

Prison-Ashram Project

September 1979

Newsletter

Dear Friends,

For some reason, 1979 seems to be a very heavy year for suffering. If this has been the case for you, please don't feel alone. In prison or out, as long as we have attachments like fear, lust, anger, jealousy, greed, pride, etc., we'll be feeling the heat of God's fire -- the fire which hurts as it burns, but eventually burns out all the ego which creates our pain. I'd like to share my favorite story with you. It's a story about suffering, but also about the illusion, or "maya" which our suffering truly is. I hope you enjoy it.

Much Love to you, ----- Sita

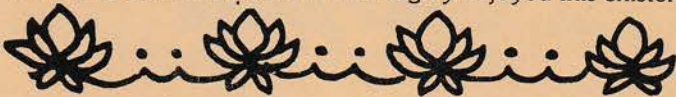
THE INDIAN LIFE

-- condensed from a story by Hermann Hesse

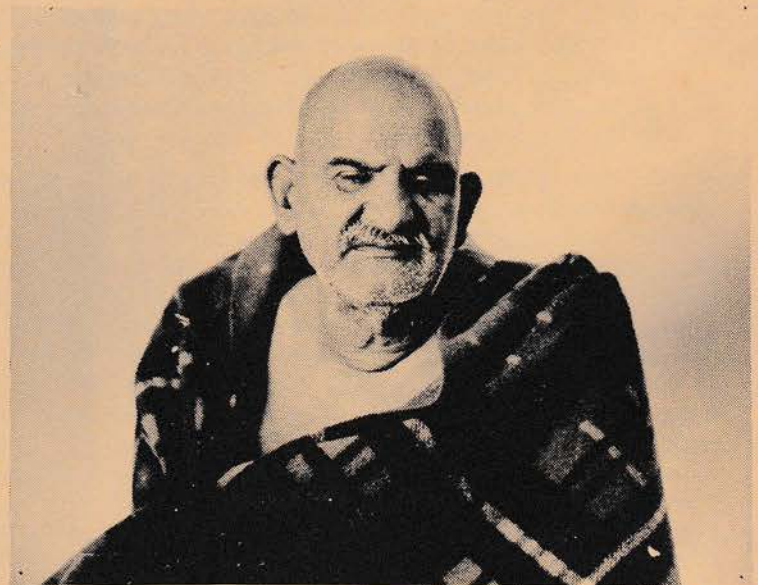
A long time ago in India lived a young boy named Dasa. Dasa's mother died when he was quite young, and his father, the Rajah, married a beautiful but ambitious woman who bore him a son. Dasa's stepmother, wishing to establish her own son Nala as heir to the throne, was determined to somehow do away with Dasa. The high priest Vasudeva could see her intentions, and kept a watchful eye over him.

One day one of the herdsman, who was delivering a cartload of butter to the palace, announced that there were signs of an approaching drought, and advised the Rajah to allow his cattle to be driven toward the mountains where there was always water. Vasudeva saw this as an opportunity to protect Dasa forever, and arranged with the herdsman for Dasa to join his wandering family of cowherds. Dasa was soon delighted with his new companions and grew up as one of them. He helped tend and drive the herd, learned how to milk, played with the calves, lay under the trees, and perpetually bore the stains of cow-dung upon his feet. He thoroughly enjoyed this existence,

even raising his eyes, could kill and bring one back to life. Yet he sat in perfect peace, and Dasa noticed with awe and astonishment that the man was totally unaware of the patches of sunlight on his body, or the brown wood bees that settled on his face, smelling his skin, crawling over his cheek only to rise and fly away again, or of the bird song and monkey chatter from the surrounding forest. All this, everything beautiful or ugly, loveable or frightening, seemed to have no connection with the holy man. Rain could not chill him, fire could not burn him; the whole world around him had become superficial and meaningless, no more than a breath of wind or the ripple of a wave. The Yogi had sunk deep below the surface of the world, into the mystery of all things; he had broken through to the essential, the unchanging.



One day when the herd had moved on to other pastures, Dasa went into the forest to look for honey. The woods were lovely, wild and mysterious; and Dasa soon forgot his quest for honey as he noticed a path leading through a thicket of high ferns. Noiselessly and cautiously he set out to explore it, and discovered beneath the branches of a Banyan tree a little tent-shaped hut built of woven ferns. On the ground nearby a man was sitting motionless and erect. His hands lay idle between his crossed legs, and beneath his white hair and broad forehead a pair of eyes, calm and unflinching, looked down at the ground. They were wide open but their gaze was turned inwards. Dasa realized that this was a holy man, a Yogi. The dignity and greatness of his figure, the light from within which lit up his face, the concentration of his features sent forth waves and rays of accumulated spiritual strength. His calm but concentrated will power wove around him such a magic orbit that one began to feel that this man, by a simple wish or thought and without



In this wondrous fashion, Dasa stood at the edge of the fern thicket, deeply moved in his spirit. He could not have said afterwards whether he had remained two or three hours or whether he had been days near the hut. When he returned to his camp, the herdsman fell silent when he noticed the look in the boy's eyes. "Have you seen a God or perhaps met a demon?" he asked after awhile. Dasa told him all about the holy man and said, "I must go back this evening and take him a gift." "Yes, do that by all means!" said the cowherd. "Take him some milk and sweet butter -- one must always respect holy men and bring them gifts." "But how shall I address him?" "There is no need to address him, Dasa. Simply bend down before him and place the gifts at his feet. No more is necessary."

Every evening for as long as the herd was in the neighborhood, Dasa brought offerings to the Yogi and often daydreamed of himself as a hermit and yoga adept.



As is the way with boys, however, within a few years after leaving that place Dasa's memory of the old man began to fade. One day one of the herdsman brought the news that a mighty feast was about to take place; the Rajah had named the day when his son, Nala would succeed him on the throne. Dasa's tribe of herdsman took part in this feast with great gusto.

Dasa was astonished at the size and beauty of the town, and especially the women, who were comely and saucy and exciting. On his return from this feast, Dasa had become a man. His herd came in due course to another neighborhood, and here Dasa saw a maiden named Pravati and was seized with an all-consuming love for her. He became so preoccupied with her that he left his herd, married her, and settled down to the farmer's life of her family -- administering his father-in-law's millet and rice fields and helping in the mill and with woodcutting. He surrendered himself completely to Pravati and found his greatest happiness in her arms.

More than a year after his marriage, messengers on horseback arrived to announce that the young Rajah was coming on a visit to hunt in this area. Dasa did not trouble himself in the least about all this, but continued to work in the fields, avoiding the huntsmen. One day, however, upon returning to his hut he found that his wife was not there, although he had strictly forbidden her to go out. He searched the gardens and fields, and for two whole days wandered about, praying and calling her name. Eventually the youngest of his brothers-in-law divulged to him that Pravati was with the Rajah, and that she was living in his tent. Dasa now haunted Nala's camp day and night carrying in his hand the sling he had used as a herdsman. When Nala appeared in his doorway, Dasa slipped lightly through the trees, prepared a large stone in his sling, and hurled it straight between the young Rajah's eyes in a moment of blinding anger and bitterness. Nala fell lifeless to the ground, and Dasa fled to the forests to begin his life as a fugitive.

One day his travels led him through a grassy district which seemed to reassure him and comfort him, as if he were returning to a home left long in the past. Making his way through a fern jungle, he reached a giant Banyan tree and a little hut, before which sat the motionless Yogi to whom he had once brought gifts. Dasa stood as though he had just been awakened from a long sleep. He found everything just as it had once been. Time had not moved here; there had been no conflict or murder here. He remained with the old man, renewed his bed of leaves, provided food daily for both of them, repaired the Yogi's hut, and began to build a second one for himself. The old man seemed to tolerate him, but Dasa couldn't even be sure that he was aware of his presence or not.

Thus Dasa lived with the silent one as a servant in the presence of a great man. He gave no thought to the future, and had begun to imitate more and more often the behavior of the venerable hermit, to sit motionless with his legs crossed, to peer into an invisible world and to become insensible to all that was happening around him. He experienced moments of a greater, purer, sunnier life, elevated and impelled by the permanent, the timeless and the infinite. But these moments could not be enough, and he decided that he must somehow ask the master to be his teacher, to instruct him in exercises and secret arts and perhaps make of him a yogi. Yet how could he achieve this? The old man seemed to be beyond days and hours, forest and hut, and also beyond speech.



One day, however, Dasa plucked up enough courage to break the silence. He had once more fallen prey to dreams which recurred night after night, alternately sweet and nightmarish, either of his wife Pravati or of the terror of the fugitive's life, and he was making no progress by day in his exercises or meditations. As the Yogi arose to go over to his hut, Dasa confronted him at last. "Oh, most venerable one," he said, "forgive me for intruding upon your peace. I myself am in search of peace and should like to be like you. I am still young and yet I have already suffered much, and destiny has played many a hideous trick on me." He then told the Yogi of his princely birth and banishment, his beautiful young wife, her faithlessness, and the Rajah's murder and his life as a fugitive. He ended, "Oh venerable one, I am a madman, I am a murderer, and perhaps they will catch me and tear me limb from limb. I cannot endure this life a moment longer; I want to be free of it."

The Yogi had listened in silence to Dasa's outburst with downcast eyes. He now raised them slowly to the level of Dasa's face and gave him a piercing, almost unbearably direct and penetrating look. As he watched Dasa's face, the Yogi's mouth suddenly changed to a smile until finally, shaking his head with a noiseless laugh he cried, "Maya! Maya!"



Confused and ashamed, Dasa remained standing there as the old man calmly went off for his usual walk. What manner of laugh had it been? Was it benevolent or scornful, consoling or condemning, godlike or infernal? Dasa could not solve the riddle. He thought far into the night of this laughter which his life, happiness, and misery seemed to have inspired in the old man; and he reflected long and hard upon the word that the old man had called out so clearly and serenely -- "Maya!" What did it signify?

He had already known and half-sensed the significance of the word, and the manner in which the old man had uttered it had half betrayed its meaning. Maya -- illusion. He thought of his life, his youth, his sweet happiness and his bitter sorrow. It had all been Maya. Dasa's life and the lives of all men were, in the eyes of this old Yogi, all illusion --- something like a childish spectacle, a theater, a soap bubble, at which one could laugh with a certain delight and at the same time despise, but which under no circumstances could one take seriously. Yet it was all still quite serious and solid to Dasa, and now his hopes of really learning Yoga or resembling the old man grew extremely small. He resolved to leave in the morning.

At the hour when the hermit arose from his sitting the next day, Dasa placed himself in his path and said, "Master; I would now go on my way. I do not wish to disturb your peace any longer. But, most venerable one, grant me one last favor. When I told you of my life you laughed and called out 'Maya!'. I implore you -- let me know a little more about this Maya." The Yogi held out his empty water bowl and bade Dasa to bring fresh water from the spring. Dasa obeyed, and a feeling of sorrow nagged at his heart because he was now taking this tiny little footpath for the last time. He knelt down at the water's edge

and took a sip of water, rose carefully with the bowl in his hand so as not to spill any, and was about to make his way back to the hut when a sound that at once delighted and terrified him reached his ear -- a voice which he had heard so often in his past and his dreams and even his daydreams. It was the voice of Pravati, his wife, and she called him enticingly. He let fall the bowl of water, and ran to meet her. She was more beautiful than ever, and he felt that everything he had ever possessed had returned to him once more. Dasa was soon far from this dark forest and the holy man in all his thoughts. Her story was astonishing. It was not only that Pravati was his own again, but that Dasa was being sought, not as a murderer, but as rightful heir to the throne. An old priest had disclosed the whole story about Dasa's upbringing, and Dasa was now being eagerly sought to be crowned Rajah in place of his wicked brother Nala, whom he had killed.

Thus Dasa was conducted into his kingdom where there were greetings, blessings, and speeches of welcome. He received instruction each day in the necessary facts, policies, positions and laws for governing his land and subjects. He learned of his neighboring friends and foes and the claims of his future heirs. Chief among his foes was his stepmother -- Nala's mother, who was the cause of his original banishment. She now had fled to the palace of a neighboring prince, Govinda, and would continue to plot against Dasa and his kingdom.

After many years, Pravati bore Dasa a son, and now all that he possessed in the way of land, power, houses, cattle and horses, assumed a double importance in his eyes. His son became the high point of his destiny, a gentle lovely child, a true prince.

How much he loved him, Dasa most realized when he had to leave him for periods of time, such as riding with his warriors to the frontier lands to counter Govinda's frequent attacks on the kingdom. Govinda's bands would make raids on small villages and carry off cattle and even men who would then be imprisoned as slaves. Dasa had no choice but to counter these attacks and even make similar reprisal raids in Govinda's territories, so that Dasa's subjects could see that their Rajah was fulfilling his responsibilities to them. Dasa could see that full-scale war was probably inevitable, and the happiness and joy which he derived from his gardens, his books and kingship gradually became things of the past. All that remained was his intense love for his son, which seemed to increase as his other joys faded away. Even Pravati no longer consumed him; looking back he could clearly see that she had gone to Nala of her free will, and may never again have been interested in finding Dasa had he not become a king.

At last the fateful day approached and had to be endured. The enemy struck. Govinda launched his main forces against the capital itself, and especially Dasa's palace. The battle raged in every street, and as night fell Dasa collapsed exhausted and with several wounds. When he awoke, he found himself a prisoner in his own palace. He was put in chains and brought before Govinda, who greeted him with scorn and led him into a nearby room. On a carpet sat his wife Pravati surrounded by armed guards, and in her lap lay her son. The tender figure lay like a broken blossom --- dead, gray of face, and his garments saturated with blood. Dasa knelt down, and his face sank onto the dead child's head. He smelt the odor of blood and death mingled with the scent of flower oil on the child's hair. Pravati

looked down on both of them, staring with expressionless eyes and sitting motionless with a face of stone. Dasa was led away. Dasa was laid upon a wagon and imprisoned in Govinda's city. He only wanted to die. How long would it last -- how long? He yearned for death as his parched throat yearned for water -- only with death would the torture in his heart have an end, only then would the picture of the mother with her dead son fade -- but in the midst of his torment, weakness and weariness took compassion upon him and he sank to the floor and fell asleep.



When he came out of this short sleep he tried to rub his eyes in his drowsiness but was unable to do so; his hands were busied with something held firmly between them, and when at last he had the courage to open his eyes there were no longer prison walls around him but a greenish light which shone bright and strong upon the moss and foliage. He blinked his eyes for a long time as a trembling shudder of terror ran through his spine. He was standing in a forest and in his two hands he was holding a bowl filled with water. Somewhere behind him he knew stood the hut in the fern thicket and the Yogi who had sent him to fetch water -- the Yogi whom he had begged to teach him something of Maya. He had neither lost a battle nor a son, was neither a prince nor a father, but the Yogi had merely granted his wish and taught him Maya or illusion. Palace, garden, library, princely cares and paternal love, war and jealousy, love and distrust for Pravati, all were nothing -- no, not quite nothing, but simply Maya!

Dasa stood there completely bewildered. Tears streamed down his cheeks. Oh, how rapidly, gruesomely and profoundly had he been taught Maya! All that he had thought had happened over many years had really taken place in the twinkling of an eye. Everything had been a dream, even that which seemed so real. And was not all the rest -- his birth as a prince, his cowherd's life, his marriage, the murder of Nala and his finding the Yogi, even his experience of the spring, the waterbowl, and these very thoughts -- also woven of the same stuff? Was it not dream, illusion, Maya? And what he was about to live in the future, see with his eyes and feel with his hands until death should come -- was that anything else, anything other than Maya? It was a game and a delusion, foam and dream, it was Maya, the whole beautiful, dreadful, enchanting and desperate kaleidoscope of life with its burning joys and sorrows.

What should he do? Fill the bowl again and take it back to the Yogi? Submit forever to his laughter for all that he had suffered in his dream? It was not an alluring thought. He threw the bowl down on the moss, and sat down and began to reflect earnestly. He had had enough of this dreaming, of this patchwork quilt of events, joys and sufferings, which strangled the heart and made the blood stand still simply to become Maya and leave one behind like a fool. He desired no more wife and child, neither throne nor victory nor revenge, neither hap-

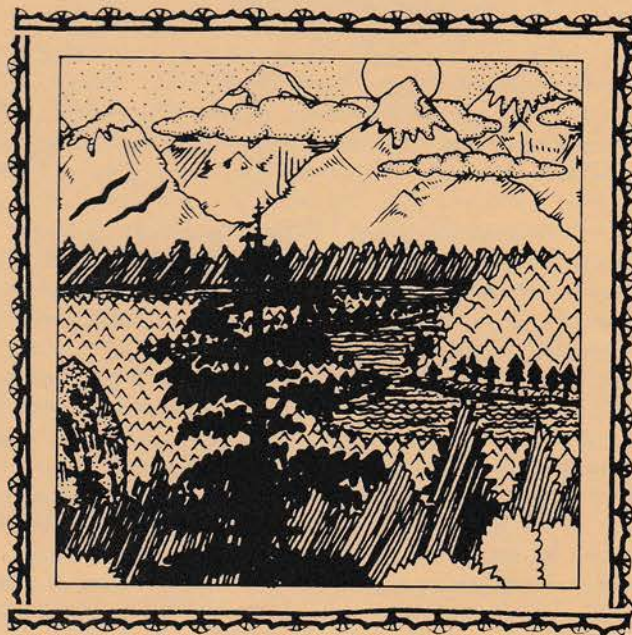
piness nor cleverness, neither might nor virtue: he desired nothing but peace, nothing except an end, wanted nothing except to bring this eternally revolving wheel, this endless picture show, to a close. Yet death, he could see, was also a part of Maya. A pause of unconsciousness, a slumber, and immediately to be awake once more, to let the stream of life into one's heart again, and the beautiful, terrifying flood of pictures would ensue until the next consciousness, until the next death. Ah, there was no extinction, no end!!

If there really were no rest in this maddening game, then he might just as well refill the water bowl and take it to the old man. It was infinitely better to obey and serve than to sit merely thinking out ways of suicide.

When he arrived at the hut the master received him with a remarkable look, a half pitying and half merry look such as an older boy might give to a junior upon his returning from a rather tiring and somewhat shameful adventure, some test of courage that had been allotted him. Dasa had not been gone longer than a quarter of an hour, but had nevertheless come out of a prison cell, lost a wife, a son and a kingdom, had taken a human life and had had a glimpse of the spinning wheel of births and deaths. This young man had presumably once in an earlier life been awakened and had breathed a mouthful of reality, otherwise he would not even have come to this spot and stayed for so long. Now he seemed to be ripe for the entrance to the long way. It would take many years to teach him the correct procedure and breathing.

The Yogi by his look had indicated that he had accepted the youth as his pupil. His look banished the useless thoughts from Dasa's head, and received him in discipline and service. Nothing more can be told of Dasa's life, for from then onwards it took a path beyond pictures and stories. He never left the forest again.

the end





Namaste --

Well, here we are in California. The address on this newsletter may or may not be permanent, so if you'd like to keep writing to us at our Colorado address, that's fine; our mail is forwarded from there every day. By the time of our next newsletter we should be settled in enough to officially change the Prison-Ashram Project address.

We've decided that we probably have enough funds to send you these newsletters every six-to-eight weeks for the next year or so; we'll be selecting brief stories or teachings (such as THE INDIAN LIFE, on page 1) for each one, and then including any news or interesting letters we may have to share. This decision was made primarily because we know you enjoy receiving things more often than once or twice a year, and also because INSIDE-OUT 3 is now long overdue. The full book just hasn't come together yet, and we feel that much of the material in these newsletters will eventually help to bring the book about. INSIDE-OUT 3 will probably be at least another year before it's in your hands.

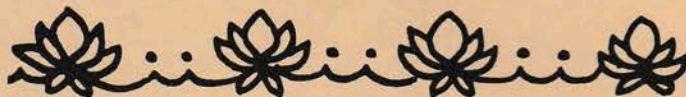
WINTER TOUR

I'll be making a few-week workshop & lecture tour during the month of January, 1980, along the east coast. With Sita accompanying me, we'll be starting out the month around Miami, Fla., and winding up in the Boston area by the 25th. If you'd like to help us by arranging a prison workshop or public lecture or both in your area, please contact us as soon as possible.

Prison Workshops -- These are usually four hours, and are free of charge. We spend about half the time talking and discussing, and the other half in various meditation & breathing practices or other awareness exercises. If you try to arrange for a workshop, please check with the proper authorities before you write to us. It's simplest to ask permission for a free meditation workshop, and to tell them that I'm a respectable prison consultant who has worked with the Bureau of Prisons and many state agencies for years.

Public Lectures & Seminars -- These are usually a few hours (up to four) and cover a broad range of subjects from meditation to prison reform. Lectures are usually held at colleges, churches, or various societies, and it's the income from these which enables us to go to the prisons free of charge. So, if you'd like to simultaneously share this project with your community and help us finance our prison tour, you might try approaching the local institutions which sponsor lecturers. We can help with descriptive flyers and background materials. Especially for people who have never been in prison, these public gatherings can be very powerful and valuable opportunities to exchange stories, opinions, fears and insights about the whole spectrum of crime and punishment.

God does not send us despair in order to kill us, but to awaken new life in us. -- from MAGISTER LUDI by Hermann Hess



You get wisdom from suffering. You are alone with God when you are sick, in the cremation ground, or the hospital. You call on God when you suffer. I love to suffer; it brings me so close to God.

Neem Karoli Baba (Maharaj-ji)

RESOURCES TO BE LISTED

In our next newsletter, which should be in your hands sometime in November, we'd like to have a listing of up-to-date resources. If you or your organization has some sort of offering to make to prisoners or ex-prisoners, please write us immediately. A very brief (two or three sentences) description of what you offer is all we need.

WE GOOFED

In our last newsletter I mentioned that the pen-pal project was seeking another group to take it over. This is still true, but the \$300/month budget I described should actually be only \$300 in a year. For full information on the pen-pal project write to Jon Seskevich, Box 1011, Leominster, Ma. 01453.

On behalf of us all, I wish you Light for your journey.

Love,
Bo Logoff



SPIRITUAL MATERIAL

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*A true seeker, one who really wishes to find the Truth, can accept no doctrine, but
must seek the hard way -- through experience and suffering.*

--from SIDDHARTHA by Hermann Hesse



The Prison-Ashram Project of the Hanuman Foundation has served, since 1973, as a source of materials and advice for prisoners throughout the world who are interested in meditation and general spiritual guidance. The Project is supported solely by private donations, which are fully tax-deductible under the IRS code. Contributions, trusts, grants and the like are always needed and welcomed.