

Rehabilitation of Prisoners through Vipassana Meditation

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The prison authorities in Sri Lanka as well as in other countries such as India have emphasized the use of religious practices and religious teachings in disciplining and rehabilitating prisoners. As most of the individuals tend to commit crimes owing to some mental problems, meditation can be the best remedy for the mentally and spiritually sick prison inmates to get rid of their wrong perceptions.

Vipassana is the method of meditation often practiced in prisons. *Vipassana* means “insight” into the impermanent nature of mind and body. It is a way of self transformation through self observation and introspection. It deeply focuses on the interrelationship between mind and body, which can be perceived directly by disciplined attention to the physical sensations of the body that continuously interconnect and condition the state of the mind. In Sri Lanka, where Buddhism is the main religion of the majority, the Buddhist teaching and practices have made a considerable impact upon prisoners for their rehabilitation. This study explored the impact of Vipassana meditation practices in changing prisoners’ behavior and their wrong attitudes. During the months of June and July in 2011, the data were gathered by interviewing 48 prisoners who had been imprisoned in Bogambara prison in Kandy, Sri Lanka. The data were concerning the perceived changes in behavior and attitudes of prisoners caused by the practice of *Vipassana* meditation.

The majority of prisoners said that they were able to sleep peacefully without having nightmares and physical pains and with increased appetite after meditation practices. The other beneficial effects of meditation were that it helped prisoners to get rid of their addiction to smoking, drugs and alcohol, improve their discipline, experience in spiritual and behavioral changes, giving up hatred and revenge, and becoming vegetarians.

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