

PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT

August 1980

Newsletter

A STORY

"The bold and handsome young Samurai warrior stood respectfully before the aged Zen master and asked, 'Master, teach me about Heaven and Hell.' The master snapped his head up in disgust and said, 'Teach YOU about Heaven and Hell!?' Why, I doubt that you could even learn to keep your own sword from rusting! You ignorant fool! How dare you suppose that you could understand anything I might have to say!" The old man went on and on, becoming even more insulting, while the young swordsman's surprise turned first to confusion and then to hot anger, rising by the minute. Master or no master, who can insult a Samurai and live? At last, with teeth clenched and blood nearly boiling in fury, the warrior blindly drew his sword and prepared to end the old man's sharp tongue and life all in a moment. The master looked straight into his eyes and said gently, "That's Hell." At the peak of his rage, the Samurai realized that this was indeed his teaching; the Master had hounded him into a living Hell, driven by uncontrolled anger and ego. The young man, profoundly humbled, sheathed his sword and bowed low to this great spiritual teacher. Looking up into the wise man's aged, beaming face, he felt more love and compassion than he had ever felt in his life, at which point the master raised his index finger as would a schoolteacher, and said, "And that's Heaven."



Dear Friends:

Well, here we are back home in North Carolina where all of this began. Please be sure to note our new (and final!) address. If you have written to us in the past few months and not received any reply, please write again; the postal service has goofed up on our mail forwarding a few times, and it's possible that many letters have been lost. Please don't ever think that we're just ignoring you.

It's mind-blowing to us to share these newsletters with you, and to watch ideas, programs and relationships grow from seed—such as the Prison/Community Alliances idea explained in this newsletter. This same newsletter you're reading is being read by people in and out of prison in over *thirty countries*

throughout the world. And we usually haven't the slightest idea how word has travelled when we receive a letter in French from an African nation, or one from a prisoner in New Zealand; however it all goes, our family grows and changes constantly, and it's mystifying to watch.

So, once again, hope you enjoy the newsletter and thank you for being a part—an intimate part—of our spiritual journey.

Bo + Sita Hogg

August 1980



UPCOMING WORKSHOPS, LECTURES, TOURS

We're beginning to make plans for a Fall, 1980 tour through the Southeast, and a Spring 1981 tour in the Northeast. If you'd like to arrange or attend either a prison workshop, public lecture, or training seminar in your own community, please get in touch with us soon. As usual, most of the prison workshops are done free of charge and our trip expenses must be covered by the public talks. Drop us a quick note and we'll provide more information and help advise you in setting something up.

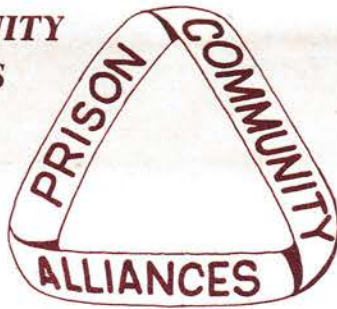
On Wednesday, Sept. 17th, from 3-6 PM, I'll be giving a workshop entitled "Meditation & Yoga: A Non-Traditional Approach to Substance Abuse," at the Washington Hilton in

Washington, D.C. The workshop will be part of the National Drug & Alcohol Coalition conference; write for more details.

We're considering sponsoring a full weekend intensive seminar for people who work or plan to work in corrections. The seminar would be held here in North Carolina, we would hopefully be able to foot the bill for all expenses except your travel arrangements. If you would be interested in attending such a seminar, which would include training in prison/community work as well as prison-ashram work, please let us know. We'll develop the dates and details based on the amount of interest shown.

PRISON/COMMUNITY ALLIANCES

"If not you,
who?
If not now,
when?"
— Hillel



The Prison-Ashram Project started with the idea of sharing meditation, yoga, and other spiritual disciplines with people in prison. Over the years we've naturally seen that there are many other parts of a prisoner's life which need a caring touch from someone outside; it has always pained us to be unable to provide *everything*. In that same period of time we've also seen many projects—most of them locally based—which accomplished great things that made differences in people's lives. It's finally dawned on us that if we but provide you with detailed descriptions of what we've seen and observed, *you* can run with the ball in your own local facilities far better than we ever could.

One characteristic that you may notice in reading these descriptions is this: Every one of these prison/community activities can be realized *without waiting for laws, buildings, or society to "change."* This is truly a form of "power to the people," yet not in the usual sense of battle and politics. It is true that prisons are horrible, that most of them need to be torn down, that most prisoners could be released to community corrections programs, that our society is terribly unjust to minorities and the poor in so many ways; all of that is true and the goals of anti-prison activists are noble; but still, several hundred thousand of our brothers and sisters are locked up today and it looks like they will remain so for quite a few tomorrows. So, while it's good that many people are struggling for the big change way down the road, we think it's equally important for some of us to do whatever we can, right now, to bring a caring spirit into the prisons. And of course, the two different approaches are not only both necessary, but also complementary. If we can succeed in getting more community residents into their local prisons and jails, corrections policies will be more open to public scrutiny, corruption and abuse will be more quickly exposed, and the big changes will come much faster.

The Programs

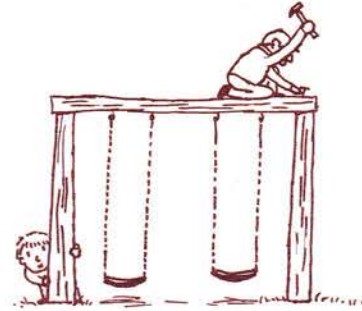
Following are brief descriptions of just *some* possibilities you may be able to suggest in your own community. If you drop us a line asking for more details on particular ones, we'll tell you all we know and also give you names and addresses of people to write to for more direct information.

- 1) Visitation & Sponsorship—The most common and respected form of community involvement (and therefore, probably the easiest to get permission for). Many prisoners have no family or friends who visit. A local "sponsor" who volunteers to enter into a weekly or monthly visiting relationship can literally help save a life, and learn a great deal in the process. The M-2 Program in California is widely respected and now has over 10,000 volunteer visitors statewide. A program in Utah channeled through the Mormon Church goes a step further than one-on-one visiting, and allows a whole family to develop ties with a prisoner; after a while, the prisoner is given furloughs to visit at the family's home. You could either start your own local project or simply join one already active in your area; we'll be happy to help either way.
- 2) Prisoners helping the handicapped—In Tennessee, Maryland, and Colorado, volunteer inmates are translating books into braille for the blind. These and other such humanitarian projects allow prisoners to make valuable contributions to society, rather than always being put in the role of inmate, client, patient, student, etc.



- 3) Prisoners in community service—In Ft. Worth, Texas, the local United Fund once coordinated a program by which prisoners went into the community as volunteers in a variety of areas, such as at the local YMCA. Even those prisoners who wouldn't be allowed to go into the community could do many useful projects, such as helping to build playground equipment for local parks or needy schools. Carol DeCosta, in Santa Fe,

N.M., is working on just such a project now. Many of my prison friends have remarked that one of the worst things about imprisonment is their inability to be of service to others; this sort of project benefits everyone all the way around.



- 4) Community residents in prison service—What the state provides to prisoners leaves much to be desired. But community folks can pitch in where the state leaves off in many ways. By spending some time on the phone, you may be able to come up with an informal roster of people who would volunteer time to teach a workshop or even a weekly class in any of a number of areas— theater, writing, crafts, art, communications skills, etc., etc. Or volunteer tutors in math, reading or writing on a one-to-one basis; or a local musician willing to help prisoners start a band; or meditation & yoga instructors. In Miami, Fla., prisoners even got a class on the stock market, offered by a local stockbroker who felt that many prisoners have the time and inclination to do well in that field. A lady in Oregon made her offering in the way of a portable bookmobile which she personally wheeled through the maximum lockup section of the local jail, so that prisoners who were prevented from visiting the library could still read. Her books were donated by local residents and organizations, and the project cost no money at all.

If you come up with a roster of possibilities, you might try working through the prison education department to coordinate your activities. You might even be able to circulate a monthly or quarterly list of "free university offerings" so that prisoners themselves could choose, and therefore determine, the courses or workshops to be offered each time.



- 5) Institutional Entertainment—A concert or show of some sort is one of the few positive activities which affects nearly everyone in a prison. The Bread & Roses project in San Francisco is one group which coordinates such shows, not only for prisons & jails, but also for old-age homes and hospitals. Bread & Roses works with a number of local entertainers, but also keeps eyes and ears open for all the big name show-biz people who pass through town. A great number of these stars are more than happy to do a free concert while they're in town. Sam Garrison, the warden of Central Prison in North Carolina succeeded in getting both Lionel Hampton and Dizzy Gillespie to the prison this year.

You might try to work with the recreation director of the prison and get approval for putting on one free show of some sort each month with local talent, and then occasional special shows when big stars are passing through.

- 6) Family Assistance—The Terrell House, in Tallahassee, offers free lodging and local transportation to families who come from out of town to visit prisoners. A similar group exists in Alderson, W. Va., near the Federal Women's Prison. This is a straightforward project that helps many people who would otherwise be unable to visit. Another family assistance project, this one in Denver, provides a very different form of service: As soon as a person is sentenced in court, a member of this group approaches the family and gives them a phone number (or numbers) to call for any sort of advice, information, legal assistance, counselling, referral to official agencies and so forth. Few of us realize the enormous burden on a family whose loved one has just been taken away; most families don't know when or where that person will be sent, or what they should do about welfare assistance, or what their visiting rights are, etc. Again, what our government fails to provide can be provided by volunteers.



7) Other community/prison alliances — A Program called *Gardens for All*, in Vermont, has helped prisoners in several states to plan and maintain beautiful vegetable gardens. Produce from the gardens not only provides healthful, cost-effective food for the prison, but in one program in Connecticut the garden also donates a great deal of produce to local nursing homes and individual seniors citizens. The prisoners, of course, find the whole thing deeply rewarding.

In Jamestown, Ca., local prisoners have begun producing meaningful plays which they share with the community. In Butner, N.C., federal inmates have held at least two public art shows at the prison, sharing their talents, selling their wares, and making good local connections with artists and patrons of the arts. In Vienna, Ill., a group of prisoners who have taken EMT training (Emergency Medical Technician) actually operate the local ambulance service for a three-county area, serving a great need which was unmet in that rural part of the state.

In many communities, prisoners counsel youth groups (without the dramatic scare-tactics of *Scared Straight*) both in and out of the prison. In Connecticut, prisoners run a radio show called *Cabbage Patch*, and read stories to youngsters. From these sorts of things to disaster relief, donating blood, prison/community panel discussions on crime & punishment, etc., the ideas are nearly limitless for productive ways of interaction between prisoners and community residents.



What We've Done

On May 1st, we committed \$5,000 and three months' time to do some research that would make us most effective in helping you to organize your own prison/community alliances. We hired Scott Gassman, who used to coordinate volunteer services for the Dept. of Corrections in the state of New York, as our research associate. For the past few months, Scott has been gathering information about programs, people, organizations, agencies and other resources. He is now in the process of writing funding proposals to enable him to

OTHER OFFERINGS & CHANGES

A new project, headed by Hope Welker, has begun in the Philadelphia area. Hope describes *Inner Freedom* as a "spiritually oriented program for those newly released from prison." It's strictly a local effort, so if you're in that area and just out of the joint (or if you might like to help Hope in some way), contact: Inner Freedom, Box 122, Swarthmore, Pa. 19081; (215) 328-9098.

Our west coast branch of the Prison Book Project is now over. All requests for specific books and magazines should now go only to the east coast branch: Prison Book Project, Box 746, Newport, R.I. 02840. Kathy Parker, who runs the project now, has been recovering from an illness but is just about all caught up now. So, in order to request or to donate used spiritual books, write directly to Kathy.

As mentioned in our last newsletter, we've received a donation of 9,000 copies of the most recent *SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY GUIDE* (#4). We'll automatically send a free copy to every prisoner on our mailing list. If you're a librarian or other staff person or volunteer, we'll be happy to send you as many copies as you request for prison use.

Our pen-pal affiliate, the Inside-Out Postal Satsang, is in full swing at its new location, Box 468, Cambridge, Ma. 02138, under the directorship of Joan Kugelmann of the Rudi Foundation. If you'd like to offer yourself as a pen-pal or to request one, just drop them a line.

set up a resource center, complete with a nationwide toll-free number so that volunteers, professionals, inmates, family members, prison staff or anyone could call free of charge to find useful information in almost any area of criminal justice work. Scott's resource material includes far more than the few ideas on this page, and it is thought by many professionals that such an information center would be of tremendous value to the entire field of corrections. The Prison/Community Alliances resource center will cost an estimated \$90,000 for the first year, and will operate entirely independent of the Prison-Ashram Project (except that both will be projects of the Hanuman Foundation). It's impossible for us to say right now whether funding will be found; we're just going month-to-month trying to feel whether it seems to be God's will. If it all falls through, we'll still be eager to share whatever information we can from here, and to help you organize local groups of volunteers.

What's Next?

If any of the above pushes one of your buttons, what do you do next? One option is to follow this course of action: 1) Read all the program ideas a few times, perhaps sharing them with friends, and decide which sorts of things sound most practicable for your particular community (whether you're in or out of prison); 2) Do your homework—ask around enough to know whether such things have been tried, or what's going on right now that might be similar or overlapping, or whether any existing local organization might want to do some of these things; 3) if after you're done your homework you're still on track, get in touch with us for more specific information on the project ideas you're considering. We'll try to give you details, names and addresses, and even names of prisoners and non-prisoners in your area who might be interested in helping; 4) At the time you feel confident about what you want to do, call a meeting to determine local interest; if you're in prison, the steps from here on out will be different, but the main thing is to approach the prison authorities with a very simple, straightforward proposal which shows that you're not just a "wide-eyed naive liberal" with some half-baked ideas. Be careful, in your enthusiasm, not to sound as if you're the first person who ever tried to do something good in a prison, or pour out so many ideas that your listener becomes lost in a sea of good intentions. Our suggestion is to take one, simple step at a time and do it successfully. Perhaps that might be a concert at the prison. If you do it well, then the next suggestion you have, such as a visitation program, may be considered more seriously. You may have a tough time making the initial breakthrough, but we have lots of experience at that and will be happy to share it with you. Let our numerous mistakes and embarrassments prevent you from repeating them all.

At the present time, write directly to us and we'll share all the letters with Scott after we've done whatever we can from here. By our next newsletter, we'll try to have figured out a workable division of responsibilities so that you can write either here or to Scott's New York address.

Money Yoga

Inflation has hit the Prison-Ashram Project pretty hard, so this is one of those tricky paragraphs in which I have to let you know how it is, yet try not to push all your guilt-and-drama buttons, yet trust that enough of you will come through without guilt and drama to keep this whole show going (whew!). Especially with recent changes in postal rates, our budget has climbed upwards of \$3,000 per month. Our monthly donations, on the other hand, have dropped to less than \$500. So, for the past few months we've had to dip into our funds that were reserved for the publication of *INSIDE-OUT* #3, a \$40,000 sum which is now \$25,000 and fast falling. At this rate, we'll be broke within a year, and the new book will have to bite the dust. If you're able to help and feel good about it, it would come in handy at this time. If not, don't sweat it; we all just do what we can.

REMEMBER TO USE OUR NEW ADDRESS:

PRISON—ASHRAM PROJECT
Route 1, Box 201-N
Durham, N.C. 27705

SPIRITUAL MATERIAL

A Project of the
Hanuman Foundation

Rt. 1, Box 201-N
Durham, N.C. 27705

PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT



*"I see two birds on the same branch;
One eats the sweet fruit,
One looks on sadly.*

*The first bird wonders —
In what prison does he live?*

*The second marvels —
How can he rejoice?"*

— from The Ramayana,
retold by Wm. Buck

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.

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