

AWE

ALTERNATIVES WITH
EDUCATION



Breaking the cycle of crime—jail—more crime—more jail: This is what AWE is all about.

MEDITATION: HOW DOES THAT HELP?

We teach meditation to prisoners. Hearing that, some people ask doubtfully, “Meditation? How does that help?”

Jon’s experience can provide a concrete example. Jon has been in the meditation program for more than five years now. A man in his late 30s, he is vastly different from the young man who entered prison 20 years ago. Jon says of his early years: “I spent so long being mean, devising evil, plotting evil. I was evil.” Most of his first fifteen years he spent in the “hole” for assaults on guards and other prisoners. He hated his surroundings, the people around him, especially the guards. He wrote to his family, but often received no response. He didn’t like himself. He was negative about everything.

Then, he says, “Somewhere I began to change, to want something different. It was a process, growing into wherever it is I am now.” He attributes this change to meditation. He began to practice meditation during Sister Elaine’s course. He took it to heart and began noticing the changes in how he felt about himself and others. He became mindful of the destructiveness in himself. He followed up the meditation course with Achieving Your Potential, the cognitive/ behavioral change program from the Pacific Institute. Jon saved all his notes about becoming aware of how limiting and negative his thinking patterns were and about stretching his comfort zones.

During that time he began to realize that his mother had suffered mental abuse throughout her life—that she really was not able to relate any more than she did. She wanted to relate, sending him articles every now and then, but she couldn’t relate personally. He began to see possibilities in himself—that he could change long-term systems of violence to non-violence. He still didn’t trust himself, though. He commented at that time, “I don’t want to be in the honor house. [the unit for best behaved inmates]. You gotta watch your p’s and q’s.”

For five and a half years now, Jon continues the practice of meditation. Of the present he says, “Now I plan good. I spend my days trying to create something positive – not only for myself but for other guys around me, even for the guards.” He has re-established his relationship with his mother. He hopes that she, too, can move out of her depression and move into a less negative life—that there will be a deeper relationship. He uses every day to learn something new. He has been in the honor house for at least three years, and he cannot even remember saying he didn’t want to be there. He participates in the prison’s Puppies for Parole program. He likes the influence of being with other positive people. He convinces others in class that it is possible to change your outlook if you examine your beliefs. He firmly believes that we become what we think about. He is respected for his integrity.

Jon is now looking at a release date in less than five years. He really exemplifies what it is that we strive to effect in our students. Your contribution to AWE makes transformations like Jon’s possible.

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