Buddhism teaches about “Jiri Rita”: by helping others I help myself. How do I become happy? By helping others to become happy. I recently heard this story from a friend. I am grateful he shared it. I want to share it here now.

**A Dog-House Program in the Prison System**

Within the prison system in America, there are many rehabilitation programs for the prisoners to help them to return to society. Many of them include work or study programs.

But there is still a serious problem with these prison programs because the second offense rate remains quite high. Nearly 40% of these inmates come right back to the prisons again.

However, one particular prison in America introduced a special program.

Once enacted, the crime rate suddenly decreased. At this prison for 15 years, no one came back to the prison again. The program was introduced to Japan too.

The program ordered a prisoner to take care of a dog.

Prisoners had to live together with the dog, even eating and sleeping together.

Many people who had murdered didn't have a lot of experience taking care of other people, let alone animals. Since they came from such unfortunate environments they were selfish and thought only about themselves.

In the program, inmates cared for the dogs for a total of three months.

The dogs had been previously abandoned or abused. These animals were close to being put to sleep. After three months, if the dog was well behaved, it was brought to a shelter where people could adopt them.

By building a caring relationship with the dogs, the prisoners rediscovered what kindness was.

One prisoner said,

"When I was in jail, the dog looked at me sadly. The dog’s eye reminded me of the time when my brother looked at me in the old days. I am here because I almost killed somebody. I used drugs and I was violent. However, I don't want to go back to that life."

Another inmate said,

"I am self-centered and I didn’t care about others. However, when I took care of the dog, I realized that they also have the same feelings as people. Wanting to take care of others is important."

After the three months, the dogs and prisoners had to be separated.

The dogs were then brought to their new home.

One prisoner even cried because of the sad departure.

"Actually, I want to take care of the dog more, but if the dog is happy then I am OK. If the dog was not here, he might have been put down. I hope he will be happy."

The prisoners were wishing happiness for the dogs they cared for. Their eyes took on a brilliant shine, and their faces no longer harbored vicious feelings.

So, here is a question. Did the prisoners help the dogs? Or did the dogs help the prisoners?

The answer is both.

This is known as Jiri Rita: "by helping others, I help myself."

By making others happy, I make myself happy.

Even though we humans are weak, having the mind of kindness toward those in need can make us stronger.

It is difficult to change myself for my own profit. But it is possible to change myself for others.

The mind of giving is the source to the power of living.