explanation for the act of helping is illuminating: “Big Mind, Issan began to see, presumes that taking care of others is also taking care of self. As co-participants in Big Mind, sufferer and helper are mutually necessary – both help, both suffer” (Whitney, 1998). Paul Rosenbaum of the San Francisco Zen Center explains Dorsey’s inclusive attitude: “Issan didn’t see Zen practice as excluding anybody. He developed the theme in his practice of ‘settling in closeness. He could never exclude anybody because his practice was so

inclusive” (Schneider, 1993, 154). Settling in closeness – the identification with the person you are trying to help, suggests a practical application of the Buddhist concept of non-duality. This point was also made by Dorsey’s teacher, Suzuki: “... to be a white bird in the snow... always being with them [people] without any idea of discrimination...” (Schneider, 1993, 106). Also given as an explanation for Dorsey’s influence were his feet of clay.

Dorsey was a very human role model for Westerners, miles away from saintly Asian figures like the Dalai Lama, possessed of failings and not afraid to acknowledge missteps in his own past. As Katy Butler noted in a review of his biography, “Issan's story inspires me because I figure if he could turn his life [around], anybody could, even me” (Butler, 1994, 69). He was also an outsider figure – part of the gay culture in 1950s America, a drag queen, a drug user, part of the North Beach California arts scene, a member of the 1960s San Francisco counter-culture and an AIDS-positive gay man. It is this blend of human failings, outsider pedigree and Buddhist compassion in action that seems to inspire some informants.

Claude Anshin Thomas’ story shares similar trauma and recovery and has also influenced informants. His dysfunctional childhood and adolescence during the 1950s and 1960s, traumatic experiences during the Vietnam War, his alcoholism and his relentless spiritual seeking, as well as his white rural American origins, seem to have enabled close identification with his experiences among some informants. One informant, speaking both of Thomas and Dorsey, stated “they gave me confidence that [if] someone is that fucked up

then I could practice too.”¹⁰⁶ It appears that his monumental pilgrimages, accomplished in the name of peace and demonstrating extreme commitment to a cause, also inspire some informants. He has walked, for example, from New York to California and from Auschwitz to Hiroshima.¹⁰⁷

Jarvis Jay Masters is an African-American currently serving time in San Quentin Prison in California for allegedly murdering a corrections officer while serving a sentence for armed robbery. He had been a ward of the court, experienced the California Youth Authority (for juvenile offenders) and, by his own admission, committed a series of armed robberies that put him in San Quentin at the age of nineteen. In 1989 Masters converted to Tibetan Buddhism. He has maintained a rigorous practice since that time and authored a book on his experiences as a Buddhist in prison.¹⁰⁸ His story of adversity, resilience and commitment to practice is cited by several informants as influential.

Whether Christian or Buddhist, these role models are highly committed to their faiths and their practice. Whether running a hospice, practicing ‘on the inside,’ walking 8,500 kilometres for peace or helping Latin American ‘base communities’ organize, the practice is seen by informants as a marker of commitment to a spiritual tradition. The fact that these efforts are directed at the poor, the disenfranchised and the marginalized seems to heighten their appeal. Additionally, many of the Western role models encountered

¹⁰⁶ Informant ‘JM.’ Telephone interview. November 4, 2008. Notes taken.

¹⁰⁷ See Thomas, Claude Anshin. *At Hell's Gate: A Soldier's Journey from War to Peace* (2006).

¹⁰⁸ See Master, Jarvis. *Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row* (1997).

Buddhism in a similar manner to several informants, almost haphazardly through a gradual drift towards it.

Of the many varied forms of social action – hospice work, helping the homeless, assisting the aged, prison work remains most challenging in terms of gaining access to facilities and working with inmates. As Kobai Scott Whitney puts it:

Going into a prison every week, or every other week is a big commitment that can weigh heavily on one's schedule. In many places, volunteers are not treated with particular friendliness by security staff. Often times the orientations seem to be meant to scare people away.¹⁰⁹

Why then would someone choose this specific form of social action to take up instead of (or in addition to) another? Is there a particular benefit to be gained or a compelling need to be met?

There is the 'Oz effect.'¹¹⁰ This is a narrative that speaks of the dangerous nature of prisons and the consequent heroism of those who take the risk of volunteering in one. Veteran volunteer, Bo Lozoff, notes this motivating factor, calling it “the public fascination with

¹⁰⁹ Kobai Scott Whitney. Personal communication by email. May 29, 2009.

¹¹⁰ 'Oz' is a gritty television drama that ran on HBO in the US between 1997 and 2003. Set in a fictional maximum security prison, the series was notable for its graphic depictions of murder, sexual abuse and other violence.

prisons.”¹¹¹ Similarly a degree of idealization can occur, as one informant noted: “the issue of romanticizing prisoners is another challenge for me. I believe my ideas about saving people who are victims of the ‘system’ was my initial motivation to do prison meditation.”¹¹² Kobai Scott Whitney has observed this, noting that “some people are lonely and co-dependent and want a man or woman to rescue, save or marry.”¹¹³

The very environment in prisons has, as we have seen, an effect on Buddhist practice. Almost all informants were clear that inmates’ responses and adaptations to such as environment, and their ability to maintain a practice in such an environment, were inspirational and had a definite positive effect on the volunteers’ own practice. One informant referred to it as a “reciprocal practice”¹¹⁴ arrangement that enabled a deepening of her own practice, another claimed: “I’ve learned so much from these guys.”¹¹⁵ This was a common theme, with most informants using words like ‘inspiring’ and ‘rewarding’ to describe the benefits they saw.

Many informants thought that Buddhist inmates lived the practice and its concepts, often by virtue of their circumstances. Those in remand centres, for example, were often not allowed personal possessions or to put up pictures in their cells. In other facilities, there may be a limit to the number of books an inmate may possess at one time, limiting the building of a ‘library’ of literature to consult. Buddhist concepts such as impermanence

¹¹¹ Lozoff. Telephone interview. Noted taken. 8 Mar. 2009.

¹¹² Informant ‘KD.’ Personal communication by email. December 19, 2005.

¹¹³ Kobai Scott Whitney. Personal communication by email. May 29, 2009.

¹¹⁴ Informant ‘L.’ Telephone interview. February 18, 2008. Notes taken.

¹¹⁵ Informant ‘C.’ Telephone interview. March 19, 2008. Notes taken.

and non-attachment were delineated much more clearly in a prison setting, some informants thought. It was the inmates' ability to adapt to changing circumstances that was inspiring and that has thrown light on the full meaning of such concepts as these, making them more comprehensible. As one informant put it, volunteer work "makes practice practical."¹¹⁶ Another indicated that prison outreach work made the Mahayana concept of the Buddha within – *Tathāgatagarbha*, clear, enabling him to "see each person as a Buddha [and] to meet each person as they are."¹¹⁷ Thus engagement with Buddhist inmates delivers a deeper, more concrete understanding of Buddhist terms and concepts.

Similarly, inmates respond to challenging situations in prison and practice Buddhism in a setting commonly thought to be hostile to it. One informant cited the fact that Buddhist inmates tried to live the Precepts, knowing the danger this may pose in a culture often predicated on violence and posturing to project the image of strength. The informant found this courage inspiring. Many informants identified this evidence of the dharma in action, of real examples of lived Buddhist teachings, often wrestling with Buddhist responses to issues uncommon outside of prison walls, as opposed to a purely intellectual encounter with Buddhism.

Furthermore, working with inmates has provided many informants with the opportunity to witness evidence of the transformation that Buddhism offers. One informant stated "every

¹¹⁶ Informant 'SK.' Telephone interview. March 23, 2008. Notes taken.

¹¹⁷ Informant 'SN.' Telephone interview. March 22, 2008. Notes taken.

day there are miracles taking place in these prisons.”¹¹⁸ By this it was meant not that real miracles (interruptions in the accepted functioning of the universe) were happening but that significant transformative changes in inmates were being observed. Some informants found that watching people change with the application of Buddhist practice both confirmed for them the value of the path they themselves were on (to witness transformation and to know that it was available to them too) and rewarded them personally for their volunteer efforts.

Buddhist prison outreach was also seen by some informants as providing teaching opportunities and groups of enthusiastic and committed learners. Working with inmates who often had no or limited knowledge of Buddhism and possibly barriers to learning (low literacy, for example) forced them to refine their teaching techniques and, in answering difficult questions, to deepen their knowledge both of Buddhist concepts and texts. They were also forced to give reflective thought to how to apply Buddhist principles in prison before responding to more controversial or uncommon questions from inmates.¹¹⁹ Thus it is rewarding and thought provoking to work with receptive practitioners as it prompts a deeper understanding of Buddhist teachings.

Aside from extracting personal benefit from prison outreach, informants also identified altruistic motivations. Most found that the need for such work was intense in prisons. One

¹¹⁸ Informant ‘A.’ Telephone interview. March 26, 2008. Notes taken.

¹¹⁹ In one instance, I corresponded with a transgendered inmate for several months on topics such as managing sexual desire in prison and Buddhist views on gender issues.

informant found the work confirmed the idea of “joy from sacrifice”¹²⁰ for him. This complements the view of joyful service explained earlier by Steve Allen of Maitri. Another stated flatly that the “inmates need it.”¹²¹ A third informant had found that practicing in his own sangha had accelerated his own practice development and felt it was necessary to bring this opportunity to inmates who, because of their incarceration, would have limited capacity to develop on their own and who otherwise lacked a connection to the wider Buddhist community.

Based on their own explicit views we can see that most informants identify with either those belonging to, or emerging from marginalized groups or those committed to helping them. There is a strong attachment to the marginal members of a society, whom many informants thought were most in need of help. There may also be a degree of romantic imagining of the prison setting and inmates that creates a desire to volunteer in this setting. But most informants felt there were practical benefits to be gained from volunteering in prisons – deeper understanding of Buddhism, evidence of the benefits of practice, etc. Although no informant clearly articulated this view, it was inferred by several that the intensity of the prison environment is what enabled many of these benefits to become clear, in essence that prison functioned as a crucible to forge stronger Buddhist practice and to accelerate its development.

¹²⁰ Informant ‘R.’ Telephone interview. March 26, 2008. Notes taken.

¹²¹ Informant ‘CK.’ Telephone interview. March 25, 2008. Notes taken.

Chapter 13: Identity and community

Buddhism is a minority religion in the United States, which is overwhelmingly Christian¹²² and possessed of its own 'civil religion' (Bellah, 1970, 177). Additionally, the 'de-privatization' of religion identified by José Casanova (Casanova, 1994, 17) that puts faith (principally Christianity) back in the public sphere of American life makes the differentiation of Buddhism from mainstream American spirituality starker. Convert Buddhists are a minority within this minority of Buddhists, distinct from ethnic Buddhists. Furthermore, those engaged in prison outreach represent yet another minority within American Buddhism – a small number of individuals who are highly involved in social action.

From the political perspective Buddhists performing prison outreach are at variance with the dominant ideology of the US (Gallup, 14 and 25 Aug. 2009), being left of centre and with distinct views on corrections. They are a highly critical minority. Most informants viewed the correctional system in the United States as punitive, semi-functional at best, uncommitted to rehabilitation, often brutalizing and, in the opinion of four informants, part of a for-profit prison-industrial complex that deliberately incarcerates the poor and racial minorities. This view may have been shaped by the experiences of those informants who have been personally involved in the criminal justice system, having been convicted of a crime and, in some circumstances, serving a custodial sentence. In contrast “virtually everyone agrees that the public in the United States harbours punitive views towards

¹²² 81 per cent of Americans are Christian. See Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. 1 Sept. 2009.

offenders” (Cullen, 2002, 1) with 64 per cent of Americans in favour of the death penalty and 48 per cent believing it is not applied often enough (Gallup, 24 Aug. 2009).

With political views far outside the mainstream, a spiritual tradition adhered to by few and membership in a very small group performing prison outreach work, these volunteers are a distinct minority. We will see that a principal driver for such outreach work is the fashioning of an identity for, as Bataille notes, “men act in order to be.” (Bataille, 1985, 171). Understanding how they fashion an identity for themselves, how that ‘act’ in order to ‘be’ (or become) something in light of this minority status also helps us discern their motivations for such volunteer outreach.

As we shall see, there is a shared *habitus* (in the Bourdieusian sense) among informants. The three main planes of this *habitus* are: religion, politicization and marginality. Examining these schemata will provide some understanding of the worldview of informants.

Religion did not, in most cases, form a critical part of the early lives of informants. Rather, they mostly had secular upbringings or were involved in strictly circumscribed religious activities delineated by a modicum of devotion and pro forma belief. As adults they had largely disaffiliated themselves from their birth faiths. Their turn to Buddhism was incremental, deepening almost without deliberate intent until at some point, it seemed appropriate to wear the label, ‘Buddhist.’ The religious stratum of *habitus* is thus one of limited connection with a theistic spiritual tradition, of individual self-discovery of a more suitable faith and of deepening connection to the adopted tradition. This drives behaviour

in the sense of, as we have seen, the need to be a 'serious' Buddhist and to find ways in which to demonstrate that to oneself and to others.

By living through politically tumultuous times, informants were observers of, and sometimes participants in, acts of opposition to the state. Being witness either to the Nixonian swing to the right or the heyday of the Bush doctrine and in some cases actively opposing (and sometimes receiving a criminal conviction for such efforts) provided informants with a shared anti-authoritarian perspective. As mentioned, the iconic events of the anti-war movement (culminating in at Kent State University) and the street battles of Seattle provide mental anchors for such opposition to 'oppressive' state structures. Additionally, the intimate first hand experience of the power of the state corrections apparatus, and the practical functioning of the correctional system, gained by many of the informants due to their arrest, conviction and, in some circumstances, incarceration, made them acutely aware of the institution they wished to oppose. Being 'in the belly of the beast,' even for a short period of time, sharpened their opinions as to its unjust nature. This was influential in shaping their perspectives on the role of the state and its arms (including the correctional apparatus), the way it functioned and its effects (largely deleterious) on specific populations (minorities and the lower classes, for example). An oppositional stance to the state would be congruent with the *habitus*; however it must be a carefully constructed oppositional stance if it is not to contradict other components of the cognitive order, such as the identity as a Buddhist (with the non-violent connotations attached). We shall see below how this has been navigated by informants.

The marginality exhibited by informants is both real and appropriated, a function of their past positions and current self-assigned places. It transcends the original social position held by the informant at one point in time and now becomes an aspect of the constructed identity, embedded in the cognitive order. Given that 58 per cent of informants self-identified as middle-class, socio-economically, a significant portion of a marginal status must be constructed. This is augmented by the relationships held with inmates who themselves are, as Wacquant notes (Wacquant, 2008, 276-277) of hyper-marginalized and for whom the penal state has been built to manage. Association with this group enables informants to appropriate and internalize their hyper-marginality with their own, yielding a virtuous circle that constantly reinforces this aspect of *habitus* and that completes the narrative of marginality.

Durkheim (2008) argued that religion serves to stimulate social action. Marx posited that religion and religious action are precursors to mature political opposition. However, the experience of American Buddhism stands Marx's evolutionary idea on its head and adds a preliminary component to Durkheim's model. What we have seen is that, in the case of the majority of informants, a radicalization process occurred, either during the 1960s and 1970s or during the later period of confrontations in the 2000s. At the same time, spiritual explorations took place, often spurred by casual encounters with Eastern spiritual traditions. Robert Bellah has observed this, finding that the spiritual traditions of the 1960s counterculture were largely derived from Asian sources. For many informants, the

idea of social action as a necessary corollary to religious practice makes perfect sense. They would concur with long-time Buddhist activist, Alan Senauke: "... part of what happened in 68, 69 and 70 was feeling there's this spiritual yearning on one hand and then there are these radical yearnings on the other and they don't mesh. And when I began to explore anew I felt 'of course they mesh'" (Senauke, 2009). What we see then is a model of:

Political sensitization/radicalization → encounter with Buddhism → Buddhist social
action

Although some, such as Bernie Glassman (Fields, 1992, 375), have argued that there is a certain inevitability leading American Buddhists towards social action, derived from a supposedly indwelling American orientation to social service and charity, this is not borne out by the evidence. Very few informants were active in social outreach prior to taking up Buddhism, although many were involved in oppositional acts such as civil disobedience and protest. They therefore did not share a common 'charitable sensibility' that pushed them all towards social action, regardless of their religious affiliations. Nor is it likely that prior exposure to religious charity was a factor. Most informants had desultory religious educations as children, ranging from near-atheism to frequent shifts in church denomination. This seems to undercut the idea that social action, common in many Christian churches (for example), was engrained in informants through early religious exposures.

One element of informants' sense of identity is derived from this political radicalization, which provided the initial impetus leading to Buddhist prison outreach. Volunteers differentiate themselves by a continuation of their resistance to the state. Outreach is thus more an act of opposition than one of charity. They oppose the practical deleterious effect of the current corrections system on inmates, its practices as well as its symbolic nature as a surrogate for the (until recently) politically conservative government of the United States and the dominant political ideology of the nation. In essence, by opposing the correctional system, condemning the ideology that supports it and working to mitigate its impact on inmates, they oppose the conservative factions of American political life and the conservative political perspectives that continue to dominate. Interestingly, while condemnation of the system as an abstract entity was universal among informants, on a more concrete level, there was little criticism of administrative personnel or chaplains and only occasional disparagement of correctional officers.

Another aspect of the sense of identity is derived from the manner in which volunteers manifest dissent while still maintaining an image as pacific Buddhist. This portrait is important to serious Buddhists, given the qualities ascribed to Buddhists generally and the 'gentle' public personae of leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. Indian scholar, Ashis Nandy points out how such an uneasy balance has been struck by subjects of the colonial system. His model offers insight into the case of Buddhist prison outreach. Nandy explains that the colonized have several options available to them. They may follow a path of servile imitation of their 'masters.' They may collude with or join the oppressive

structures. They may rebel, either as “ornamental dissenters” (Nandy, 1988, xiv) or as serious opponents. Or they may be “... neither a player nor a counter-player” (Nandy, 1988, xiii) but a non-player. The non-player, like Sillitoe’s famed long-distance runner, refuses to abide by the conventions that govern the game. He or she refuses to “... fight the victor according to the victor’s values, within his model of dissent” (Nandy, 1988, 111).

Buddhists involved in prison outreach are formulating their dissent in explicitly Buddhist terms, which shifts the quality of that dissent from a purely secular and political realm (e.g. the conventional left-wing of American politics) to a moral one based on spiritual principles. It may in fact, prove more effective, as Nandy suggests when he writes of the slaves’ cognition of the master as human being as a view superior to that of the master, who views the slave as a thing. Buddhist principles such as non-duality do not permit such a radical differentiation between self and other. This is a very different model of dissent than that commonly used by secular opponents of the corrections system. It is also a model that positions these Buddhists behind a stereotypical image of peaceful, non-confrontational figures, an image that can be used to screen their dissent, giving them what Nandy calls a position of “perfect weakness” (Nandy, 1988, 111) from which to oppose the prison system and yet still navigate successfully between the corrections enterprise, anti-prison activists and the inmates themselves. It is, after all, difficult to oppose Buddhist compassionate action on the grounds that such altruism is in fact critical of the corrections system.

This non-player oppositional stance helps to build an identity as a political progressive, which, as we have seen, appears to be the original impetus for later social action. On a spiritual level, social action helps construct an identity as a 'serious' Buddhist, committed to the spiritual tradition by engaging in 'off the cushion' practice. It augments other markers of commitment, such as length of time practicing as a Buddhist or leadership roles. The view among a little more than half (10 of 19) of informants was that social action of some sort was helpful both in showing one's *bona fides* as a serious Buddhist and in maintaining that status.

That status is also useful in helping Buddhists volunteers generate self-esteem. Leaving aside altruistic and imitative motivations for a moment, there is a practical benefit to such volunteer work. In as much as there is a loosely connected 'community' of American Buddhists (broadly and also more locally down to the individual temple or practice centre level), volunteers are able to generate relational value in it by participating in outreach. Given that they position themselves as outside of, and in opposition to, mainstream American society, the opportunities to generate self-esteem may come from this community. Sociometer theory contends that an individual will behave in a way that prevents 'relational devaluation' (i.e. rejection) within the communities he or she belongs to, whether these or familial, work-related, temple or practice centre sanghas or the broader, loosely-connected community of people involved in prison outreach. Individuals act in certain ways in order to enhance "... relational value in others' eyes and, thus, improve... chances of social acceptance" (Leary, 1999, 33). The key aspect of sociometer

theory in the case of Buddhist prison outreach is the public nature of the act – “events that are known (or potentially known) by other people have much greater effects on self-esteem than events that are known only by the individual...” (Leary, 1999, 33). Prison outreach involves work in a symbolic institution, one commonly seen as representative of repression, helping inmates who themselves have a representative figure in Buddhist history (Angulimala). This last is important as Buddhism typically lends great weight to teachers and guides; being perceived as a teacher could go far to credential an individual as a ‘serious’ Buddhist practitioner. It is thus tailor-made as a public, or ‘known,’ act that would support self-esteem. We can thus consider this psychological aspect a likely motivator for volunteer work, albeit not the principal one.

We must ask ourselves why volunteers chose prison outreach as the primary vehicle for their social action. We know that the obvious symbol of prisons as oppressive structures, “torture chambers behind the fake façade of American justice and democracy,” (Beck in Franklin, 1998, 168) is attractive as a monolith to oppose. But the choice of prisons as venues for such social action also has to do with fashioning one’s identity, this time through membership in a community of a sense. As Kobai Scott Whitney notes, “most of the best Dharma volunteers I’ve seen over the years ... have some personal connection or history with outlaw culture or prisons.”¹²³ It is this ‘outlaw culture’ that is most interesting and which forms a component both of volunteer identity and of the community of prison outreach volunteers (this community is, quite obviously, a subset of the broader community of American Buddhists, described above).

¹²³ Kobai Scott Whitney. Personal communication by email. May 29, 2009.

The majority of informants identified themselves as misfits or outsiders, in some fashion distinct from mainstream American society. Buddhist, politically left (often radically so), gay, transgendered, Hispanic, African-American, female, former criminal, lower class or simply taking an unconventional approach to career development, they imagined themselves as minorities or outsiders of some sort. In one instance, an informant considered himself to be in opposition to most of American Buddhism, positioning himself as an outsider from an already outsider spiritual tradition, calling mainstream Buddhism “self-congratulatory” and “narcissistic.”¹²⁴ He indicated that he felt he “was not supported by Buddhism as a person of colour.”¹²⁵ This view was echoed by another informant, who observed that his sangha was Caucasian and middle class in composition and not inclusive or welcoming to those on the fringes of society, including both transgendered people and inmates.¹²⁶ Informants also identified with other outsiders, concurring with Bo Lozoff: “my favourite people in the history of the world have all been fanatics...” (Lozoff, 2006) and with the marginalized elements of American society in general, such as Aboriginal peoples.

In the sense that they saw themselves as members of a community, it was one diffuse, unstructured, non-hierarchical, leaderless and voluntary. In fact, it was a community characterized largely by the ‘outsiderness’ of its members. Inmates themselves were often

¹²⁴ Informant ‘T.’ Telephone interview. March 21, 2008. Notes taken. By ‘mainstream’ he meant a predominantly middle class and white community of Buddhists.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Informant ‘JM.’ Telephone interview. November 4, 2008. Notes taken.

seen as members of this community, driven (as we have seen) by a sense of an inclusive sangha that does not respect prison walls as barriers to membership. As Benedict Anderson has noted: “all communities are to be distinguished by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson, 1983, 6). Given the great distances between Buddhists involved in prison outreach and the often tenuous nature of their connectivity, the community of volunteers is to a great degree a mental construct of the participants. Such a construct maps the affinities members have towards the wider Buddhist community, inmates (both specific, known individuals and groups as well as the broader community of inmates generally), Buddhist activists and exemplars (as discussed above) and other volunteers (again, both known individuals and the community at large).

There are certain features of both the constructed identities of volunteers as well as the community they comprise that align with anthropologist, Victor Turner’s ideas of *communitas* and liminality. Liminal entities, Turner asserts, are “... betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention...” with “... ambiguous and indeterminate attributes...” (Turner, 1969, 95). This coincides with the self-perception of many informants as outsiders, defined by their differences from mainstream America and, in some cases, from conventional American Buddhism. Indeed, although Turner concedes that the diversity of liminal types (or ‘threshold people’) makes classification difficult, he does describe characteristics he considers defining. Liminal individuals often: “(1) fall in the interstices of social structure, (2) are on its margins, or (3) occupy its lowest rungs” (Turner, 1969, 125). The informants of this study can be easily recognized in these terms

(think, for example, of the transgendered informant, certainly in an in-between state by conventional definition and ‘betwixt and between’) and indeed Turner makes oblique reference to them when he identifies “dharma bums” (Turner, 1969, 125)¹²⁷ as liminal types. By virtue of their spiritual and ideological orientation they are on the margins of American religious and political life. By their own nature and their self-identification, they are outsiders, positioned on the outskirts of the social structure. From a social or socio-economic perspective, they may not occupy the lowest rungs but certainly are not at the upper reaches of society either.

Turner goes on to describe a non-hierarchical mode of organization he calls *communitas*, which is a rudimentarily structured, loose community of equals. It is “spontaneous, immediate [and] concrete...” as opposed to “norm-governed structure” (Turner, 1969, 127). The parallels with the community, such as one exists, of Buddhists involved in prison outreach, are striking. Turner notes that: “*Communitas* breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality, at the edges of structure, in marginality, and from beneath structure, in inferiority” (Turner, 1969, 128). We are thus looking for a community existing where structure ends or has not yet begun, at its margins and at a position of weakness. All of this can be said to characterize the community of Buddhists doing prison outreach. They are structurally only loosely organized, often only virtually or in small, localized entities affiliated voluntarily with others. They are positioned beyond mainstream American religious and political structures. And because of their minority status, they

¹²⁷ Dharma bums are of course some of the spiritual ancestors of contemporary American Buddhism, going back to the 1950s.

come from a point of weakness or inferiority. Turner saw the attributes of both Buddhism and the American counterculture (both of which are, as we have seen, integral to the shaping of the identities of most informants) as representative of *communitas*. He interpreted the Buddha's efforts as constructing *communitas*: "... equalizing and putting on the behaviour of weakness and poverty" (Turner, 1969, 197). And he sketched a continuity of *communitas* values from 1950s Beats to 1960s Hippies and beyond. Buddhists involved in prison outreach are inheritors of this *communitas*.

We are dealing then with threshold people, brought together by their common interest in Buddhist prison outreach into a *communitas*. They are the 'outsider's outsider,' both because of their beliefs and because of aspects of their identities that place them on the margins of American society. It is this identification as a liminal person that, in addition to the motivations they themselves articulate, drives them to empathize and identify with inmates – also extreme outsiders, and to volunteer to help them. Informants' conception of their sanghas – including both local, physical groups, the broader group of volunteers active in this sort of work and the inmates themselves, is of "We with one another..." (Turner, 1969, 137).¹²⁸ This is an inclusive group, without hierarchy, brought together by the power of the weak. And it is a group that manifests its dissent in a uniquely Buddhist fashion, which enables it to maintain resistance to the monolithic symbol of repression – the prison, while still navigating the corrections system as non-threatening volunteers.

¹²⁸ Here Turner is quoting Martin Buber.

There is of course the reverse of this line of enquiry. If we accept that there only a slender minority of American Buddhists are involved in Buddhist prison outreach, we must ask not just why people volunteer but why they do not. Given the obvious benefits described above, what would prevent the further spread of such volunteer work among American Buddhists? Why is it that a tiny minority would volunteer in corrections? While this lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is worthwhile to make several conjectures that may be confirmed by future research.

There are the obvious impediments: a criminal record would bar one from many ways of volunteering in corrections; a lack of transportation would be a major barrier to in-person visits, given that many facilities are located away from urban centres; inflexible work and/or family schedules could also prevent one from finding time to volunteer in person. As Murray Milner Jr. puts it, “People have agency but only to the degree that they have power and resources to make a difference in social outcomes” (Milner: 1994, 6).

The benefits prison outreach offers may also be available from other social outreach activities, such as working with the homeless. We may also hypothesize that ethnicity may play a role in determining one’s attitudes to such outreach, as could one’s previous exposure to, and familiarity with, the corrections system (as a former inmate or a relative of one, a former corrections employee or relative of one, for example). Theories of behaviour change, such as Prochaska’s transtheoretical model (Prochaska, 1997, 38-48), may help explain how individuals may progress from awareness of such outreach efforts to actual

participation in them. So too could analysis of the moral development of Buddhist volunteers.

There is also the nature of inmates with whom one must work. One may be a Vietnamese Buddhist who, disconnected from his birth faith and only barely familiar with its external rituals, wishes to draw strength from it. Another may be a curious spiritual seeker, uncommitted to Buddhism and exploring many spiritual paths at once. Yet another may simply be seeking a sympathetic ear. The notion that Buddhist outreach is provided to 'serious' and experienced Buddhist practitioners is quickly dispelled. Volunteers may be dismayed at this. The nature of the prison population may also cause frustration; volunteers running meditation groups at remand facilities will find that attendance is highly variable due to inmate churn and that, as a result, one usually teaches only the rudiments of meditation, over and over again. Volunteers must also spend time with individuals accused or convicted of a range of crimes. Providing Buddhist counsel to someone accused of possessing child pornography, for example, will challenge one's notions of *karunā*. All of these may militate against one's commitment or desire to volunteer in a prison setting.

Chapter 14: Modernizing American Buddhism

“The emergence of a distinctively American Buddhism is another dramatic new development. For the first time in history, Buddhist teaching lineages have crossed the Pacific Ocean, transmitted from Asian-born teachers... to American-born students who are shaping a new American Buddhism.” (Eck, 2000, 136) It can be said that, in the 21st century, American Buddhism is fully indigenous, having moved from a first phase of importation to a second phase of invention. For a spiritual tradition grounded in the principle of impermanence, such a process of change should be unsurprising. In the invention phase, institutions and practices are critically examined and adapted or abandoned to fit local circumstances. This process intensified with the transition from Asian-born leaders to American ones (such as Baker-roshi at the San Francisco Zen Center), starting in the 1970s. In some cases the adaptation has progressed beyond Buddhism, for example Toni Packer’s departure from the Zen tradition as established by Philip Kapleau in Rochester, New York and her adoption of a post-Zen, post-Buddhist approach to mindfulness (Ford, 2006, 162). In others there has been spirited debate and schisms; Issan Dorsey’s introduction of the Maitri hospice to the Hartford Street Zen Center spurred heated debate among those seeking solely a spiritual practice environment and those interested in a Buddhist outreach initiative as an aspect of Buddhist practice (Schneider, 2000, 175). Thus the role of social action in modern American Buddhism remains contested although hospice and prison work are strong strands of outreach in US Buddhism.

The ethnic Buddhist institutions resident in the United States do not seem to have followed this path of invention to any great degree, with the exception perhaps of Shin Buddhism. This is because a salient difference between convert and ethnic American Buddhist institutions is the prevalence of lay-led groups among the former and monastic structures among the latter. The traditional ethnic Buddhist structures are less inclined to change as the convert groups have, simply because they have a fundamentally different purpose. Ethnic Buddhist monastics help preserve the identity and fabric of the community they serve and in turn are supported by that community.

Prison outreach (and the groups and individuals active in such work) is an active force in the modernization of American Buddhism, albeit a very small one. It was not a force in the preceding 25 centuries of Buddhist history for a number of reasons. In pre-modern Asia, the pressures of hierarchical and restrictive societies, such as Tokugawa Japan, would have worked forcefully against any effort to assist prisoners. Confucian conceptions of the ideal social order would have made questioning of the punishments meted out by (again looking at Japan as an example) daimyo (lords), samurai, shogun or emperor an act almost equivalent to treason. Indeed, in instances where Buddhism or its leadership seemed to be slipping from the control of the state or growing too influential, a backlash occurred, hence the proscription against Buddhism in China in 845 CE and the exile of Honen and

Shinran.¹²⁹ Additionally, the pre-modern organizational structures of Buddhism were monastic-centric. In this model, the community served the monks and nuns who provided religious services as well as some spiritual guidance. It would seem that lay-centred Buddhist structures would be needed to drive outreach into sectors such as prisons or the homeless. Thus the involvement of Nishi Honganji, a populist Shin Buddhist organization, in *kyokai*, or prison outreach, in Japan initially informally through affiliated volunteers starting in 1881 and officially sponsored at the beginning of the 20th century.¹³⁰

By modernization I mean the adaptation of Buddhism to the particular circumstances of the United States. I would submit that the influence of prison outreach as an example of Buddhist social action may in fact be out of proportion to its actual size. As Robert Bellah points out, no religion (if it is to survive) “can remain indifferent” to modernization (Bellah, 1970, 72). Bellah also states two other essential aspects of such modernization. First, the process of modernization itself offers “social solidarity” and “individual stability” (Bellah, 1970, 72) to those involved in the enterprise and thereby encourages and supports the ongoing process. We have already seen this in the way such work helps volunteers construct their identities as American Buddhists. It is a sort of virtuous circle of modernization, motivating further action and change.

¹²⁹ State displeasure was not restricted to Buddhists who were perceived as threats; in Japan the government acted against Christians and, in the 1800's, against an uprising grounded in the idealistic Confucian principles of Wang-Yang Ming.

¹³⁰ Jessica Main, University of British Columbia. Personal communication by email, May 4, 2011.

Bellah also explains that modernization of religion “disturbs the pre-existing structure of meaning and motivation...” (Bellah, 1970, 72). In the case of American Buddhism, prison outreach asks a direct and disturbing question: what is the point of sitting on your cushion and seeking nirvana when others are suffering? This is a challenge to the prevailing view of American Buddhism as an individualistic spiritual quest, supported by Asian-derived rituals and driven by meditative practice. It (likely along with other forms of Buddhist social action) works to generate impetus for American Buddhism to shift and to have relevance not only for practitioners but also for American society as a whole. In the case of Buddhist prison outreach the point at which that relevance is generated is the correctional system. In this model we can see that Buddhist prison outreach is provoking a very fundamental change in American Buddhism, one that involves a major shift of emphasis from individual practitioners and Buddhist communities to the application of Buddhist principles to all of American society (and its social issues). Buddhist prison outreach does this by generating an iconic image of Buddhist principles in practice: the confrontation of compassionate practitioners with an enduring aspect of American society – its prisons, which are themselves icons of repression, the polar opposite of compassion.

Chapter 15: Prison outreach as faith legitimization

Buddhist prison outreach in the USA exists in two contexts. The first is within the community of Buddhists, such as that exists. The second is the community of faith groups present in the country. Both are highly influenced by trends occurring in the US and beyond and by discourses shaping faith development.

US Buddhism participates to a great degree in the broader currents of western Buddhism. It is informed by the viewpoints and moral actions of key figures such as Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama as well as Buddhist media outlets such as *Tricycle* and *Turning Wheel* and a plethora of online media sources. Whether termed engaged Buddhism or Buddhist social action, forms of outreach – and their applicability or necessity for 21st century Buddhism, have become a subject of much discussion and debate within these organizations and in journals, at conferences and on websites. Christopher Queen, the American scholar of Buddhism, propagates Ambedkar's view that social action constitutes a fourth *yana*, or vehicle, following the turning of the wheel of Buddhist development, in which "... Buddhist activists attempt to bring their mindfulness into situations of great complexity or conflict..." (Queen: 2004) Whether this is indeed a fourth *yana* or not, prison outreach is a part of this bigger trend in western Buddhism, along with eco-activism, championing of human rights, anti-war efforts, hospice work and outreach to the homeless.

“One of the sexiest things to do in our culture is to do good deeds,” (BergmanL 2011) says Rob Bergman, youth pastor at Windsor Crossing Church in Missouri. For faith groups, this emphasis on good deeds is often focused on prisons. There has been an increase in prison outreach among several faiths in the last decade. Some Christian groups consider prisons to be significant “spiritual harvest fields” (“Ten Ways Prison Ministry Promotes Church Growth”) and have expanded efforts to reach incarcerated populations. Criminon, established in 2000, seeks to use the principles of Scientology to rehabilitate prisoners, thereby extending the reach of that spiritual path (Criminon). Lisa Miller of the Wall Street Journal noted a decade ago that “prison ministry has become a sophisticated and competitive business,” (Miller, 1999) involving many faiths. A Canadian prison chaplain advised me that “prison work is fashionable right now”¹³¹ for faith groups. The growth and maturation of Buddhist prison outreach in the west in the 1990s and the 2000s, including in the US, can be seen as part of this increased general interest in such social service.

In such contexts Buddhist prison outreach works to legitimate ‘off the cushion’ Buddhism (whether termed Engaged Buddhism or described as Buddhist social outreach or similar) within the wider Buddhist community and to legitimate Buddhism within the broader faith community. The choice of a prison environment for such legitimation should not be surprising; we have seen how, in the early 1970s, the Transcendental Meditation movement (a quasi-religious organization based on the teachings of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and with an emphasis on meditative practice) attempted to obtain such legitimation through a short-lived program at the La Tuna federal prison in Texas. Similarly, Jon Kabat-

¹³¹ Chaplain ‘D,’ Personal communication, December 22, 2010.

Zinn and others offered mindfulness-based stress reduction (derived from Buddhist practices) to inmates and staff in the Massachusetts correctional system between 1992 and 1996. So too have Vipassana practitioners in Washington state and Alabama sought to demonstrate the legitimacy of their practice through prison outreach (there have been efforts to bring Vipassana programs to several Canadian prisons as well but none has been offered to date). In all cases what prison experience delivers to a spiritual tradition (or therapeutic technique) is symbolic capital. Such symbolic capital is generated through acceptance by the state through the agency of the various correctional authorities. Practically this takes the form of inclusion in policy and in programming opportunities (such as meditation programs or consultation on matters of faith). Such inclusion gives Buddhism parity with other spiritual practices, being accredited not only in principle but also in practice within the corrections environment.

Prison outreach also offers opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of Buddhism, its utility and applicability in (as has been earlier described) difficult circumstances. That relevance is built on Buddhist responses to some of the challenges of prison life – loss of control over one’s life, regret for past actions, fear of the future, despair and depression. Meditation’s value as a calming agent may account for the prevalence of that form of Buddhist spiritual practice in prison and its value as a ‘proof point’ of Buddhism’s relevance. In a similar fashion, Buddhist hospice work confronts another monolithic aspect of life: death. As Garces-Foley observes, Buddhism has “pragmatic techniques for dealing

with death” (Garces-Foley 2003, 341) that are revealed in hospice work. Buddhism’s pragmatic approach to dealing with suffering is illuminated forcefully in prison settings.

But there are other aspects of Buddhism that help construct this relevancy. The emphasis on the present moment as exemplified in *sammā sati*, or right mindfulness, is of practical value for inmates who may be tormented by thoughts of past actions or suffering anxiety contemplating the possibilities of an imprisoned future. So too is *sīla*, or ethical conduct, which has practical value in supporting or justifying behaviour in prison. These are immensely practical aspects of Buddhism that can work to define its utility in a prison setting, addressing real challenges and thereby helping to define its relevance and ultimately contribute to a legitimation of the Buddhist spiritual path.

There is more to Buddhism’s legitimation than such practical value. The sociologist of religion, Peter Berger (Berger, 1967), contends that one of the principal purposes of religion is to ground an individual’s life in some sort of meaningful order in the face of an ‘out of balance’ and ever-changing world. In essence, a believer may anchor him or herself in an eternal present in order to survive the tumult of the ordinary (or ‘earthly’) present. The solution offered by Buddhism is not one of creating an eternal cosmological order out of time in opposition to the temporary ‘in time’ nature of this world (the “vale of Baca,” or lamentation cited in Psalm 84:6, for example). Rather it stands this idea on its head, positing a solution grounded in a profound recognition and acceptance of the transitory nature of all conditioned phenomena – *anicca*. Whether this solution is found to be

adequate by inmates is, from the perspective of legitimation, not as important as the fact of the existence of a formal response to the issue of a person's relationship to the cosmological order, whether an eternal order or one defined by constant flux.

Berger also claims that the strength of a religious tradition lies in its response to what in philosophy and religion is often termed the problem of evil. Berger borrows the term, 'theodicy,' to mean an explanation of suffering that defines it in a way that supports the sense of cosmological order. Once again, prison, by the nature of the mental and physical suffering inherent in the system, is a proving ground for theodicies. A religious tradition, if it is to have relevance in prison, must put forward a meaningful and satisfactory explanation of suffering. Berger goes further, advocating that:

Every society is, in the last resort, banded together in the face of death.

The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of [men and women] as they stand before death, or more accurately, they walk, inevitably, toward it (Berger, 1967, 51).

To legitimate a spiritual tradition, one must, therefore, put forward a convincing explanation of suffering and, by extension, death. Buddhism begins with the First Noble Truth, setting *dukkha*, or suffering, as a central plank. The remainder of the Noble Truths elaborate on the nature of such suffering and the way to escape from it. Thus, unlike Jewish, Christian or Islamic theodicies, Buddhism sidesteps the dilemma posed by the

simultaneous existence of the divine and suffering and instead focuses on a blueprint for encountering and responding to suffering; "... the bodhisattva cultivates the capacity to live within the raw reality of suffering on the ground and transform life's adverse circumstances into a path of awakening" (Preece, 2009, 3). As with Buddhism's response to a cosmological order (described above), it is less important whether or not this is compelling for inmates than that a response to suffering exists within the Buddhist spiritual tradition. The prison environment demands not only that Buddhism be useful to inmates – providing actionable guidance and benefits from practices such as meditation but that it include spiritual responses to man's place within the cosmological order as well as an explanation of suffering. Buddhism succeeds on these points. The prison setting provides opportunity not only to graphically illustrate these features of the tradition but also to demonstrate their utility, thereby supporting the claim of relevance for Buddhism and working to legitimate it as a spiritual tradition in the United States. That this happens in an environment commonly perceived as harsh and extreme only heightens the legitimation.

Chapter 16: Conclusion

Buddhist volunteers active in prison outreach are self-professed outsiders who refuse to identify with mainstream American political positions. They hold their own views of desirable social and political organization, have in fact rebelled against mainstream beliefs in most cases, continue to resist them now and to hold them in contempt. Additionally, they belong to a spiritual tradition that is a minority within the US. For many reasons, including the need to maintain and enhance self-esteem, they have constructed an identity grounded in 'outsiderness.' This identity is welcoming towards those typically shunned by mainstream America (e.g. criminals). As we have seen, the Turnerian concept of *communitas* and the complementary liminal position help explain the structure-averse nature of this group.

Volunteers have offered several explanations for their volunteer work, ranging from the reciprocal benefits of working with inmates (enhancing one's own practice) to imitation of esteemed role models. A certain amount of romanticization of inmates and prisons may also motivate initial involvement. Informing it is the Buddhist concept of non-duality, which emerges practically in close identification with inmates in a process Issan Dorsey called 'settling in closeness,' tied to a lived application of the Buddhist concept of non-duality.

Buddhist prison volunteers also share a common *habitus* comprised of similar religious, political and socio-economic perceptions and experiences, all of which are strengthened through prison outreach work. This yields a narrative of self that speaks of marginality, political defiance and at the same time a pacific Asian-derived spiritual path.

Looking at the seminal events in informants' lives, it appears that some form of resistance to the state often took place and that this occurred before the encounter with Buddhism. What emerged following the conversion to Buddhism was a continued opposition to the repressive aspects of the state, only now through explicitly Buddhist social action, targeted at the most iconic image of repression – the corrections system. Outreach functions then as a sustained gesture of opposition. Buddhism offers volunteers an advantage by providing an oppositional position as a non-player (as described by Nandy) and enabling them to screen their dissent, using a different model of opposition than that commonly used by secular opponents of the corrections system, one that enables them to engage with the system and those within it.

Buddhist prison volunteers are able to construct an identity as “vulnerable servant” (Nouwen, 2001, 45) sharing affinities with the population they serve in a model of pastoral care that is different from that of other faiths; this works to fulfill their own self-image and satisfies and meshes with the *habitus* fashioned over time.

Buddhists active in prison outreach also gain from the work. They may experience a deepening of their own practice by working with prisoners, clarifying what were previously only intellectually understood Buddhist concepts or drawing inspiration from inmate practice on the inside. And they may benefit by the strengthening of their own persona as a serious Buddhist, thereby earning standing and obtaining approbation from their fellow American Buddhists, thus bolstering self-esteem.

In tracing the history of Buddhist prison outreach, we see a flowering in the 1990s. While this may be due to rising numbers of American convert Buddhists, the transition from Asian to Western leadership may also have played a part. In this sense, prison outreach is a mark of the maturation of American Buddhism. The development of American Buddhism is a path from early intellectual interest (e.g. Olcott, Blavatsky and the like), to proselytizing by Asian Buddhists and the transition of leadership to Westerners. During the upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s the focus appears to have been on individual enlightenment.¹³² A certain degree of awareness among Buddhists, leading figures in American Buddhism and those who see themselves as serious practitioners may have spurred the development of social action and a shift of emphasis away from the contemplative; they may have sensed that they were contributing to the invention of a wholly indigenous Buddhism in America. I would expect that, although my informants were uncommitted to a spiritual path in their earlier lives, a degree of imitation might have been at work here. So many American religious traditions (e.g. Quakers) have strong service components; American-born

¹³² See, for example, the tone of one of the most influential Buddhist books of the period, Philip Kapleau's *Three Pillars of Zen*, with its focus on *kensho*, the Zen enlightenment experience.

Buddhists may have seen a conjunction of 'faith' and 'works' as a necessary mark of a mature spiritual tradition, which they wished Buddhism to be seen as. This lies beyond the scope of this paper and remains to be validated by further research into American Buddhist social action.

Buddhist prison outreach will, I believe, continue to play a role in shaping American Buddhism. It is a powerful and iconic form of social action that makes it more influential than the small number of volunteers involved would suggest. Through its direct and visceral encounter with suffering and its placement of suffering as the central 'theological' problem Buddhism seeks to solve, outreach serves to offer greater legitimacy to a spiritual tradition that has entered the mainstream, demonstrating its 'spiritual adequacy.'

However, there may be future challenges as Buddhism becomes normalized within the corrections system. Turner identified other spiritual movements that exhibited the same qualities and that existed in a state of permanent liminality – the early Franciscans and the Sahajiya movement of 17th century Bengal. But this permanence is illusory as Turner himself notes: "it is the fate of all spontaneous *communitas* in history to undergo... "decline and fall" into structure and law" (Turner, 1969, 132). There is evidence that this may be the case for Buddhist prison outreach – emphasis on external signs of religiosity such as the wearing of Buddhist robes when performing outreach work, prison administration interest in determining if a volunteer is endorsed by, or in good standing with, a Buddhist temple or centre and the development of systematized approaches to prison outreach (including

formal chaplaincy training). However, the seemingly inherent instability of American Buddhist structures larger than local ones, the reliance on volunteers and the lack of central authority figures may militate against the formalization and bureaucratization of Buddhist prison outreach, at least in the near term.

Glossary

Pali terms are given first, followed by the Sanskrit equivalent, if applicable.

Anattā /anātman – not-self. The concept that there is no eternal, fixed element to any individual or object.

Anicca/anitya – impermanence. The concept that all phenomena are dependent on conditions in order to come into existence and that they change and go out of existence at some point; thus nothing is permanent and unchanging.

Bodhi – awakening or enlightenment; to come to a full understanding of the Buddha's teachings.

Dāna – generosity, from which comes merit.

Dhamma/dharma – (1) the complete teachings of the Buddha; (2) the universal principles that govern the functioning of the universe.

Dukkha/duhkha – suffering or unsatisfactoriness arising from ordinary discomforts (such as illness) as well as by change.

Jhāna/dhyāna – a state of deep, fully aware meditation caused by focusing the mind on a single object.

Jiriki (Jap.) – self-power. The ability to achieve liberation or awakening through one's own efforts.

Karunā – compassion.

Khandha/skandha – an aggregate, of which five make up a human being: form, feelings, perception, volitional factors and consciousness.

Mettā/maitrī- loving kindness, goodwill, benevolence.

Nibbāna/nirvāna – the end of suffering through elimination of defilements or through the cessation of the factors that cause rebirth after death (termed ‘final nibbāna’), which causes escape from samsāra.

Paññā/ prajñā – wisdom or insight into the truth of the Buddha’s teachings.

Paticcasamuppāda/pratītyasamutpāda – dependent origination. The concept that all phenomena arise because of dependence on other causes or phenomena and lack any intrinsic, permanent nature.

Punna/punya – merit, virtue.

Samadhi – (1) a state of deep meditation; (2) the second division of the Eightfold Path, comprising right mindfulness, meditation and effort.

Samsāra – the cycle of repeated birth and death that goes on until an individual reaches nibbāna.

Sangha/samgha – (1) a Buddhist community, either lay practitioners or ordained monks or nuns (as in a practice centre’s or monastery’s membership); (2) the wider Buddhist community.

Sīla – morality.

Sutta/ sūtra – a discourse attributed to the Buddha.

Tanhā /trsnā – thirst, craving or excessive desire. The cause of dukkha.

Tariki (Jap.) – other power. The power of Amitabha Buddha to strengthen one’s Buddhist practice and lead one to liberation.

Tathāgatagarbha – embryonic Buddha. The concept that all beings have intrinsic Buddha nature.

Upādāna – clinging or attachment to the notion of self, to sense desires, to rituals or to wrong views.

Appendix 1: Images of Buddhist prison outreach

The following photographs document a multi-faith session and mindfulness-based stress reduction programs offered to male and female inmates in 2009 in the Florida corrections system by Gateless Gate.





Appendix 2: An example of a Buddhist liturgy for use in prison

I. Salutation, Refuges, Precepts

Buddhist ceremonies traditionally have three parts and usually begin with the salutation and the refuges. They are given here in Pali, the Prakrit language thought to be closest to what the historical Buddha would have spoken. Many ceremonies and retreats also begin with a recitation of the Five Ascetic Vows, which existed prior to the time of the historical Buddha. These days, they are often called the Five Lay Precepts. If you want to incorporate bells into your ceremony, the ○ will indicate one strike. Leave time for reverb.

Salutation

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato, Sammāsambuddhassa

Hail to the Holy One, the Arahant, the Fully Awakened One

[recited three times]

The Refuges

Buddham saranam gaccami

I take refuge in the Buddha

Dhamman saranam gaccami

I take refuge in the Teaching

Sangham saranam gaccami

I take refuge in the Community

[Bell and bow]

Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gaccami
the Buddha

For the second time, I take refuge in

Dutiyampi Dhamman saranam gaccami
the Teaching

For the second time, I take refuge in

Dutiyampi Sangham saranam gaccami
the Community

For the second time, I take refuge in

Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gaccami
the Buddha

For the third time, I take refuge in

Tatiyampi Dhamman saranam gaccami
the Teaching

For the third time, I take refuge in

Tatiyampi Sangham saranam gaccami
Community

For the third time, I take refuge in the

The Five Precepts

[Leader] I take up the practice of not harming living beings.

[Pause, all repeat] I take up the practice of not harming living beings.

[Leader] I will not take what is not offered.

[All] I will not take what is not offered.

[Leader] I will not misuse sex.

[All] I will not misuse sex.

[Leader] I will practice gentle, truthful speech.

[All] I will practice gentle, truthful speech.

[Leader] I will not deal in or misuse intoxicants.

[All] I will not deal in or misuse intoxicants.

II. Sutras

This section of a ceremony allows us to pick one, or several, sutta (P.) to recite together. Some given here are from the Pali canon and contain ancient words that are said to have come directly from the Buddha himself. Plum Mountain also uses some sacred texts from other world religions which are similar in spirit and understanding to Buddhist teachings. Choose one, or several recitations for special occasions or for daily practice.

Metta Sutta

(The Loving-Kindness Scripture)

To reach the state of peace

One skilled in the good

Should be capable and upright,

Straightforward and easy to speak to,
Gentle and not proud,
Contented and easily supported,
Living lightly and with few duties,
Wise and with senses calmed,
Not arrogant and without greed for supporters,
And should not do the least thing that the wise would criticize.

One should reflect:

“May all beings be happy and secure;
May all beings be contented at heart.

“All living beings, whether weak or strong,
Tall, large, medium, or short,
Tiny or big,
Seen or unseen,
Near or distant,
Born or to be born,
May they all be happy.

“Let no one deceive another
Or despise anyone anywhere;

Let no one through anger or aversion
Wish for others to suffer.”

As a mother would risk her life
To protect her child,
Her only child,
So toward all beings
Should one cultivate a boundless heart.

With loving-kindness for the whole world
Should one cultivate an open heart,
Above, below, and all around
Without obstruction,
Without hate and without ill will,
Standing or walking,
Sitting or lying down,
Whenever one is awake,
May one stay with this recollection.

This is called the sublime abiding,
By not holding on to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,

Being free of sensual desires,
Is not born again into this world.

*This is adapted from several translations of the Metta Sutta, including those of Gil
Fronsdal and Piyadassi Thera.*

The Dhammapada

(“The Path of the Dharma,” selections)

CHAPTER ONE

(1-2) All experience is shaped by mind,

Led by mind,

Made by mind.

Speak or act with a corrupted mind,

And suffering follows

As the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.

All experience is preceded by mind,

Led by mind,

Made by mind.

Speak or act with a peaceful heart,

And joy follows

Like a shadow that never leaves.

(3) “He abused me, attacked me,
Defeated me, robbed me!”

For those carrying on like this,
Hatred does not end.

(5-6) Hatred is not ended by hatred.
Hatred is vanquished by love.
This is an ancient truth.

People forget that
We will soon die.
For those who know this,
Quarrels end.

(7-8) Whoever lives
Focused on the pleasant,
Senses unguarded,
Immoderate with food,
Lazy and sluggish,
Will be vanquished by Māra,*

Like a weak tree bent in the wind.

(9-10) Whoever is defiled

And devoid of self-control and truth,

Yet wears the saffron robe,

Is unworthy of the robe.

Whoever has purged the defilements,

Is self-controlled, truthful,

And well established in virtue,

Is worthy of the saffron robe.

(15) One who does evil grieves in this life,

Grieves in the next,

Grieves in both worlds.

Seeing one's own defiled acts brings grief and affliction.

(19-20) One who recites many teachings

But, being negligent, doesn't act accordingly,

Is like a cowherd counting others' cows,

And does not attain the benefits of the contemplative life.

One who recites but a few teachings

Yet lives according to the Dharma,

Abandoning passion, ill will, and delusion,

Aware and with mind well freed,

Not clinging, in this life or the next,

Attains the benefits of the contemplative life.

CHAPTER TWO

(21) Vigilance is the path to the Deathless;

Negligence is the way toward death.

The vigilant do not die;

The negligent are as if already dead.

(23) Absorbed in meditation, persevering,

Always steadfast,

The wise touch Nirvana,

The ultimate rest from toil.

(24) Glory grows for a person who is

Energetic and mindful,

Pure and considerate in action,

Restrained and vigilant,

And who lives the Dharma.

(29) Vigilant among the negligent,

Wide awake among the sleeping,

The wise one advances

Like a swift horse leaving a weak one behind.

CHAPTER THREE

(33) The restless, agitated mind,

Hard to protect, hard to control,

The sage makes straight,

As an arrow-maker does the shaft of an arrow.

(34) Like a fish out of water,

Thrown on dry ground,

This mind thrashes about,

Trying to escape Māra's command.

(35) The mind, hard to control,

Flighty—alighting where it wishes—

One does well to tame it.

The disciplined mind brings happiness.

(68) A deed is good

That one doesn't regret having done,

It results in joy

And delight.

CHAPTER SIX

(83) Virtuous people always let go.

They don't prattle about pleasures and desires.

Touched by happiness and then by suffering,

The sage shows no sign of being elated or depressed.

CHAPTER EIGHT

(111) Better than one hundred years lived

With an unsettled mind,

Devoid of insight,

Is one day lived

With insight and absorbed in meditation.

CHAPTER NINE

(124) A hand that has no wounds

Can carry poison;

Poison does not enter without a wound.

There are no evil consequences

For one who does no evil.

(128) You will not find a spot in the world—

Not in the sky, not in the ocean,

Not inside a mountain cave—

Where death will not overtake you.

CHAPTER TEN

(130) All tremble at violence;

Life is dear for all.

Seeing others as being like yourself,

Do not kill or cause others to kill.

(142) Even though well adorned,

If one lives at peace,

Calmed, controlled, assured, and chaste,

Having given up violence toward all beings,

Then one is a brahmin, a renunciant, a monastic.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

(221) Give up anger, give up conceit,

Pass beyond every fetter.

There is no suffering for one who possesses nothing,

Who doesn't cling to body-and-mind.

(222) The one who keeps anger in check as it arises,

As one would a careening chariot,

I call a charioteer.

Others are merely rein-holders.

(224) If one speaks the truth,

Is not angry,

And gives when asked, even when one has little,

Then one comes into the presence of the gods.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

(251) There is no fire like lust,

No grasping like hatred,

No snare like delusion,

No river like craving.

(252) It's easy to see the faults of others

But hard to see one's own.

One sifts out the faults of others like chaff

But conceals one's own,

As a cheat conceals a bad throw of the dice.

CHAPTER TWENTY

(277) "All created things are impermanent."

Seeing this with insight,

One becomes disenchanted with suffering.

This is the path to pure wisdom.

(421) One for whom nothing exists

In front, behind, and in between,

Who has no clinging, who has nothing,

I call a brahmin.**

(423) That person is a sage

Who knows former lives,

Who sees both heavens and hells,

And who has attained the end of birth-and-death.

I call a brahmin

One who has ripened in advanced knowledge
And who has refined the many perfections

* Mara is the personification of evil in Buddhist mythology. He famously appeared to the Buddha just before his enlightenment, offering a world of sensual pleasures, much like Satan appearing to Christ in the desert. One might say that Mara is all of our own greed, aversion and ignorance packed into one being.

**Here, brahmin has the meaning of a “holy one,” rather than someone of the Brahmin caste.

This is an abridged, and slightly adapted selection from the Dhammapada, based on translations by Gil Fronsdal and Eknath Easwaran. The full text of Fronsdal's translation is available from www.shambhala.com and is ©2005 by Gil Fronsdal. Easwaran's work is published by Nilgiri Press and is © 1985 by The Blue Mountain Center for Meditation www.nilgiri.org.

A Chinook Blessing Litany

We call upon the earth, our planet home,
with its beautiful depths and soaring heights,
its vitality and abundance of life,
and together we ask

that it teach us and show us the Way.

We call upon the mountains, the Cascades and the Olympics,

the high green valleys

and meadows filled with wild flowers,

the snows that never melt,

the summits of intense silence,

and we ask

that they teach us, and show us the Way.

We call upon the waters that rim the earth,

horizon to horizon,

the waters that flow in our rivers and streams,

and that fall upon our gardens and fields.

and we ask

that they teach us and show us the Way.

We call upon the land, which grows our food,

the nurturing soil, the fertile fields,

the abundant gardens and orchards,

and we ask

that they teach us and show us the Way.

We call upon the forests,
the great trees reaching strongly to the sky
with earth in their roots
and the heavens in their branches—
the fir and the pine and the cedar—
and we ask them
to teach us, and show us the Way.

We call upon the creatures of the fields,
of the forests and the seas,
our brothers and sisters the wolves and deer,
the eagle and dove,
the great whales and the dolphin,
the beautiful Orca and salmon
and we ask them
to teach us, and show us the Way.

We call upon all those who have lived on this earth,
our ancestors and our friends,
who dreamed the best for future generations,
and upon whose lives our own lives are built,

and, with thanksgiving,
we call upon them
to teach us, and show us the Way.

And lastly, we call upon all that we hold most sacred,
the presence and power of the Great Spirit
whose love and truth
flow through all the universes,
and we ask that this spirit be with us
to teach us, and show us the Way.

Adapted from The Essential Mystics, by Andrew Harvey, Castle Books, 1998.

Angulimala's* Song of Enlightenment

A man who lived carelessly,
And now is neglectful no more
Illuminates the world
Like the full moon on a cloudless night.

He who stops his harmful conduct

By doing skillful actions instead
He lights up the world
Like the full moon on a cloudless night.

The new disciple who devotes
Her efforts to the Buddha's teaching,
She illuminates the world
Like the moon freed from clouds.

Ditch makers guide the water,
Arrow makers straighten out the shaft,
Carpenters trim the lumber,
But wise people seek to tame themselves.

"Harmless"* is the name I bear,
Though I was dangerous in the past,
The name I have today is true:
I hurt no living beings at all.

And though I once lived as a bandit
With the name of "Finger Bone Necklace,"
One whom the great flood of desire swept along,

I went for refuge with the Awakened One.

And though I was once bloody-handed

With the name of “Finger Bone Necklace,”

See the shelter I have found:

The bond of craving has been cut.

So welcome to that choice of mine

And let it stand; it was not badly made.

Of all the teachings known to living beings

I have come to rest in the very best.

So welcome to that choice of mine,

And let it stand; it was not badly made

I have come to the threefold understanding*

And I have taken up the conduct that the Buddha teaches.

* *Angulimāla* means “finger bone necklace” and is the name this man was called by those who feared him. The legend goes that he had 999 finger bones around his neck and that the Buddha was to have been his 1000th victim.

* *Ahimsa*, “Harmless,” was the Dharma name given to Angulimāla by the Buddha.

* The “threefold understanding” refers to an understanding of suffering, impermanence and not self.

From the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya, by Bhikkhu Nanamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications.

Purabheda Sutta

(Qualities of a Sage Sutta)

1. “Gotama, sir, “a questioner said to the Buddha, “I want to ask you about the perfect person. There are those people whom we call ‘those who are becalmed’—can you tell me how they see things and how they behave?”
2. “A person who is calmed, who has extinguished all cravings before the time the body disintegrates into nothing, who has no concern with how things began or with how they will end and no fixation with what happens in between: such a person has no preferences.
3. This person has no anger, no fear and no pride. Nothing disturbs composure and nothing gives cause for regret. Such a one is wise and restrained in speech.
4. The sage has no longing for the future and no grief for the past; there are no views or opinions that lead. There is detachment from the entangled world of sense-impression.

5. Such a one does not conceal anything and there is nothing to hold on to. Without acquisitiveness or envy, the practitioner remains unobtrusive, with no disdain or insult for anyone.
6. This is not someone who is full of self, or a person addicted to pleasure; but rather gentle and alert, with no blind faith and shows no aversion to anything.
7. This is not one who works because of wanting something; if one gets nothing at all one remains unperturbed. There is no craving to build up the passion to taste new pleasures.
8. Mindfulness holds the sage posed in a constant even-mindedness where arrogance is impossible. The sage makes no comparisons with the rest of the world as “superior,” “inferior” or “equal.”
9. Because there is understanding of the Way Things Are, one is free from dependency and there is nothing to rely on. There is no more craving to exist or not to exist.
10. This is what I call a person who is calmed. This is one who does not seek after pleasure, who is tied down by nothing, who has gone beyond the pull of attachment.
11. This is a person without children, without wealth, without fields, without cows—a person with nothing to reject as “not mine.”
12. This is one who receives false criticisms from other people, from priests and hermits, but who remains undisturbed and unmoved by their words.

13. This is one without greed and without possessiveness; wisely one knows that one is not superior, inferior or equal. This is someone free from fruitless speculation.
14. This is a person who has nothing in this world to claim and who does not grieve for having nothing. This is one who is calmed; who does not cling to speculative views.

Adapted from the translation by H. Saddhatissa found in The Sutta-Nipāta, Curzon Press, 1985.

III. Dedications

This third section of a ceremony is used as a “transfer of merit.” In other words, we give away the good results of our practice for other beings. It is an act of generosity toward other beings and fulfills the need to put our intentions out into the universe, which is a good definition of prayer. Choose one or several of the dedications here, depending on the occasion and the needs of the individual or of the sangha.

Simple Metta Dedication

[Recite the name of the person or persons we wish to dedicate our practice to, then recite:]

May she/he be safe.

May she/he be healthy.

May he/she be happy.

May he/she be at peace.

Wisdom Dedication

[Leader] We dedicate this time and place to the Three Jewels:

[All] To the Buddha, the ideal of enlightenment to which we aspire:

To the Dharma,

The path of the teaching that we follow;

To the Sangha,

The spiritual fellowship with one another that we enjoy.

Here may no idle word be spoken

Here may no unquiet thoughts disturb our minds.

[Leader] To the observance of the Five Lay Precepts

[All] We dedicate this place.

[Leader] To the practice of meditation

[All] We dedicate this place.

[Leader] To the ripening of wisdom

[All] We dedicate this place.

[Leader] To the great awakening

[All] We dedicate this place

[Leader] Though in the World outside there is strife

[All] Here may there be peace.

[Leader] Though in the world outside there is hate

[All] Here may there be joy.

[Leader] Here seated, here practicing,

[All] May our mind become Buddha,

May our thoughts become Dharma,

May our speech together become Sangha.

For the happiness of all beings,

For the benefit of all beings,

With body, speech and mind,

We dedicate this place.

Adapted from The Sevenfold Puja of Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.

Devotions for Daily Life

Grace before Communal Meal

We eat to maintain our health

And to celebrate our connection
With all living beings.

We are grateful for this food
And for all those
who have brought it to us:

those who farm and fish
those who harvest and transport
those who select and prepare
and those who cook, serve and clean.

Let us eat mindfully and gratefully.
Let us enjoy our time
With one another and
Set aside all judgments or opinions
About our neighbors.

We honor this food by
Transforming its energy into
Compassion and love for one another.

Let us spend out time together

With joy and wisdom and generosity.

Short-Form Grace

I (*we*) eat to maintain my (*our*) health

And to set aside greed, hatred and delusion.

I (*we are*) am grateful for the efforts of the many beings

Who have brought me (*us*) this food.

I (*we*) will eat mindfully and vow to transform

this energy into compassion and wisdom.

Gatha

Gatha are four-line poems, prayers or “affirmations” that are used to bring mindfulness to some area of daily life. The first line expresses the situation, the second is almost always “I vow with all beings to...” and the last two lines express the intention. Here are some examples.

Gatha While Standing in Line

As I stand in this line

I vow with all beings to

Remember that my feet are touching the earth

And there is no hurry in the Buddha's World.

Gatha Before Driving

As I begin this trip

I vow to remember my connection to all other drivers,

To pay mindful attention to the traffic,

And to recover quickly from anger.

Gatha before Taking a Shower

As I begin to clean my body

I vow with all beings to

Rid both body and mind of the three poisons,

Greed, hatred and confusion.

Gatha on Noticing Anger

As I notice an angry thought

I vow with all beings to

Refrain from following this chain of thinking

And to return to compassion in this present moment.

Compose your own.

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