

Prison-Ashram Project

Thanksgiving/Christmas 1979

Newsletter

Jesus and Freedom

"I bow to God, who lives in this world within us;
whoever calls Him by any name, by that name does He come."
—from the MAHABHARATA, as told by William Buck

This coming Christmas will be the seventh Christmas I've spent as director of the Prison-Ashram Project. And each year at this time I think about Jesus' particular compassion for the sick, the lame, the imprisoned; how he told us quite clearly that as we helped or visited any of these, we were helping or visiting Him. Surely the most understood and accepted part of Jesus' teachings is along the lines of relieving pain, of helping those who are suffering. Of course, the subtler part of that same teaching—the underlying punch line—is that service helps us even more than it helps the people we're serving. Most of the time our service begins from a place of pity mixed with a very subtle self-righteousness, e.g. "I, being such a good person, am going to help those poor wretched prisoners." But then the serving itself moves us through those places if we're *willing* to be put through a lot of changes. We slowly see that illness, pain or prison themselves don't automatically make people poor

and wretched; that in fact, our "freedom"—those of us who are on the outside and think of ourselves as the "helping professionals"—doesn't automatically mean that *we're* not the ones who are poor and wretched as often as anyone else. Because mobility or imprisonment, health or illness, are only the *physical* conditions of our lives; and poorness or wretchedness are *Spiritual* conditions.

This has been and still is the thrust of the Prison-Ashram Project: We can allow our physical and spiritual selves to be tied together in bondage, or we can accept whatever physical limitations we've been given without limiting or surrendering our Spirit.

As much as Jesus stands for service and relieving suffering, he also stands for this sort of freedom. His dignity and grace throughout the heckling, arrests, imprisonment and crucifixion are a very important teaching about this separation between physical and spiritual conditions. Jesus did easy time; He knew that there was nothing they could really do to Him—all they could do was fool around with His physical body, and how big a thing is that to a being who is free?

And Jesus told us repeatedly to be like Him; that we really could be the same as He is. When we finally stop judging others, stop being so caught in the world of bodies and riches and illusions, stop wasting our time either in false pride or self-pity or bitterness; when we finally clear and quiet our minds enough to see and hear beyond this brief world of shadows and promises; then all about us we see Light, and looking into anyone's eyes we see God.

I think that it took several years of working in the Prison-Ashram Project for me to begin seeing that I'm not especially closer to this state of freedom than is anyone in prison. Just because I teach it and talk about it, that's no guarantee of *living* within it. And every now and then, in one of my prison workshops, I've looked into an inmate's eyes and seen a certain depth and wisdom that can only come from a Christ-like acceptance of God's will; someone who is beyond even the subtlest self-pity and bitterness games, spiritual pride, jive sarcasm; and it reminds me once again of the sort of freedom this project is really about for all of us. A being like that is not imprisoned any more than Christ was killed.

My greatest hopes and best wishes for this Christmas season are that we *all* open to the Spirit of Christ, opening past the places we're still stuck, past the seeming tragedies of our lives, past the petty differences we've created between forms of God and forms of worship; that we open to the loving intention and gentle humor of God in helping us to become free.



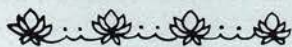
OUR OWN THANKSGIVING

This being our Thanksgiving-Christmas newsletter, we thought it might be fitting to say thanks publicly to a few of the people who help us to keep things going in one way or another. A long-belated thanks to Rick Morgan, in Durham, North Carolina, and Gururam Kaur Marini, in Newport News, Virginia, for their artwork and graphics over the past six years. Rick & Gururam have rarely been paid, yet have supplied most of the illustrations throughout all our literature and pamphlets.

More thanks; to Jon and Kathy and Barbara, in Ashby, Massachusetts, who have given the pen-pal project life for the past three years, and to Diane in Rhode Island and Paris in California who have handled the book projects. These folks have all done beautiful work with little or no funding. They, as well as Rick & Gururam, are shining examples of the true spirit of volunteerism—straight from the Heart.

And for the first time ever, we'd like to publicly say thanks to some of the people whose donations have kept us going. The Prison-Ashram Project has always been in a particularly tricky position for a charity: the people who benefit most from our work have no money because they're in prison; and most of the individuals or foundations that generously support health-care or hunger-based or mental health programs, don't feel the same way toward prison inmates. So, we've depended on those foundations and individuals who feel attuned to this specific work, and we'd like to let you know about them. The combined donations of the people listed below have accounted for at least one-third of our annual \$50,000 budget for several years now. The only omission in the list of large donors is one foundation which wishes to remain anonymous.

Thanks to Ram Dass, whose earnings actually started and sustained the whole project for the first few years. Our thanks to Terry Hunt, Margaret Austin, and Mary Francis Chadderdon, whose large annual gifts have assured us that there will continue to be a project at all; and to Sheelu Webber, Debby McIlwaine, the Donnelly's, the Candlelight Foundation, Tom Mitchell, the Fellowship of Inner Light, Laura Huxley, the San Francisco Zen Center, Universal Light Church, and the Maui Zendo, whose single or occasional large grants have paid for many of our publications. And a very warm hug of thanks to the loyal group of monthly or quarterly donors whose devotion and consistency over the years has touched our hearts. (In fact, your example inspired me a few years ago to begin tithing to a few charities whose causes I enjoy supporting as you obviously enjoy supporting this one.) This list of "regulars" includes Lewis Hildreth, the Merrick's, Thomas Jarboe, Barbara Berk, David Sanford, Larry Conrads, the Klingbeil's, Muriel Alperin, Anne Amerson, Mildred Moore, Louise Hay, Francis Andrew, Sandra Graber, Louis Salice and Patricia Weaver. Thanks to you all; we deeply appreciate this fascinating dance we do together.



RESOURCES NEXT TIME (again)

We still haven't quite finished updating all the other free offerings and resources we'd like to share with you, so next time.... Also, our Prison Library Project and Inside-out Postal Satsang (pen-pal project) are both in the midst of changing hands. By our next newsletter we'll be able to give you the new people and addresses for both of those. In the meantime it might be helpful for the change-over if you don't write to their old addresses anymore.



*"Love Everyone
unconditionally
including Yourself."*

WINTER / LECTURE WORKSHOP TOUR

As we mentioned last time, I'll be giving public lectures and prison workshops along the east coast during the month of January. As no one will be here in the office at all, please try not to write to us during that time. We won't be able to even see any of our mail until the beginning of February.

Although some of the exact times and dates aren't yet available, listed below is a rough schedule for the tour. For more information, contact either the people listed locally, or give us a call before Christmas day (we'll be leaving on the 26th of Dec.).

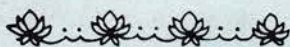
- Jan. 1st-6th—Miami, Fla., a public lecture and a seminar. Contact Stan Goudreau, (800) 327-8776.
- Jan. 8th-9th—Prison workshops at Fla. State Prisons in Lowell, Raiford, Cross City, and Gainesville, plus a possible public lecture in Gainesville. Contact Mickey Singer or Radha Kautz, (904) 462-2148.
- Jan. 10th—Prison workshop at federal prison in Tallahassee, public lecture in the evening at Fla. State Univ. Contact us directly (714) 489-5177.
- Jan. 12th—Public meditation retreat in Durham, North Carolina. Contact Rick or Cyndi Morgan, (919) 823-1056.
- Jan. 14th-16th—Several prison workshops and public lectures in the Baltimore area. Contact Kartar Singh Khalsa (301) 358-7106.
- Jan. 18th—Public lecture in Maywood, N.J. Contact Dianne Herald (201) 845-0741.
- Jan. 19th-25th—Several prison workshops and public lectures in the Phila./N.J./N.Y. areas. Contact us directly (714) 489-5177.
- Jan. 26th-30th—Several prison workshops and public lectures in the Boston area, including Amherst University on the 30th. Contact Jon Seskevich (617) 534-0808 or Maurice Soulis (617) 668-0686.

*"Blessed is the man who has suffered—He has found the Life."
—Jesus, the Gospel according to Thomas*

HOW TO HELP

We get many letters from people asking how they can best help the work of this project. Because we're not evangelistic or trying to push one particular idea, our answer is not so simple as "go spread the word" or anything like that. Really, the project itself only exists to help; we help people in prison to work on themselves, and we help a wide variety of programs to get started or stay in operation. So, how to help in terms of doing prison work yourself is entirely up to you; you get something going around where you live, and we'll be happy to provide our materials and advice as you can best use us. How to help in terms of supporting what we do is also simple: send us lots of money. Our budget is around \$50,000 a year now and every penny comes from plain folks who like what we do. We receive no government funds whatsoever, and we don't plan to apply for any—the red tape and the controls are more burdensome than we wish to deal with.

Other ways to get involved with this sort of work in some way are many: You can become a pen-pal through the Inside-Out Postal Satsang (their new address will be in our next newsletter); you can donate your used spiritual books to one of our two book projects (addresses in our next newsletter also). You can begin investigating programs or conditions in the prisons around where you live; you might find that there is a local group doing something already that attracts you; you might want to simply become a local instigator for more connections between your local prisons and the community at large; help to arrange for entertainment or classes in creative writing or arts and crafts; you might want to coordinate some sort of "consciousness-raising" gathering about your prison systems—just get people talking, arguing, sharing—*anything at all* rather than ignoring. You can also combine a consciousness-raising event with a fundraiser for us or some other prison-related project. The ideas are truly limitless, because basically *everything* needs to be improved upon in our criminal justice system. And, if you have ideas I haven't mentioned here, drop me a line so that I can share them with others.



"Love your brother as your soul, guard him as the pupil of your eye."

— Jesus, the Gospel according to Thomas

Changes, changes...

Each time we send out a newsletter or other mailing, it costs us about \$200 or so to pay for the address corrections for people who have moved. It would help a lot if you could let us know yourself if your address is going to change or has changed, or if you simply no longer wish to be on our mailing list.

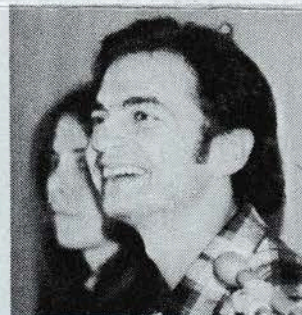
Dear Prison-Ashram People,

I wanted to thank you for your book "Inside Out". The only way to say how it has helped me is that it literally saved my life. I'm in the Johnson County Jail in Olathe, Kansas on drug charges. In the 12 weeks I've been locked up I've attempted suicide twice. At times the depression and feeling of hopelessness got so great I felt that the only way I could get out was by suicide. Two weeks ago my depression reached its peak and I was ready for another attempt. Before going to bed I prayed, for the first time in years, for release. When I woke I found your book on my bed. A federal prisoner, with whom I'd never exchanged a word, left it for me when he was transferred. I started reading the book and the effect was instantaneous. Tears came to my eyes and I felt a most unusual shiver, happiness. I began meditating daily and from the first my thinking cleared. The terrifying confusion left me.

That was a month ago but seems as if it was a lifetime ago. I am happier now than I ever was on the streets. I am freer now than ever before. I can't put it into words.

Thanks again!

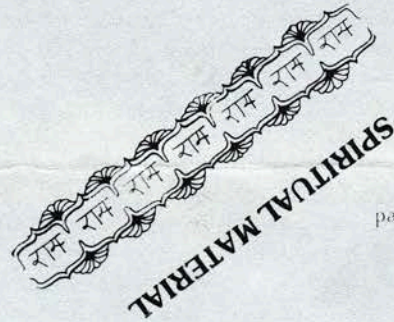
Praise Maharaji
Keith Leggett
Johnson County Jail
Olathe, Kansas 66061



As always, Sita and I remain mind-blown at the grace and beauty of being involved with all of you. Our struggle through this stormy life seems to be aimed toward being just a little kinder. We both wish you the very best Christmas and a true New Year in that difficult journey. Yours in love,

Bo & Sita Lopez

"Show me the stone which the builders have rejected; it is the cornerstone."
— Jesus, the Gospel according to Thomas



Address Correction Requested

A Project of the
Hanuman Foundation

PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT
2459 Fawn Creek Lane
Escondido, Ca. 92026

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Escondido, Ca.
Permit No. 218



"Let him who seeks not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds he will be troubled, and when he has been troubled he will marvel and he will reign over the Totality and find Repose."

— Jesus, the Gospel according to Thomas

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-deductable under the IRS code. Contributions, trusts, grants and the like are always needed and welcomed.