

*Continuous Becoming:*  
Spiritual support for residents and staff  
in transition centers

Erik Hulse  
Upaya Zen Center  
Chaplaincy Training Program  
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*'...it is in our society's best interest and inseparable from our moral standards and dignity as a human society to offer all individuals, even those on death row or serving life sentences, the opportunity for healing and transformation and the rediscovery or reclamation of their own dignity as human beings.'* Fleet Maull

*'What if enacting compassion toward police, as a group and as individuals, includes recognizing how their jobs often harm and traumatize them, too? We need more than tepid, abstract affirmations of the buddhanature of all beings. Empathy also means re-grounding, again and again, in the harsh, practical realities of avowing all our ancient twisted karma...'* from 'All Cops are Buddhas' by Katie Loncke

*'Love your crooked neighbor with all your crooked heart'* W.H. Auden (paraphrased)

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine an aspect of the liminal space between incarceration and *freedom* occupied by many human beings. My curiosity about this subject was fueled by over 25 years of exposure to people who ran afoul of the law and the systems that seemed to perpetuate rather than ameliorate harm. I began by reacquainting myself with the state of the American criminal justice system and its effects on the human beings incarcerated by or working within that system. I then looked closely at the transition center, a facet of the correctional system intended to provide support to people wishing to maximize their chance of successful reintegration upon release. Having learned that the Transition Center of Kansas City (TCKC) was using Restorative Justice principles to inform their programming, I studied those principles as well as the assertions made about its parallels with Buddhist philosophy. Transition centers in Missouri aren't run by the same division overseeing prisons so they don't employ chaplains; I was therefore also interested to explore whether or to what extent spiritual support might be beneficial in the transition center environment. Over a period of three months, I volunteered at TCKC, offering meditation, secular mindfulness classes and a Buddhist study group. I interacted with residents and staff and to the extent possible, offered my presence and support. My experience at TCKC dislodged persistent biases borne of a lifetime of conditioning about 'criminal offenders', correctional officers and the system they inhabit. In a program such as this, whose proponents are unabashedly in favor of recognizing the inherent dignity of human beings otherwise discarded by society, I found an approach with broad implications for a system in desperate need of reform and a role for the interfaith chaplain to serve within it. My intention is to explore this subject more deeply as an aspiring chaplain. My wish is that others will be

similarly inspired to see the wise hope implicit in programs like those at TCKC and advocate for their inclusion elsewhere.

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Buddhist philosophy and the principles of Restorative Justice have at their respective cores a deep understanding of human suffering and the habits of mind one can cultivate to uproot the causes of their own suffering and to flourish as a productive member of their community. These principles include an appreciation of interconnectedness, which tethers us to all beings through our intentional actions. Another principle has to do with the role of compassion in recognizing the dignity inherent in all beings, coupled with a wish to alleviate that suffering whenever possible. Compassion is not weak though - deep, abiding care for self and others demands that appropriate boundaries be a part of any compact that exists between members of a community. Fierce compassion requires the assumption of accountability for one's harmful acts and a willingness to 'make things right'.

The prison environment in the United States is known to be largely antithetical to environments in which the principles described above might flourish. Innumerable human beings have suffered incalculable harm in prison, often beginning the moment the cell door slammed shut behind them. Modern psychology helpfully updates the lexicon of suffering every so often, but the condition now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) once reserved to describe the experience of the combat soldier is now recognized as a nearly universal condition of the marginalized and essentially discarded American inmate. Although it's less controversial than it used to be to say that the random circumstances of one's birth and upbringing influence their life trajectory to a significant degree, the impulse to mete out punishment predicated entirely on the instinct for revenge has hardly been extirpated from our criminal justice system.

Efforts are being made in some states to improve the living standards and by extension, the future prospects of inmates after they're no longer incarcerated. In the state of Missouri, these efforts are being made in ways that are fairly novel in comparison to other progressive reforms in the United States, and even radical when contrasted with the overall status quo. In April 2022, the Missouri Department of Corrections opened a 'transition center' in Kansas City (TCKC) where men on probation or parole may voluntarily spend 4-6 months learning skills intended to prepare them for success in their respective communities. TCKC operates within the Division of Probation and Parole rather than the Division of Adult Institutions (prisons), and its programming is predicated entirely on the principles of restorative justice.

TCKC is an experiment with no real precedent or analog in this country. The inspiration for my involvement at TCKC comes from the intuition that an interfaith chaplain can contribute to the primary objective of the transition center, which is to reduce recidivism by helping residents rediscover their inherent dignity, repair broken relationships and rejoin their community with hope and confidence. I think such a chaplain can make a meaningful contribution by facilitating programming like mindfulness meditation and providing a ministry of compassionate presence while supporting restorative justice programming. Furthermore, it's my belief that the core tenets of Buddhist philosophy and the principles of restorative justice animate each other in a way that might lend a unique set of credentials to the Buddhist chaplain to serve **all** of the human beings in this fraught environment. What follows is my attempt to synthesize some of the scholarship and opinion around these systems and correctional reform in general, and to share my impressions of how compassionate action, enacted through the lenses of restorative justice and Buddhist philosophy, informs what is being attempted at the Transition Center of Kansas City.

## American Corrections

### ***Discard: get rid of (someone or something) as no longer useful or desirable***

The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world. The U.S. has 5% of the world's population but nearly 25% of the world's prisoners (Travis, Western & Redburn, 2014). In 2016, there were 2.2 million people in jails and prisons and an additional 4.8 million on probation or parole (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016). In 2016, nearly 40% of those in prison were incarcerated for offenses without a demonstrable public safety reason and therefore could have been punished in arguably less costly and more effective ways.

As of June 2021, there were 23,137 people in state prisons in Missouri and 17,730 people on parole. 13,214 were released from prison in the same year and 12,346 people were sent to prison. According to the most recent available data, 46.8% of people return to prison within 5 years of release in Missouri (Missouri Dept. of Corrections, 2021). A person can return to prison ('recidivate') due to a new criminal conviction or a technical violation of their parole, which could amount to failing to report for scheduled office visits, missing a curfew, lack of employment, testing positive for drug or alcohol use, or associating with someone else who is on parole. More parolees are returned to prison each year for technical violations than for new criminal convictions. The Missouri Department of Corrections uses the Ohio Risk Assessment System to identify risk factors that could lead to recidivism (also known as "criminogenic needs.") These risk factors fall in the categories of anti-social attitudes, anti-social peers, antisocial personality, pro-social leisure activities, education/employment, substance use, family/social support, and anti-social history (Missouri Dept. of Corrections, 2021). While recidivism is an important factor to consider when evaluating a person's success after prison,

there are many factors, including housing, employment, and self-identity, that help a person to desist from crime.

Despite two decades of declining crime rates and a decade of efforts to reduce mass incarceration, some policymakers continue to call for tougher sentences and greater use of incarceration to reduce crime (Cullen, 2018). It may seem intuitive that increasing incarceration would further reduce crime. In reality, however, increasing incarceration rates has a minimal impact on reducing crime and entails significant costs (Cullen, 2018). Numerous alternatives to incarceration exist, including probation, drug courts, home confinement, fines/restitution, community service, mental health and veterans courts among them. The focus of this paper is another process that can be of significant benefit either in lieu of incarceration or as a profoundly healing experience for the offender, victim and anyone else impacted by a crime. Given that at least 95% of all state prisoners will be released from prison at some point, a substantial percentage of whom will still be bearing the weight of trauma accumulated before and during their incarceration (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1990-2000), it seems self evident that learning to heal from that trauma and to acknowledge the ways and extent to which they have caused harm to others should be central to the offender's experience at what may be the last weigh station before release.

### **Trauma in Prison (Incarcerated Population)**

*'There may be no other work environment where a significant percentage of all involved—both the corrections professionals and the justice-involved individuals they manage—suffer from the consequences of exposure to psychologically traumatic material and other high-stress events. That makes understanding the nature and impact of traumatic stress, its interactions with organizational and*

*operational stressors, and strategies to counter these effects, an urgent necessity in corrections systems* (Spinaris, Denhof, Morton, 2013).’

‘Trauma’, which corresponds to the Greek word for injury or wound results from an event or series of events that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening. Trauma often has lasting adverse effects on a person’s functioning, and on their physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (SAMHSA 2012a). Studies have shown that well over two-thirds of incarcerated adult males have experienced trauma exposure at some point in their lifetime, prior to incarceration (Pettus-Davis, 2014; Wolff et al., 2014). Violent offenders are also believed to have experienced up to four times the childhood adversity of the general population (Reavis, 2013).

For some individuals, incarceration of any type and for any duration can exacerbate or be the source of trauma. Bright lights, loud noises, questioning by guards and staff, harsh physical handling/movement, restrictions, and sparse living quarters can be triggering. Many correctional facilities are structured to maintain order through strict control of the environment and incarcerated individuals, but without consideration of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, the policies and procedures intended to maintain safety and security within a facility may re-traumatize individuals who are limited in their ability to remove or avoid triggers.

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, series of events or set of circumstances. An individual may experience this as emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening and may affect mental, physical, social, and/or spiritual well-being. Examples include natural disasters, serious accidents, terrorist acts, war/combat, rape/sexual assault, historical trauma, intimate partner violence and bullying. People with PTSD have intense, disturbing thoughts and

feelings related to their experience that last long after the traumatic event has ended. They may relive the event through flashbacks or nightmares; they may feel sadness, fear or anger; and they may feel detached or estranged from other people. People with PTSD may avoid situations or people that remind them of the traumatic event, and they may have strong negative reactions to something as ordinary as a loud noise or an accidental touch. A diagnosis of PTSD requires exposure to an upsetting traumatic event. Exposure includes directly experiencing an event, witnessing a traumatic event happening to others, or learning that a traumatic event happened to a close family member or friend. It can also occur as a result of repeated exposure to horrible details of trauma such as police officers exposed to details of child abuse cases (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

PTSD symptoms can be categorized into four groups and may be triggered within the correctional environment even by the physical structure and policies of the setting (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

**Re-experiencing** - When the environmental stressors of living in a correctional setting or memories that remind one of a traumatic event trigger nightmares and flashbacks.

**Avoidance** - When incarcerated individuals are unable to evade triggers and resort to avoidance methods, such as substance use or avoidance of conflict.

**Arousal and reactivity** - When traumatized inmates are fearful of real or perceived threats of violence and sexual assault and respond with aggression to potential triggers such as mandatory pat downs, unannounced strip searches or routine restraint practices.

**Cognitive and mood symptoms** - Behaviors that result from the mere experience of being incarcerated (hypervigilance, interpersonal distrust, alienation, diminished self worth, etc.) may

be interpreted by correctional officers as disrespect or by other incarcerated persons as disinterest in relationships, which may result in further isolation (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

The author's observations while volunteering at the Transition Center of Kansas City: *About a week after I began volunteering at TCKC, I met 'Bill', a resident who'd also arrived there recently, when he dropped into the chapel one morning to say hello. Bill spoke rapidly, in disjointed and convoluted sentences. He told me he was already very unhappy with how he'd been treated by TCKC staff. He told me 'they' didn't respect him and refused to listen to his feedback. Over the time I've been volunteering at TCKC, Bill seems to find me wherever I am, usually to complain about residents and/or staff who make him angry or frustrated.*

*Another frequent visitor to the chapel, 'Jeff' once shared his description of the labyrinthine bureaucratic processes of trying to update his registration on the sex offender registry. His story featured multiple visits to various websites, government offices and to his parole officer with what he assured me was all the documentation he'd been told he needed, only to learn that he needed to have completed a different form, or was 5 minutes late to his appointment and would have to reschedule his appointment. Whether Jeff's account of his experience was entirely accurate or not, it was apparent from this story and others that Jeff was perpetually at odds with the systems in his life. His family, school, past jobs, personal relationships and now, the justice system - all impenetrable to him and even menacing in some way. A particularly acute sense of aversion still arises when I encounter someone who's been categorized as a 'sex offender'. As with*

*most of the other residents I've encountered at TCKC, I don't know what Jeff was charged with, let alone what he actually did. For now, I still think that's wise, but ignorance on that subject does lend itself to thoughts about the worst possible scenarios. Did he molest a child? Commit a violent rape? If I want to know Jeff as a 'whole person', are these facts salient? Does intentionally turning away from them undermine my capacity to serve fully? (Hulse, 2022)*

### **Trauma in Prison (Staff)**

Corrections professionals are expected to maintain an unusually heightened and sustained level of mental and physical vigilance and strict adherence to security protocols. This is considered necessary in order to maintain the physical safety of those incarcerated, the staff managing them, and members of the surrounding communities. Much of what corrections professionals are routinely exposed to at work is in fact traumatic. In addition to directly witnessing or experiencing actual or threatened serious injury, actual or threatened sexual violation, and death or threatened death, indirect exposure—such as learning about the violent or accidental death or threatened death of a close friend (or coworker, in the case of corrections staff), is considered to be potentially traumatic. Additionally, what has in the past been labeled as “secondary trauma,” such as being repeatedly or extremely exposed indirectly to details of traumatic events as part of one’s vocational role, is now recognized to be “primary trauma,” which may result in the development of trauma symptoms and conditions. Moreover, witnessing death, serious injury or sexual violation through various electronic media or pictures as part of one’s vocational role, is now also considered to be “primary trauma,” again involving indirect exposure (Spinaris, Denhof, Morton, 2013).

Corrections work of all disciplines, whether in institutional or community-based settings, has been recognized as being exceptionally stressful. This ongoing stress is likely to contribute to “burnout” among corrections professionals. “Burnout” has been attributed mainly to staff’s exposure to multiple organizational stressors (e.g., role ambiguity, demanding social contacts with other staff or justice-involved individuals), and also to operational stressors (e.g., shift work, mandatory overtime, overcrowding, etc.). Two definitions of burnout are appropriate: (1) emotional exhaustion and lassitude that set in insidiously after 7 to 12 years of policing; and (2) syndrome of exhaustion and cynicism often present in individuals who work in the social service field. Some try to deal with long-term stress by partially withdrawing and toning down their reactions. In the end, they become indifferent and detached from work, physically tired, depressed, and cynical. Professionals agree that burnout has physical, psychological, and behavioral components and that burnout develops within a dynamic process of exchanges between individuals and their environment. Burnout can also be characterized by withdrawal that resembles depression (Oligny, 1994).

Other types of direct and indirect traumatic exposure are specific to parole and/or probation officers. These include: finding disturbing pornographic and/or violent photographs, images or videotapes on the computers or cell phones of their clients, encountering child, adult or animal abuse or neglect during home visits, interviewing victims, being stalked by clients or their associates, and being confronted by armed clients. These examples do not include two other potential sources of correctional traumatic stress: incidents that can be described as “near-misses” regarding violent behaviors directed toward staff or other residents/inmates, and “what could go wrong” situations that may result in anxiety prior to high-risk interactions or events. Examples of “near misses” would be finding out that one was a target of a “hit” that was

intercepted at the last minute, or leaving a location shortly before staff are assaulted in that very same area. Examples of worrying about “what could go wrong” include preparing to confront a parolee about a parole violation (which would result in parole revocation) or preparing for use of force. Such “near misses” and anticipatory anxiety about “what could go wrong” activate similar physiological and psychological reactions in affected individuals as does exposure to actual dangerous/traumatic incidents (Lewis 2011).

The workplace culture in corrections tends to be characterized by an attitudinal emphasis on self-sufficiency and emotional ‘toughness’, even outright denial of vulnerability and ‘soft’ emotions. In order to be able to walk into the home of a client in the community, or when facing large staff-to-inmate ratios in corrections facilities, employees feel the need to project the image of remaining unflappable and in control, and of being fearless when confronted with the potential for aggression. Admitting to being affected or needing help in managing one’s emotions or mental health is often considered by corrections staff as being ‘weak’ or, worse yet, as being ‘unfit’ for corrections work and/or a liability to coworkers. Historically, an aura of physical courage has been seen as the only safe alternative. Corrections employees, therefore, may resist seeking the help of behavioral health providers due to personal denial of their mental health needs as well as due to the professional stigma attached to seeking help.

The impact of traumatic exposure is systemic, affecting whole organizations, not only individuals. For example, unhealthy and maladaptive behaviors of individual officers in response to repeated traumatic exposure can adversely affect their peers, work groups and ultimately manifest as organization norms (Bloom, Farragher, 2013). Unfortunately, agencies may provide short-term solutions to problems that are in some cases severe and which warrant long-term attention and care. Community-based Employee Assistance Programs and other behavioral

health providers typically have limited experience in dealing with the severity of mental health issues that arise from the direct or indirect traumatic exposure routinely encountered in corrections work. Employees' lack of understanding of the impact of traumatic exposure coupled with their emotional denial may result in erroneous attributions to relationship or family issues, when in fact they may stem directly from the multiple stressful factors inherent to corrections environments, including traumatic exposure.

### **Trauma-Informed Care**

Correctional facilities can curb PTSD symptoms within their populations by instituting some key components of trauma-informed care (Adams, Houston-Kolnik, Reichert, 2017). Trauma-informed care in the correctional environment requires addressing organizational policies and practices that may re-traumatize or trigger traumatic memories. Failing to address these re-traumatizing practices poses a threat to both the individual and the stability of the setting. Some of these components include recognizing the impact of trauma, being aware of the signs and symptoms of trauma and structuring policies and practices that are sensitive to people's potential trauma histories and that seek to prevent re-traumatization. The overarching principles that should guide the creation of a trauma-informed correctional setting include safety, peer support, collaboration and recognition of cultural, historical, and gender issues (Adams, Houston-Kolnik, Reichert, 2017).

In May and November of 2022, I was invited to participate at Post Critical Incident Seminars (PCIS) coordinated and presented by the Missouri Department of Corrections. PCIS is a 3-day therapeutic seminar, originated by the FBI in 1983 and designed to assist law enforcement personnel suffering from traumatic stress following their involvement in highly critical incidents such as officer-involved shootings, mass casualties, line of duty deaths, etc. In

May, I delivered a presentation on *'Mindfulness for Stress Reduction'* and in November I guided meditation and mindful movement classes for participants and staff twice a day throughout the seminar. The director of the Missouri Department of Corrections, Anne Precythe, delivered remarks at the beginning of both seminars and I was struck by the depth of her commitment to progressive initiatives like the PCIS and TCKC.

On the first day of a PCIS, participants share the details of their incident. Each participant's story is followed by their support person's account of their experience navigating their loved one's traumatic event. Several times, I heard participants remark that prior to their incident, their perspective of *'offenders'* (the term used for inmates within the Missouri DOC) was that they were *'just offenders'*. My impression was that this language reflected a general disregard, disdain, even contempt, for those who were incarcerated. The same participants went on to explain that following their critical incident (usually incidents in which an offender had attempted suicide) the net effect of trying to save the offender's life and the attempts of other offenders to assist them resulted in a profound and sometimes disconcerting shift in their perspective. One CO talked about seeing a *'human being with a soul'*, a perspective that wasn't available to them before. The feedback I received in connection to the meditation and movement sessions was positive, several participants remarking that the potential benefits of a regular meditation practice [for offenders and corrections staff alike] like emotional regulation primarily, was very apparent to them and they believed mindfulness practices should be a mandatory part of training in correctional facilities.

*'[Corrections Personnel], in their attitudes and behaviors on the job, may hold the key to their own happiness or misery. It may not be until prison administrations start to pay close attention to the health and stress issues of their employees that*

*some of the problems in the prison environment can be solved. Meditation is certainly not the only answer, but treated as one part of a more comprehensive employee health and destressing policy, it could yield powerful results with the underpaid and stigmatized prison security force (Whitney, 2007)'*

### **Transition Centers**

The Scandinavian countries tend to receive international attention for combining exceptional conditions of confinement with recidivism rates that are among the lowest in the world. As a result, there are ongoing collaborations between northern European correctional services and several corrections departments in America (Anderson, 2022). To date, these collaborations have been subject to little empirical and academic scrutiny, and the extent to which programs derived from the Scandinavian models may thrive outside their respective social and institutional contexts requires further investigation. The Scandinavian Prison Project seeks to remedy this scarcity of data by empirically assessing what happens when certain practices and principles from Scandinavian corrections are implemented in an American prison setting. The project focuses on an ongoing collaboration with the correctional department of Pennsylvania. In 2019, a group from State Correctional Institution (SCI) Chester, a medium-security facility located just outside of Philadelphia, PA, spent three weeks visiting and working in several facilities across Scandinavia. In 2022, they returned for a shorter follow-up visit and an initiative emerged whose effort has been directed toward developing a single housing unit at SCI Chester, which has been named "Little Scandinavia." (Anderson, 2022) The unit differs from the regular conditions of confinement at SCI Chester in some important respects: single cells, custom furniture, a communal kitchen, redesigned common areas, and an outdoor green space all make the unit look unlike any other. Moreover, the officers on the project received training in conflict

resolution, suicide prevention and other relevant skills in addition to travelling to Scandinavia to work alongside peer mentors. A ratio of trained staff to incarcerated men that is significantly lower than in other institutions is maintained in order to facilitate positive interactions and encourage meaningful communication between the people living and working on the unit. Furthermore, the Scandinavian model of incarceration focuses on rehabilitation and reintegration and the intention is to incorporate ideas and concepts from Scandinavian prisons to determine their impact on staff and inmate wellness, prison culture, and recidivism. With an eye toward determining whether or to what extent the model described above might have meaningful implications for corrections in the state of Missouri, an overview of transitional centers operating in that state follows.

In 2017, a nonpartisan study of Missouri's criminal justice system found that a significant percentage of the state's prison admissions were triggered not by new crimes but by factors such as technical violations of probation or parole. Since then, the Missouri Department of Corrections has initiated programs intended to help people succeed on community supervision and minimize disruptions in employment, housing and child care (Missouri Department of Corrections, 2021). The Transition Center of St. Louis (TCSTL) and the Transition Center of Kansas City (TCKC) are residential facilities that provide community-based transitional services and supervision programming to male offenders released from the Division of Adult Institutions as well as to offenders on supervision who are in need of additional structure (Missouri Dept. of Corrections, 2022). Services include substance use and mental health treatment, employment readiness, cognitive restructuring, home plan assistance, family reunification, education and links to other community-based services. The focus is primarily on transitioning these offenders back into the community as productive, law-abiding citizens.

TCKC was fully renovated before it opened in April 2022 and is equipped with housing for 150 clients and workspace for 106 staff, as well as classrooms, computer labs, a professional-attire lending closet, programming space and other features that promote a therapeutic environment. TCKC partners with more than 50 area organizations, including nonprofits that offer holistic reentry services and behavioral health treatment providers, technology agencies, and financial services. Local employers, job training and placement entities, and local businesses launched by entrepreneurs formerly involved in the criminal justice system assist residents in addressing their employment needs (Missouri Dept. of Corrections, 2022).

TCKC follows a four-phase programming model established at the Transition Center of St. Louis: Intake and Orientation, Programming, Pre-release Planning, and Discharge Planning. Clients remain inside the facility for at least 60 days upon initial intake, with supervised transportation provided for job interviews and other approved outings. Additional programming follows evidence-based practices shown to be effective at reducing risk and recidivism. Residents must be employed before they leave the transition center (Missouri Dept. of Corrections, 2022).

The Transition Center of Kansas City (TCKC) also follows a community focused transition management model rooted in restorative justice philosophy and based on the principle of human dignity. The *'Restorative Reentry Community'* (RRC) model is derived from evidence-based practices established within prison systems in Germany, Norway, Sweden and some programs that replicate those practices in a handful of US prisons (Center for Conflict Resolution website). Fundamental principles of the program include repairing harm, restoring relationships, reentry preparedness, resolving conflict without violence, accountability and

responsibility, business planning, awareness of trauma and building resilience, personal development, financial management, civic engagement and prosocial behavior, circle processes and practices that promote leading a life free from crime and violence. The Restorative Reentry Community seeks to enhance the existing reentry process by creating a supportive community on the inside to better prepare and connect participants to more resources available on the outside.

Inside TCKC, the Restorative Reentry Community (RRC) seeks to create a culture free from negative influences of typical prison environments and establish an atmosphere where cooperation and collaboration between and among residents, staff and administration is the norm. Seeing the dignity of each human being is at the core of this collaboration. The RRC focus is on European concepts of ‘normalization’, ‘resocialization’ and ‘dynamic security (Center for Conflict Resolution website)’. ‘Normalization’ promotes the idea that life inside prison should be as normal as possible to life in society, so the difficulty of transition is minimized and success is maximized. The ‘resocialization’ process fosters prosocial behaviors like accountability and personal development to prepare individuals to lead a life free from crime and violence. The theory of ‘dynamic security’ states that professional and purposefully personal relationships between residents and staff reduce the potential for violence and actually increase safety and security for residents and staff. The culture within the RRC, to include the mission, vision and values is ‘co-created’ by the participants, staff and administrators who reside and work in the unit, and TCKC is structured like a college campus model in some ways. All participants are expected to complete required courses like conflict resolution and financial literacy, and elective courses may be chosen by the residents from three tracks: Education, Employment Readiness/Employment, and Self-Improvement.

The work of TCKC is intended to continue outside of the center, as graduates of the program are supported by case managers, parole officers, and various community partners to continue a smooth transition. 'Citizen Circles' in which groups of community members 'adopt' a returning citizen and act as an additional support and resource network are part of TCKC's future plans. Program graduates will also be encouraged to return to TCKC to help mentor current residents and advise them on the reentry process both inside and outside based on their personal experience.

The author's observations while volunteering at the Transition Center of Kansas City: *'Tim' was the most frequent visitor to guided meditations and to the chapel in general. He enthusiastically embraced the practices I introduced, even or perhaps especially when he was down, which was often. After the second or third time we met, Tim started hugging me every time we saw each other. He also told me that he didn't have any friends on the outside and he very much wanted to stay in touch when he completed the program. Tim's religious upbringing was strongly evangelical and he is one of several residents for whom I've acquired bibles, although the first study bible I gave him didn't refer to scriptures about the mark of the beast and the end times as explicitly as the edition he was familiar with, so I had to find the 'right' edition. The day I acquired Tim's study bible he wasn't around, which I thought was a little unusual since he had been so interested in getting it. When I returned to the transition center a few days later, I was told that Tim had jumped out of a van that was taking him to job training and ran off. The resident who told me about his departure also shared that Tim considered my program perhaps the only bright spot at TCKC. Given that he left the program*

*just as much colder weather was approaching, knowing there was nobody in Kansas City he could count on to give him shelter, and that when (not if) he was picked up, he'd go back to prison, it's clear that whatever possessed him to jump out of that van overtook him in ways that I just can't really understand.*

*I was walking through the exercise facility at TCKC one morning when 'Robert' walked in. Robert is 62 years old, a lifetime drug addict with five children by five different women who's been in and out of custody for as long as he can remember. He has the kind of face that tells you his life has been an endless, agonizing battle and makes you afraid to ask him about it. His right eye is gone - he told me a lot about his life but didn't tell me what happened to his eye so I didn't inquire. On this day, I asked Robert how he was doing as he walked by. For the next thirty or forty minutes, he told me exactly how he was doing, in excruciating detail. The recitation of recent events that followed began with bitter complaints about a bungled Amazon delivery of coffee and sugar and ended with a tearful expression of his wish to be released so that he can be a father to his 16-month-old daughter - who he delivered himself, guided by an amateur midwife on the phone because his drug addicted girlfriend refused to go to the hospital. Frank Ostaseski compares grieving the death of someone we love to '...being thrown into a raging river of powerful and conflicting emotions. It pulls us down, down beneath the surface of our lives and into dark waters where we cannot breathe. (Ostaseski, 2017)' This quote came to me as I listened to Robert describe his life and it occurred to me that I'd been plunged into a sense of grief for the life he should be*

*living and the depressing certainty that his life is likely to be full of pain, even if he manages to complete the program at TCKC with flying colors. Father Gregory Boyle says that ‘Kindness is the only non-delusional response to everything’ (Talk for Upaya chaplaincy students, 2022) I can’t help but think that kindness from his primary caregivers had to have been vanishingly rare in Robert’s life.*

### **Restorative Justice**

Gregory Winship is the Restorative Justice Strategist for the Center for Conflict Resolution in Kansas City, Missouri and the architect of the ‘Restorative Reentry Community’ model at TCKC. Greg read about Howard Zehr’s principles of restorative justice (Zehr, 2015) about 14 years into a 20 year prison sentence. The principles resonated immediately and deeply because of their ‘...*emphasis on building relationships through dialogue and communication — skills and processes that are limited, minimized and discouraged in the prison environment.*’

Restorative justice is founded on an alternative theory to the traditional methods of justice, which often focus on retribution - it aims to persuade offenders to take responsibility for their actions, to understand the harm they have caused, to give them an opportunity to redeem themselves, and to discourage them from causing further harm. For victims, its goal is to give them an active role in the process and to reduce feelings of anxiety and powerlessness. Restorative justice juxtaposes a "retributive justice" framework, where crime is viewed as an offense against the state, with a restorative justice framework, where crime is viewed as a violation of people and relationships. Restorative justice views violence, community decline, and fear-based responses as indicators of broken relationships. It offers a different response, namely the use of restorative solutions to repair the harm related to conflict, crime, and victimization (Zehr 2015).

It should also be emphasized that in many ways, restorative justice reflects principles and practices of many indigenous peoples, the First Nations people of Canada and the United States and the Maori of New Zealand among them (Zehr, 2015). The concept of '*shalom*', found in the Hebrew scriptures represents the concept of 'all-rightness' with each other, the creator, and with the environment and is of a piece with what many other cultures describe in their languages as the 'web of relationships' that is torn when harm is done within the community. These principles have been marginalized and the practices often eradicated as colonial powers took hold in countless cultures throughout history.

According to Howard Zehr, restorative justice differs from traditional criminal justice in terms of the guiding questions it asks (Zehr, 2015). Whereas criminal justice processes are concerned with what laws were violated, by whom, and what punishment is deserved, restorative justice focuses on who was harmed, what their needs are, and whose obligation it is to put things right. Besides serving as an alternative to civil or criminal trials, restorative justice processes can also be applied to offenders who are currently incarcerated. The purpose of restorative justice in prisons is to assist with the prisoner's rehabilitation and eventual reintegration into society. By repairing the harm to the relationships between offenders and victims, as well as between offenders and the community that was adversely affected by the crime, restorative justice seeks to understand and address the circumstances which contributed to the crime. The potential for restorative justice to reduce recidivism is one of the strongest and most promising arguments for its use in prisons. There are both theoretical and practical limitations, which can make restorative justice challenging in a prison environment (Albrecht, 2011). These include difficulty engaging offenders and victims to participate in mediation, the often disruptive influence of family, friends, and the community, and the prevalence of mental illness among offenders. On the whole

though, academic assessment of restorative justice is positive and most studies suggest it makes offenders less likely to reoffend, including a study that found a higher rate of victim satisfaction and offender accountability than traditional methods of justice delivery (Sherman, Strang, 2007).

Although forgiveness is not an explicit aim of restorative justice programs, when victims are satisfied with the process and are able to fully understand the offender's role in the harm they suffered, they are often moved to forgiveness.

*'If we look at any hurt, we can see a larger context in which the hurt happened. If we look at any perpetrator, we can discover a story that tells us something about what led up to that person causing harm. It doesn't justify the person's actions; it does provide some context...ultimately, it is humble awareness of our own humanity that allows us to forgive - we are, every one of us, so very flawed and so very fragile...it is this knowledge of my own frailty that helps me find my compassion, my empathy, my similarity, and my forgiveness for the frailty and cruelty of others.'* (Tutu, 2014)

In August 2022, I attended a town hall meeting at the Transition Center of Kansas City. These meetings were established to introduce residents to various organizations and institutions in the community about which it may benefit them to know. The guests for this particular meeting were women from an organization called 'Mothers in Charge' (KCmothersincharge.com). This organization cares for families who have lost a loved one to homicide, providing victim and family services, education and advocacy.

One by one, the mothers described the events surrounding the violent deaths of their children. These were stories of unfathomable pain, expressed not just in the words these mothers spoke, but in the ways their bodies betrayed their grief as they struggled to give it voice. One

mother pacing back and forth across the front of the room as though she was evading the full force of her emotions. Another firmly rooted to the earth, unmoving and unmovable in her barely concealed rage at the world that could produce human beings possessed of such coarseness that they could snatch her beloved child from her without a moment's hesitation. The residents assembled in the room fell silent within moments of the start of the first presentation, and when they were invited to ask questions at the end, their engagement with the presenters was without exception, genuinely empathetic. As one might expect, residents shared their own stories of personal loss; not as shallow, performative displays to score points with the administration, but as sincere expressions of compassionate kinship. After the formal presentation, residents flocked to the front of the room to convey their condolences, share stories and hug the appreciative mothers.

When we say 'I am sorry' or 'Forgive me', there is a sense of individuality in the plea to be released from the guilt and shame 'I' am burdened by. In *'Forgiveness and Reparation, the Healing Journey'*, Mpho Tutu van Furth wrote that the Ubuntu apology '*Ndicela uxolo*' (*I ask for peace*) is about 'we' and is '*...heard [as] an appeal for healing for all of us and the space between us that is community*'. According to van Furth, '*...ubuntu peace moves beyond verbal apologies to sincere action and reparations for past harm*' (Tutu van Furth, 2022).

As an aspiring chaplain engaged with the correctional system, what arises for me when considering the question '*What serves?*' is the admonishment from our elders and ancestors not to privilege programming over spiritual nourishment, but to find ways to allow the latter to imbue the former with meaning in the service of healing and renewal.

The author's observations while volunteering at the Transition Center of Kansas City: '*Matthew*', a soft spoken, thoughtful resident in his early 30's showed up

*consistently to meditation sessions and the Buddhist study group for the first couple of weeks. It was apparent that he was interested in resuming a dormant contemplative practice and he participated enthusiastically in group discussions. His attendance then ended abruptly and it was a couple more weeks before I saw him again, leaning against the wall outside his probation officer's office looking very unhappy. I greeted him and asked what was going on; he replied that he was frustrated about a scheduling conflict that resulted in his absence from job training classes because of required court appearances. Matthew thought that more attention could have been given to a compromise that might have allowed him to attend court and his training, and he was upset that his absences from the job training might result in a delay in his completion of the program. I listened to Matthew's concerns and asked him if he would like to consider returning to meditation practice in the chapel. He told me he would like to, but that it would have to be in the evenings since his job training was now full time. I told him he was welcome to drop in Tuesday evenings and that I would let him know when/if evening offerings would be expanded.*

### **Restorative Justice and Buddhist Philosophy**

Buddhist teachings emphasize non-violence, compassion, loving kindness and spiritual friendship. These teachings have as their foundation a belief in the interrelated and interconnected nature of existence and reflect a sensibility that values wholeness over individuality (Pichler, 2007). Restorative Justice principles share the emphasis on the interdependent nature of humanity, recognizing that our actions affect others, and focuses on the reparative power of identifying what can be done to help make things right when harm is done.

As an aspiring Buddhist chaplain working in a transition center, one of the themes that I try to articulate in my encounters with residents and staff, who live and work in very close proximity with one another, is that when it comes to navigating painful experiences and reducing suffering in our lives, recognizing the universality of our wish not to suffer can actually serve their individual needs. My understanding of compassion and loving kindness in particular convinces me that to the extent residents and staff cultivate a willingness to come back home to a genuine wish for others not to suffer, born of an innate understanding that very little separates us from each other, I think harmful behavior can lessen in frequency and severity.

Another Buddhist principle that seems to map onto the restorative justice model has to do with offering practices with which people may discover for themselves what will serve. While the criminal justice system is characterized by highly choreographed processes that allow practically no agency for the non-professionals (victims, accused, witnesses) to play meaningful roles, restorative justice invites anyone affected by specific harmful acts in any way to have their voices heard and to contribute to concrete steps by which the harm may be repaired. Similarly, there are myriad practices in the Buddhist tradition that are explicitly intended to help the practitioner navigate suffering by developing their ethical conduct, mental discipline and wisdom. One may undertake a study of the Buddha's diagnosis and prescription to alleviate suffering described in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, or they may opt for meeting the teachings through formal meditation instruction. In either case, through embracing these practices, one may develop the means to exert tremendous influence over their own happiness rather than to succumb to the capriciousness of a system for which happiness isn't a factor.

Buddhist teachings on cultivating loving kindness and generosity as the basis for wholesome actions serve as inspiration for restorative justice approaches such as reflecting and continuously cultivating wholesome internal structures and external systems.

Loving kindness can be understood as the generosity and openness of heart that simply wishes all beings to be happy and is practiced formally by bringing to mind images of a succession of people and offering phrases such as *'May I/you be safe, May I/you be happy, May I/you be healthy, May I/you live with ease'*. The images brought to one's mind include oneself, a loved one, a 'neutral' person (someone about whom there are no particularly positive or negative emotions), a 'difficult' person and then perhaps expanding the scope to one's community or even all living beings. Rather than trying to fabricate warm, loving feelings when there may be no such emotions present at the moment (especially toward the neutral or difficult person) the practitioner contemplates the intentions behind the practice and is reminded that all living beings wish not to suffer and would surely abandon their hatred, greed, cruelty and indifference if they were truly happy. One is reminded when studying Buddhism and Restorative Justice that when harmful acts occur, it's often the case that everyone involved has been harmed, to some degree at least. The formal practice of Loving Kindness can imbue one's heart and mind with something beyond mere forbearance when they are wronged, it can help them to recognize conditioned reactions that perpetuate harm and choose to bring compassionate and discerning action to their circumstances.

### **Restorative Justice and Christianity**

*'While it contains retributive components, God's justice is fundamentally a restoring and renewing justice. Knowing this, the Church is obliged to practice*

*restorative justice in its own ranks and to summon society to move in the same direction'* (Marshall, 2012)

There are many texts in the Old and New Testaments that speak explicitly about justice and righteousness and many more that refer to justice implicitly. Different biblical writers take different positions on what justice requires in differing circumstances. Additionally, there are distinctions drawn between social justice, which is concerned with fair distribution of goods and resources between parties, and retributive (criminal) justice, which is concerned with how harm is identified and how those who cause harm are punished. There seems to be a strong consensus though, around the assertion that justice has a divine origin and an objective existence since it derives from God, who is real and beyond speculation (Marshall, 2012).

A common perception is that justice in the Bible is predicated on an essentially retributive approach to justice, but some scholars argue that the ambiguity of the phrase lends itself to a spectrum of perspectives on the subject. For instance, justice in ancient Israel emphasized efforts to restore and sustain healthy relationships within the community rather than inflict brutal punishment (Marshall, 2012).

*'Much of what the Bible says about social justice has direct relevance to the criminal justice domain. If we took more seriously the biblical imperative to care for the poor and dispossessed, to avoid the unjust accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of the few, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed by debt or exploitation, we would have less cause to employ criminal sanctions against those on the margins of the community who feel they have no stake in society. (Marshall, 2012)'*

There is skepticism though, among Christians who ask whether ‘...*Restorative Justice [is] a denial of important truths mixed in with identifiable Christian teaching, or is it a fundamentally good idea given a dangerous twist?*’ (Fraser, 2006). It’s pointed out for instance that in some schools ‘*Restorative Justice is often made synonymous with a “non-punitive” and “non-judgemental” approach to conflict*’, which triggers concern that its promotion as ‘...*being essentially opposed to the very concept of punishment*’ puts it at odds not only with the notion that establishing guilt is a relevant and necessary part of responding to conflict, but also that punishment as the appropriate response to wrongdoing is central to the message of the gospel (Fraser 2006).

The author’s observations while volunteering at the Transition Center of Kansas City: ‘*Steve*’, a very tall, slender resident who told me he was born and raised in the Ozarks, came into the chapel one evening as I was sitting at my desk writing. He strolled across the chapel without saying a word, his hands in his pockets and his expression vaguely suspicious and unfriendly. His face lit up when he spotted the Christian periodicals displayed on my desk and I invited him to take as many as he’d like. Steve launched into a list of the religious texts he’d read including the Torah, Quran and Bible (multiple translations, as well as the Apocrypha). He also told me he was very knowledgeable about the life and philosophy of the Buddha and went to some length about his preference for a spiritual teacher who didn’t demand to be worshiped. Steve also told me he was struggling mightily with the guilt of having been responsible for the deaths of two close friends. He spoke continuously for almost 30 minutes, about the circumstances of his friends’ deaths, the emotional turmoil of knowing that his lifestyle was no longer

*consistent with how he wished to live, and a frustrating inability to turn the corner. Beneath the posturing and what seemed to me to be such a strong desire to be regarded as knowledgeable and therefore worthy, there was also a palpable yearning in his voice for connection. I noticed within myself a strong urge to correct, to advise, to 'teach' Steve'. Luckily for both of us, he wouldn't let me get a word in edgewise, so I remained mute as the words poured out of his mouth. Father Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest who founded Homeboy Industries, the world's largest gang-intervention and rehabilitation program ([homeboyindustries.org](http://homeboyindustries.org)), admonished Upaya chaplaincy students to stop trying to reach the careseeker, but rather to ask whether we can be reached by them (Talk given to Upaya chaplaincy students, 2022). I managed, on this evening at least, to be reached. I was encouraged once by a teacher giving instructions on loving kindness to considering imagining a difficult person as a young child. The purpose of this is to remind the practitioner that all of us, even our enemies, were children once, innocent and blameless. I began employing this act of imagination not only in meditation, but when I interacted with people whose behavior angered, offended or frustrated me. It's also effective when I encounter people whose outer behavior belies their inner turmoil and suffering. At some point during my conversation with Steve, what I might otherwise have characterized as a fairly off putting personality lost all of its power to vex me as I visualized him as a small boy before the world got its hands on him. From that moment on, Steve's suffering became my suffering, silencing the inner voice that thinks it knows the answer to questions that aren't even being asked and blurring the distinction between careseeker and*

*caregiver. I don't know what Steve did that led to his incarceration and I'm not sure I'm ready to know, but it's apparent to me that if unconditional compassion isn't allowed to occupy the same space as our baser emotions, then Oscar Wilde's description of prison as '...a system so terrible that it hardens their hearts whose hearts it does not break' will continue to be true.*

### **Secular Mindfulness in Corrections**

Mindfulness and other forms of meditation and yoga-based programs have been offered in U.S. correctional facilities primarily by outside volunteers since the late 1960's (Maull, unk. date). Most programs include time for meditation, some form of contemplative or mindful movement, and group inquiry/dialogue. A few curriculum-based programs add social emotional learning and elements of cognitive behavioral treatment into this mix (Maull). Research data is generally positive and encouraging, indicating increases in capacity for mindfulness, self-transcendence and emotional intelligence, and decreases in anxiety, negative and/or violent behaviors, positive drug screens, and recidivism (Maull). The secularization of Buddhist inspired mindfulness and awareness meditation practices and the wide reach of programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has helped to increase the popularity of teaching mindfulness in corrections. Secular mindfulness has its detractors, including Ron Purser, who wrote the 2019 book 'McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality and has said: *While a stripped-down, secularized technique...may make it more palatable to the corporate world, decontextualizing mindfulness from its original liberative and transformative purpose, as well as its foundation in social ethics, amounts to a Faustian bargain. Rather than applying mindfulness as a means to awaken individuals and organizations from the unwholesome roots of greed, ill will and delusion, it is usually being refashioned into a banal, therapeutic,*

*self-help technique that can actually reinforce those roots* (Purser, 2013). My impression is that the concerns expressed in this critique apply mostly to the risks of introducing mindfulness in a corporate environment, and ‘...*becoming a reinforcement of consumer capitalism*’ (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2013). Mindfulness meditation offers many potential benefits to prisoners coping with the stresses and dangers of incarceration and its practice, even when initiated within an entirely secular framework, isn't likely to dampen the spiritual curiosity that might arise from its study. Extensive neurobiological research with mindfulness meditation practitioners in the outside community has clearly demonstrated the positive impact of mindfulness meditation practice on overall brain function and health, including enhanced attention stabilization, emotion regulation, wellbeing and capacity for effective stress management. Preliminary research points to these same benefits for participants in prison mindfulness programs (Maul).

The most important societal goal for prison programming is to reduce recidivism, which depends on the successful reintegration of released prisoners into the community. It is also important for the health and safety of incarcerated individuals and those charged with their care and confinement to offer programming that supports prisoners and staff in developing healthy coping mechanisms.

In one study, a modified MBSR program was offered to over 2,000 inmates in the Massachusetts correctional facilities including one women's prison, four medium security men's prisons and one minimum security/pre-release facility between 1992 and 1996. A reported 1,350 inmates completed the program. Results were measured on three widely accepted measures of hostility, self-esteem, and mood disturbance. All three measures indicated significant improvements for all participants, although the women and men in the minimum security facility did better. These outcomes were very encouraging, especially with the limitations imposed by

prison circumstances requiring shorter class times and program length. Also, available facilities to conduct the program were often less than ideal, and in prison it is often challenging for inmates to find a quiet place and time to practice (Samuelson, Carmody, Kabat-Zinn, Bratt, 2007).

From a spiritual perspective, the teachings and practices of the world's great contemplative traditions are renowned vehicles for profound inner healing and transformation. Interventions combining secular mindfulness with some of the most effective modern psychological therapies have also demonstrated great potential for inner healing and transformation. It is reasonable to assume that the kind of behavior change that will lead to successful reintegration of prisoners, especially those who have engaged in harmful criminal behaviors, requires some form of inner transformation. The research, meanwhile, focuses primarily on observable and measurable behaviors and conditions as well as the underlying psychological needs or factors, which have been to one extent or another validated. From my perspective, whether newly released citizens have undertaken a mindfulness practice while still incarcerated that is rooted in ancient spiritual traditions, or opted to avail themselves only of a secular stress reduction regimen, barrier-free post release access to support will be essential to their continued healing and success on the outside. Facilitating that kind of support would be central to my efforts should I have the opportunity to work in this area in the future.

Probation and parole officers are a key fulcrum point in the successful reintegration of incarcerated adults back into the community. Training probation and parole officers in mindfulness based interventions like MBSR has shown great promise in reducing recidivism and helping more released prisoners successfully reintegrate into the community (Harrison, Clarke & Maull, 2013). There is a great deal of evidence pointing to the quality of the interactions between

probation and parole officers and their clients as a critical contributing factor to positive or negative client outcomes. It would appear that the ability to form some kind of therapeutic alliance is a very promising place to focus an institution's efforts, and mindfulness training in its many forms certainly has great potential for enhancing such abilities in community corrections professionals (Muran, Barber, 2010).

Personal accountability is an essential part of any restorative justice program, insofar as acknowledging responsibility for the harms one causes is a requisite step in taking one's place as a contributing member of the community after release. Developing the ability to accept responsibility for one's actions is a natural outcome of meditation practice. A practitioner might first realize the distinction between the pain involved in living, something over which they may have little or no control, and the often resultant suffering, over which they may learn to exert tremendous control. Mindful cultivation of self compassion can also steer the practitioner away from self blame, which is about self punishment (the opposite of responsibility) and embrace true responsibility, or what they are 'able to respond to'. There are also ways the practitioner may explore the implications of cause and effect, one of which is stated in the 'Five Remembrances' in the Pali Sutta-pitaka (Anguttara Nikaya 5:57) which states *'My only true possessions are my actions, and I cannot escape their consequences.'*

### **Correctional Chaplains**

*"Chaplains are important in a correctional setting because they help offenders develop a healthy attitude toward themselves and staff in the prison where the offenders are incarcerated; Chaplains help offenders develop a positive spiritual reality regardless of religious preference and they help promote spiritual growth*

*that will assist in an orderly transition from a prison environment to the outside community.” (Rolf, CorrectionalChaplains.org)*

Correctional chaplains provide pastoral care to the incarcerated and to the staff members who work in the correctional environment. They manage religious programming, ensuring that those who wish to practice their faith are able to, and they perform liturgical duties for their own religious denominations. Correctional chaplains also assist the administration by implementing relevant policies on faith practices, religious articles, diets, etc.. Religious volunteers are recruited, trained and work closely with the chaplain who is responsible for encouraging community participation.

There are obvious differences in the roles and responsibilities of correctional officers compared to staff and volunteers in the ‘helping professions’ such as behavioral health providers, social workers, and chaplains. The primary responsibility of corrections officers to ensure safety and security often results in a perception by offenders of the officers as adversaries. Therefore, there exists a greater potential for violence and direct trauma in encounters between offenders and officers compared to helping professionals, who are more likely to be perceived by offenders as advocates and allies. It may follow then, that the chaplain is in a unique position to support administration and staff efforts to diffuse anger and stress among offenders and staff.

The author’s observations while volunteering at the Transition Center of Kansas City: *One of the Correctional Officer’s (CO) I spoke at length with has worked for the Missouri Department of Corrections for 17 years, all in the building where TCKC now exists. He works at the main entrance of the facility, screening visitors, issuing visitor badges and radios, etc. When I first met this CO, there wasn’t much that seemed to differentiate him from the 12-15 other CO’s I’d*

*already met. He was quiet, professional, maybe a little stern. After a few visits, we began to talk more and it was apparent, as it always eventually is when one pays close attention, that this was a whole person, someone with hopes, fears and aspirations - someone who also happened to have a copy of 'The Social Contract & Discourses' by Jean-Jacques Rousseau on his work station desk. He told me that TCKC is the fourth iteration of department of corrections institutions (DOC) since he began working there and that at one time, it was a medium security prison that housed mostly sex offenders. He told me a DOC chaplain worked there when it was a prison and that he believed it was beneficial for offenders and staff. After a twenty-five year career as a police officer, followed by a deep and abiding engagement with the dharma, and now immersion into chaplaincy, many of the absurd and often harmful distinctions between human beings I once accepted and perpetuated are now being attenuated by my encounters with people like this correctional officer. From the beginning of this project, it has been my intuition that I'm called to serve every living being, privileging no one over another, and my continuing relationship with him and others persuades me that this is how it should be. It just so happens that the restorative justice inspired practice of bringing transition center CO's and residents together in dialogue circles and other activities maps quite elegantly onto the Buddhist principle of the ultimate inseparability between our own well-being and happiness and that of others.*

### **The Role of the Volunteer**

*‘[Volunteers] enter this world with an often dubious view of our ability to make a difference. Prisoners make their way alone through some very rough terrain with very little guidance, but they are driven by the immediacy of their isolation and pain. To teach in this environment is to encounter your own mind in a vivid way. It challenges us to go beyond credentials and present the ‘straight’ truth as we heard it from our teachers. The result is a mutual project between the teachers and the prisoners. Sometimes everything clicks and we see the power of the practice happening (Crisp, 2017)’*

An interfaith chaplain, skilled in the kinds of practices shown by the research to reduce hostility, anxiety, depression and substance use, and increase self esteem, can contribute substantially to the development of more emotionally regulated, responsible, self monitoring and self respecting formerly incarcerated people. It’s my impression that the practices predicated on developing a clear view, at least relatively unobscured by emotional reactivity and bias, have been the most impactful to me and that sharing and modeling these practices may also be impactful to the inhabitants of a transition center in terms of deepening a capacity to make sense and derive true meaning from their present circumstances.

As evidenced so far by my brief experience at TCKC, which has included substantial input from residents and staff, the important considerations for offering spiritual support include 1.) clarity around the intention for doing this work as well as the specific type of programming one envisions offering, 2.) a clear view of the humanity of everyone in the facility and a genuine desire to serve them all, 3.) a commitment to simplicity in terms of the teachings on any subject.

Content that is either too esoteric or not immediately applicable will undermine the credibility of the chaplain and the benefits of his or her services.

### **Biography + My Experience at TCKC**

*All my ancient twisted karma,  
from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion,  
born of body, speech, and mind,  
I now fully atone*

#### Verse of Atonement

I was a police officer for 25 years (1990-2016). During that time, I served as a patrol officer, undercover narcotics investigator, detective, school resource officer, and professional standards (internal affairs) detective. Midway through my career, I was promoted several times within a relatively short period of time. About eight years after my first promotion, I requested a voluntary demotion from the position of Captain, having become disenchanted with managing from a distance, no longer engaged in the work I was most skilled at, and at the lowest emotional ebb I'd ever experienced. My request was approved and I spent the last three years of my career as an almost deliriously happy detective.

Much is understandably made of the physical dangers of police work. I'd argue, as I'm confident many other cops would, that an equally corrosive aspect of the job is wading daily through the suffering of others with only a few months of formal academy training followed by a few more months of field training under the supervision of a senior officer. Of all the skills I was taught as a young police officer in the early 1990's, compassion wasn't one of them. Such a response to human suffering was marginalized at best and ridiculed at worst. Over the years, a

relentlessly thickening layer of disregard for the causes and conditions that contributed to someone's unlawful behavior obscured my sense that there might be more effective ways to serve and protect my community. I continued to feel the dissonance between my intuitions and the reality of my environment throughout my career. As often as not though, I took the easier route, a failure of character for which a lifetime of atonement is the only remedy. My actions and values were most well balanced during my tenures as a school resource officer, a young detective and a new patrol sergeant, three all too brief periods of unalloyed enthusiasm and idealism during which I believed that I could do police work in a way that was most consistent with my deepest convictions about service to others. Being spiritually unmoored during each of these periods, I can only surmise it was a chance confluence of youthful exuberance and clarity of purpose that buoyed me.

After I retired from police work, I soon realized that a quarter century of accumulated stress and trauma hadn't neatly evaporated just because I no longer wore a badge and carried a gun. It was also apparent that the maladaptive coping strategies I'd adopted were not going to work any better than they had when I was on the job; it was just a lot more noticeable now that I was no longer in an environment where these strategies are sometimes tolerated and in the worst cases, rewarded. I developed an interest in secular mindfulness after learning about its potential benefits for those suffering from anxiety and depression. I began a solitary meditation practice and soon after, enrolled in a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) class. As my personal practice deepened, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of mindfulness to support my own healing and development as a practitioner, but also to share the practice of mindfulness with others, so I undertook MBSR teacher training. A subsequent exploration of Buddhism led to the discovery of professional chaplaincy in which I thought I saw how I might continue serving

others while deepening my understanding and engagement with the Dharma. Liberation from suffering has not been the result either of my experience with MBSR or Buddhism, but both have proven noticeably ameliorative on many fronts.

My intention for engaging in the Upaya chaplaincy training program was and remains, to deepen my personal Buddhist practice, continue to heal personally from my personal trauma and to offer the fruits of my lived experience in service to others. For much of my life though, emotional empathy has been the lens through which I viewed the suffering of others, however draining and unsatisfying it has been. Having little awareness of how transforming sympathy into compassionate action could relieve the suffering of the object of my empathy as well as my own suffering, I now understand that I spent a lot of time in empathic distress (Halifax, 2018). When I began to read about the co-equal development of wisdom and compassion in Buddhist philosophy, I knew that I'd stumbled upon a healthier and more skillful path than the one I'd previously traveled. It was apparent to me that having elevated what I'd misinterpreted as wisdom (read: book knowledge) above all else left other heart/mind states such as compassion to atrophy and thus, left me unhappy and unfulfilled.

In March 2022, I heard about the Conflict Resolution Center (CCR) of Kansas City and the Transition Center of Kansas City (TCKC) and decided to make inquiries. Eventually, I was invited to visit the facility and propose some programming ideas. Prior to volunteering on a regular basis, I met with TCKC's superintendent and her supervisor to learn about the origin and purpose of TCKC. I also met with the Restorative Justice Strategist at the Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR) who developed the programming at the institution. I took daylong training classes offered at CCR in Neighborhood Accountability Boards, Restorative Justice and Trauma & Resilience. The principles of restorative justice informed the content of each of these training

classes. A Neighborhood Accountability Board (NAB) is a restorative process that involves a community member who has done harm (the offender), the person the harm was done to, trained members of the community (NAB Board Members) where the harm took place and trained facilitators. During this process, the participants speak about how this harm affected them or their community. After stories are shared, the community members and the person who has done harm collectively come up with a plan with the person who did the harm to repair the harm and make things as right as possible. Cases are dismissed if the agreement is followed and completed in the allotted amount of time. NABs cost significantly less than court hearings/proceedings and empower all affected by a harm to be involved in the outcome.

In conversations with people championing TCKC and its programming at all levels, I learned that the overarching philosophy has as much to do with cultivating the residents' wholeness rather than focusing exclusively on the harm they've done. Accountability is still front and center in TCKC programming, as is developing the willingness to forgive oneself, through a variety of programming from healing dialogue circles to the mindfulness guidance I am offering. The Deputy Director of the Division of Probation and Parole, which oversees both transition centers in Missouri told me that transition center volunteer and staff members might be the only positive adult role model residents have and that even when they (residents) behave in ways that might be characterized as antagonistic, it could very well be that they're just trying to determine whether or to what extent you really care about them.

The building that houses TCKC has some of the trappings of a correctional facility, such as concertina wire strung along the top of the fences that enclose the facility. Inside, TCKC has more of a community college feel. Months before it reopened as a transition center in April 2022, TCKC staff undertook the task of replacing floors, cabinets, installing furniture and painting the

walls to transform the overall appearance. When I arrived at TCKC, the chapel hadn't been used as such since about a year prior, when the facility was a minimum security prison. I acquired a desk, bookcase, whiteboard and a DVD player/monitor. I raised money with a Go Fund Me campaign to purchase new meditation cushion sets and solicited donations of several meditation benches via social media. I also received a box of books about Buddhism and mindfulness/meditation from the Prison Dharma Network ([prisonmindfulness.org/books-behind-bars](http://prisonmindfulness.org/books-behind-bars)).

The areas where residents sleep, eat and attend classes are fairly austere and mostly unadorned, but clean and functional. Officers are in uniform, but residents are dressed as civilians, walking the halls with substantially less restriction of movement than in a prison. The main hallway has offices for probation/parole officers, mental health & addiction counselors, and other support staff.

I began introducing myself and offering limited programming (described in greater detail below) in August 2022, and met a number of mostly day and evening shift officers (CO's). The CO's I met ranged in tenure from brand new to those who'd worked for the department of corrections (DOC) for decades. Some had only worked where TCKC was located their entire careers and some had worked in prisons across the state. It was apparent that this spectrum of experience influenced officers' perceptions, but not necessarily in the ways I expected. The restorative justice model that drives TCKC's programming is radically different from where CO's worked elsewhere and the philosophical differences were seen as positive by some and problematic or at least frustrating to others. It seemed that when reservations were expressed, they originated in deep seated intuitions about how 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are supposed to be regarded and treated, these intuitions almost certainly preceding officers' employment with

the department and crystallized during their tenure. The freedom to wear civilian clothes, to engage in decision making about aspects of the institution's schedule and programming, to speak to staff in disrespectful (but not threatening) ways without consequence (or at least the consequences one might experience in prison) were seen by some officers as emblematic of an environment in which they were potentially less safe and residents less likely to self regulate. The majority of officers I spoke with though, were either cautiously optimistic or supportive, even enthusiastic in their endorsement of the principles behind the programming, if not equally so about the execution to that point. Almost without exception, these officers seemed to genuinely understand the complexity and challenge involved in bringing such a unique model online and indicated their willingness to support this project.

Within just a couple of weeks of my arrival at TCKC, I began to establish rapport with various civilian staff members. It was occasionally surprising and even a little jarring how much some of them were willing to tell me about their lives given the brevity of our relationship. Stories of homes destroyed by fire, fractured or dysfunctional family relationships and profound emotional turmoil were interspersed between stirring descriptions of births and hilarious workplace and family anecdotes. It wasn't so much the content of the stories they told or the emotions they expressed; after all, 25 years as a cop has pretty much inured me to the myriad ways that human beings suffer and rejoice. What struck me was the nearly instantaneous trust placed in me, by virtue only of my title - a title, by the way, that I still routinely clarify (*I'm studying to be a chaplain, I'm **not** a chaplain!*) out of an overdeveloped fear of being mistaken for someone who really knows what they're doing. Having these kinds of conversations, one after the other, reminds me of the solemn commitment I'm making: to come alongside another

human being, with only a wish to serve as needed, absent any agenda, and the self admonishment not to betray their trust in me in any way.

On August 5, 2022, I began to volunteer at TCKC and maintained an average of three days and one evening each week over several months. During that time, I guided meditation for residents, facilitated a Basics of Buddhism study group, and presented secular ‘Mindfulness for Stress Reduction’ sessions to evening shift officers. I also interacted with TCKC residents and staff on a regular basis, discussing a wide range of issues with them. In order to introduce my programming at TCKC, I conducted information sessions and introduced myself to staff and residents over a period of a couple of weeks. I submit a biweekly calendar that is broadcasted throughout the institution via video monitors. I also posted a calendar and info sheet on the front door of the chapel and installed a secure message box for staff and residents to submit questions and requests. Originally, I planned to guide meditation for anyone in the building who wanted to attend on a regular schedule. Attendance has thus far varied widely and I’ve received valuable advice from residents and staff about how to schedule my programming in a way that’s more amenable to the existing schedules at TCKC. Every month or so, I make adjustments to my programming and schedule in response to suggestions and after the New Year, my intention is to share a detailed program description to probation and parole officers, who recommend courses of study to incoming residents according to their individual needs. Once a resident has been at TCKC for even a couple of weeks, their schedule is already pretty much set, so familiarizing their supervising officers with what I offer as soon as they arrive should maximize engagement.

Caroline Atkinson and Daniel Ramos are key members of the team delivering programming to residents and staff at TCKC. Caroline is a Restorative Practice Specialist, Daniel is a Restorative Justice Facilitator, and they both work help residents understand themselves

better and manage conflict in healthy, restorative ways using methods such as Restorative Reentry Circles, which are designed to bring together individuals impacted by the criminal-legal system and their families so they can heal and create a support plan during the reentry process. Their backgrounds are very different - Caroline holds bachelor's degrees in Criminology and Psychology and a Master's Degree in Criminology and started working in Restorative Justice as an intern at the Center for Conflict Resolution. Daniel served over 20 years in prison in Kansas and about 12 years into his sentence, undertook a journey of personal transformation that began with interacting with organizations that were pro-social and therapeutic in nature and developed into a full fledged engagement with restorative justice at TCKC where he helps residents gain access to the resources needed to be successful in reentry.

New residents arrive at TCKC every Wednesday. Caroline and Daniel facilitate the orientation process and introduce them to the program, including the 'Essential Elements of Dignity' (Hicks, 2011), the foundation of the restorative principles taught and observed at TCKC. Five days a week at 7:15 AM, residents and staff are invited to participate in a circle process intended to build and strengthen the community. Participants are invited to talk about anything that is on their minds and sometimes prompts are introduced to generate dialogue. On alternating Fridays, they follow the morning circle with a healing circle in which residents are invited to process trauma and feelings of pain and grief. They do some meditation and journaling in these sessions as well.

Caroline and Daniel also participate in weekly meetings with probation officers and unit supervisors in which they discuss individual residents as well as what they refer to as 'vision oriented' subjects, or issues related to the overall vision or mission of TCKC. Their role in these meetings is to provide a 'restorative lens' through which things like programming and

institutional procedures are considered. This can be particularly beneficial when traditional obstacles that might have thwarted progressive initiatives in other institutions are raised and they are able to present a restorative approach that might be more appropriate for TCKC. They also present basic and advanced conflict resolution classes to residents, bring in mentors to teach reentry life skills classes, and facilitate monthly town hall meetings in which representatives from different organizations speak to the residents on a variety of subjects.

*'I'm really at TCKC because I believe in cultural change through restorative principles. I also believe that incarceration is inherently traumatic and my purpose is to help folks recognize that and start to heal from that. I think I always approached criminal justice from the perspective of victim advocacy and was never interested in being complicit in the cycle of incarceration.'* - (Caroline Atkinson, personal communication, October 14, 2022)

*'I am interested in helping folks heal from harm they've experienced due to their involvement with the legal system. Those folks need empowerment and I hope that [when] I leave this building, [I'll leave] some kind of legacy behind that [shows] that we can humanize people within this system and that we can recognize them as agents over their own lives - that we don't have to make decisions for them and they don't have to control them that they have the ability to act independently and be successful.'* (Daniel Ramos, personal communication, October 14, 2022)

After the first month or so volunteering at TCKC, I met with my Upaya chaplaincy mentor group and I talked about how radically different it was sometimes to have conversations with residents

around spirituality and religion in comparison to other populations and peer groups. I think part of the reason for this is that the cultural homogeneity of most of my associations outside TCKC all but guarantees some degree of consensus around spiritual nomenclature and perspectives. Given my sense of how much higher the stakes seem to be for someone in the circumstances faced by TCKC residents, the fear of ‘getting it wrong’ tends to loom in the back of my mind. In response to my observations, my colleagues helpfully remarked what a fertile ground TCKC must be for practicing the tenets of Not Knowing and Bearing Witness. The advice proved prescient. Case in point: a twenty-six-year-old, lifelong and devout Wiccan resident walked into the chapel on a Tuesday evening and asked me how I thought he should organize and carry out a memorial service for his father on Saturday. He told me he would be allowed to travel to his hometown the morning of the service, which meant he had to plan the service without the benefit of anyone else’s input. More crucially, he had to figure out how to eulogize a man about whom he had very complicated emotions to over 150 friends and relatives, many of whom revered his father. Somehow, my still immature understanding of these tenets helped me listen deeply and respond from my heart. The tenets referred to above represent two of the three ‘pure precepts’ an aspiring Upaya chaplain must study and practice. According to the Upaya Jukai book (Halifax, 2022), the ‘... *precepts offer us a chance to engage with the world in a way that is inherently meaningful. The precepts do not let us get away with behavior that is harmful because they ask us to examine our lives more and more closely. They challenge us to commit to do good, cease from harm, and do good for others in our body, speech and mind.*’ Not Knowing and Bearing Witness encourage the practitioner to relinquish rigid ideas about the world and to be fully present for the joys and the suffering of the world. I’ve also been heartened by a quote shared by Natasha Bruckner, who graduated from the Upaya chaplaincy program in 2020 in her paper,

*'Moon Freed from a Cloud: Chaplains' Support for Prison Inmates Practicing Nonviolence'*, she quoted Chaplains Naomi Paget and Janet McCormack who described the ministry of presence as “*the art of hanging out with patients, clients, victims, or team members,*” and “*loitering with intent to calm, to build relationships, to provide compassion*” (2006, p. 27). It's been a fruitful practice to allow my exuberance for spiritual platitudes to evaporate into the richness of silent companionship.

### **Conclusion**

Nowhere is the tendency of human beings to discard fellow human beings more obvious and damaging than the criminal justice system, although the practice can be found elsewhere (families of origin, education, religion, etc.). The practice and state of mass incarceration in the United States is untenable, unconscionable, and based on a zero sum fallacy: the notion that somehow the values of civil society are eroded to the same extent that compassion is extended to those who cause harm. Also to be considered is the damage done when punishment is conflated with accountability or worse yet, when punishment is confused with compassion. Without undermining the deepest values of society at all, restorative justice seeks to bring accountability back to the fore concretely rather than performatively in criminal justice proceedings and to genuinely make things better rather than worse.

This thesis seeks to illustrate the precarious status quo that currently exists vis a vis the American correctional system and to illuminate a road less traveled (thus far) by those who believe there are ways to curb and prevent harm through skillful and compassionate means. I think that the inculcation of restorative justice principles within the transition center environment, buttressed by interfaith spiritual support is likely to produce a synergistic effect that accrues to the benefit of the entire community. A chaplain working in the transition center

environment is uniquely qualified and positioned to support and complement the efforts of the staff while avoiding, or at least skillfully navigating the potentially adversarial dynamics that are baked into the traditional correctional setting. Furthermore, an interfaith chaplain is someone who can support transition center graduates who desire to continue their spiritual journey upon completion of the program by facilitating connections with the various faith communities who are willing to embrace a formerly incarcerated person. My hope is that this paper persuades the reader that it is possible to reform at least aspects of the criminal justice system in ways that are unambiguously restorative without compromising either public safety or the integrity of the system itself. The term '*Transition Center*' couldn't be more apt - it describes at once an environment where genuine transformation and healing is possible, and the process of continuous becoming from which wise hope for the future may spring eternal.

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## **Appendix**

### **Beneficial Practices for TCKC Residents & Staff**

- **Body and Breath Guided Meditation** (Upaya Meditation Facilitation Guidelines)
- **Gratitude Guided Meditation** (Upaya Meditation Facilitation Guidelines)

### **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**

#### **Overview**

Through this 8-week class, participants are introduced to the key principles of mindfulness, provided with instruction for formal and informal practices, and engage in short talks and discussions. With a commitment to involvement, both within and outside of class, participants will be pointed towards practices that integrate mindfulness into their daily life.

#### **Class Content**

Mindfulness can be defined most effectively as “The awareness that arises from paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Jon Kabat-Zinn). The skills involved in this are essentially, the ability to focus and sustain attention, learning the difference between observing and judging, and inclining one’s thinking toward keen observation of life experience without judgment. This means that your moment to moment experience is a key part of the class content! You will learn about stress, and identify your unique responses to stress, discovering new ways of viewing your experience. Skills are introduced and reinforced through teacher-led presentations, class discussions and in-class practices that include sitting meditation, body scan, gentle yoga, walking, and mindful eating practice. A basic premise of MBSR is that learning is possible only in a safe, relaxed and non-critical environment. The classroom is physically comfortable and secure, and the teacher values intent listening as the primary form of support for participants as they learn mindfulness skills. The learning environment itself is “low tech,” free of cell phones, “apps” and computer screens. The methods in Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) complement medical treatments, psychotherapy, body work and physical therapy, but MBSR is NOT medical treatment or psychotherapy of any kind. Please seek the assistance of a physician or healer of your choice for your medical care.

#### **Topics Covered in Orientation Session**

- History of MBSR
- Definition of mindfulness
- Pertinent research findings
- Practical and logistical information
  - Dates and times
  - What to expect in class
  - Home assignments and other course requirements

- Benefits and Risks
- An experience of practice (mindful movement + brief sitting meditation)

**Week One** - Setting the stage for the program, discussing centrality of awareness and the cultivation of mindfulness in class and at home.

- Opening Practice
- Review definition of mindfulness
- Review guidelines for participation
- Guided reflection on what brought participants to the class
- Group Introductions
- Yoga
- Raisin Meditation
- Body Scan Practice/Inquiry and/or Dyads to discuss participants' experiences
- Review Home Practice
  - Body Scan at least 6 times a week
  - Complete 9 dots exercise
  - Eat one meal with full awareness
- End with brief attentional focus meditation

**Week Two** - 'Perception and Creative Responding'

- Opening attentional focus practice
- Standing Yoga
- Guided Body Scan
- Small group dialogue (discussion of home practice)
- Large group dialogue
- 9 dots exercise and discussion
- Preparation for sitting meditation (introduce various postures, props, etc.)
- Attentional Focus Meditation
- Review Home Practice
  - Body Scan
  - Attentional Focus Meditation
  - Choose a daily activity to bring full awareness to for the week
  - Pleasant Events Calendar (attached)
  - Brief Closing Practice

**Week Three** - 'The Power of Being Present'

- Opening Practice
- Lying down yoga
- Optional body scan
- Sitting Meditation

- Small and/or large group discussion on yoga, body scan, sitting practice and mindfulness in daily activities
- Introduce Walking Meditation
- Review Pleasant Events Calendar
- Review Home Practice
  - Alternate lying down yoga with body scan every other day at least 6X's
  - Sitting Meditation (optional anchors, increase length of meditation)
  - Become aware of ordinary moments during the day
  - Complete Unpleasant Events Calendar
- Brief Closing Practice

#### **Week Four** - 'Meeting the Unwanted'

- Opening Practice (options for various foci/anchors)
- Standing Yoga
- Sitting Meditation (discuss options for working with physical discomfort)
- Dyads or Triads + Group Discussion
- Review Unpleasant Events Calendar
- Review Home Practice
  - Alternate body scan with lying down yoga
  - Sitting meditation
  - Be aware of automatic habitual stress reactions & behaviors
  - Be aware of feeling stuck, blocking, numbing and shutting off to the moment when it happens this week.
  - Review information about stress & stress response

#### **Week Five** - Two Major Themes

- Awareness of one's automatic, habitual, conditioned patterns
- How mindfulness may act as a mediator to recognize these patterns
- Opening Practice
- Standing yoga
- Sitting meditation (40+ minutes)
- Midway Reflection ('Taking stock, reflection on learning, growth, change)
- Review Home Practice
  - Recordings of guided practices are shared for the longer sitting practice and yoga
  - Alternate sitting meditation with standing yoga, lying down yoga or body scan
  - Continue to bring awareness to moments of reactivity
  - Complete Difficult Communications Calendar (attached)

#### **Week Six** - 'Communication & Interpersonal Relating'

- Opening Practice

- Standing yoga
- Sitting meditation (full MBSR sitting meditation with more silence, 45 minutes)
- Dyads, small groups, large group discussion
- Introduce and discuss all-day class
- Activities/group discussion about difficult communications
- Review Home Practice
  - Continue alternating practices
  - Prepare for all-day class
  - Bring awareness to moments of communication/interpersonal relating.
  - Pay attention to what you take in, physically and through all of your senses
- Brief sitting meditation

### **All Day Class**

- Alternating all MBSR practices in silence
- Talk by teacher
- Silent lunch
- Dissolving silence + large group dialogue
- Brief sitting meditation
- Closing Circle

### **Week Seven - Integrating mindfulness into daily life**

- Opening practice
- Movement practice
- Sitting meditation
- Discuss all day class
- Review Home Practice:
  - Experiment with recordings, total daily practice should still be 45 minutes
  - Continue with informal practices
  - Continue to work with ‘what you take in’

### **Week Eight - ‘Appreciating individual discipline, commitment and energy and creating the space to refine, clarify, articulate one’s choices for how to continue the practice’**

- Body Scan (30 min.)
- Sitting Meditation (30-40 min.)
- Optional: Writing a letter to one’s future self
- Home Practice, resources for continued practice
- Next Steps
- Final Sharing Circle
- Final Sitting Meditation

**Loving Kindness** (description in main text + Upaya Meditation Facilitation Guidelines)

### **Insight Dialogue**

Insight Dialogue (ID) is an interpersonal meditation practice that brings together meditative awareness, the wisdom teachings of Buddhism, and relationship (InsightDialogue.org). It has the same purposes and traditional roots as silent meditation: developing mindfulness, compassion and liberating insight, while investigating present moment experience. ID emphasizes mutuality; it involves speaking and interacting with others. Morality, tranquility, and wisdom, are essential to that mutuality and to the interpersonal path and can be found in Buddhism and other spiritual traditions. Like traditional silent meditation, Insight Dialogue has meditation guidelines to support meditators as they change their habitual ways of reacting and interacting with others. Each guideline can be used to remind us to calm down, become aware, and release old habits. As a practice, these guidelines work together to point the way towards spiritual awakening. There are six elements of Insight Dialogue practice: Pause, Relax, Open, Trust Emergence, Listen Deeply and Speak the Truth. Each of these helps us pay attention to our bodies, thoughts, emotions, and storylines. They are also deeply connected to one another and contain the seed of all the others.

### **Beneficial Practices for me**

Upaya Zen Center's Precepts are derived from the Peacemaker Observances of the Zen Peacemaker Order. They have been central to my study of chaplaincy and my personal practice (Halifax, 2022).

### **VERSE OF ATONEMENT**

All my ancient twisted karma, from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion, born of body, speech, and mind, I now fully atone.

### **THREE REFUGES**

Inviting all creations into the mandala of my practice and vowing to serve them, I take refuge in: Buddha, the awakened nature of all beings, Dharma, the ocean of wisdom and compassion, Sangha, the interdependence of all creations.

### **THE THREE TENETS and THREE PURE PRECEPTS**

Taking refuge and entering the stream of engaged practice, I vow to:

- First, do no harm: I vow not to harm others or myself, and to live in not knowing as the source of all manifestations.
- Second, do good: I vow to bear witness to the joys and pain of all life, and clearly see what is, without attachment or judgment.
- Third, do good for others: I vow to invite all hungry spirits into my life, and commit my energy and love to the healing of the earth, humanity, and all beings.

### **THE TEN PURE MIND PRACTICES**

Endeavoring to actualize my vows, I engage in the practices of:

1. Recognizing that I am not separate from all that is: this is the practice of Non-harming. I will not lead a harmful life nor encourage others to do so, and I will live in harmony with all life and the environment sustaining it.
2. Being satisfied with what I have: this is the practice of Non-Stealing. I will not take anything not given, practicing contentment by freely giving, asking for, and accepting what is needed.
3. Encountering all creations with respect and dignity; this is the practice of Chaste Conduct. I will give and accept love and friendship without using or clinging
4. Listening and speaking truthfully with kindness: this is the practice of Non-Lying. I will compassionately and constructively speak the truth as I perceive it, deceiving and harming no one.
5. Cultivating a mind that sees clearly: this is the practice of Not Being Deluded. I will embrace all experiences directly, without the many intoxicants of this world.
6. Realizing kindness: this is the practice of Not Talking About Others' Faults and Errors. Accepting what each moment offers, I vow to realize that I am not separate from any aspect of life and will abstain from criticizing others, taking responsibility for my own life.
7. Cultivating humility. This is the practice of Not Elevating Myself and Blaming Others. I will not blame or judge others, nor compete with others or covet recognition. I will hold all beings in equal regard and practice inclusiveness.

8. Being generous: this is the practice of Not Being Stingy. I will not foster a mind of poverty in others or myself, and I will use all the ingredients of my life, giving my best effort and accepting the result.

9. Transforming suffering into wisdom: this is the practice of Not Being Angry. I will not harbor resentment, rage, or revenge, and I will let anger teach me.

10. Honoring my life as a source of compassion and wisdom: this is the practice of Not Disparaging the Three Treasures. I will recognize that all beings, including myself, are expressions of oneness, diversity, and interdependence.

#### **THE FOUR COMMITMENTS**

- I commit myself to a culture of nonviolence and reverence for life.
- I commit myself to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.
- I commit myself to a culture of inclusiveness and a life based on truthfulness.
- I commit myself to a culture of equal rights for all people regardless of race, gender, ability, and economic status.