

PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT

March 1981

Newsletter

XAT



For the past few years, I've been in touch with Frank Chilcote, a Crow Medicine Man and co-founder of the XAT Medicine Society. The XAT Society (pronounced katz) is a spiritual organization for both American Indians and non-Indians. Their statement of purpose reads "To support a positive way of life. To eliminate all prejudice, and to help heal the body and mind of mankind by using herbs and teaching that health and peace of mind begin within each individual. It is also the goal of the XAT Society to reach every spiritual/cultural group within the prisons in the U.S. and Canada, furnishing them with a sweat lodge, pipe, and drum." Frank wrote last year telling me that the President of the United States has finally signed into law that Indian men and women in prison must be allowed to practice their native religion, which includes the sweat lodge ceremony. I would assume that non-Indians who claim genuine conversion must also be allowed these practices. If you're interested in finding out more about the XAT Society, its family herbal service, its native crafts program, or its services to prisoners, just drop them a line at the address below. If you're not a prisoner, you might want to send along a (tax-deductible) donation to their work; they'll put it to good use.



XAT Society
Box 46139
Seattle, WA 98146

THE SWEAT LODGE

Frank Chilcote

We stand now on a small hill. The wide shallow creek that flows north to meet the Yellowstone is just visible in the light of the new moon. This is the southeast Montana country of the Crow Indian people, my people, the Absarokee, the children of the large beaked bird. We have just put up a small lodge of canvas. It faces east. A few feet in front of it is a mound of earth about six inches high and a few feet beyond is a pit in which a pile of small rocks are enveloped in flame. A young person of our Society stands there, tending the fire.

We are a group of men who have come away, for an hour, from the Crow Fair Celebration down the road, to take a "sweat" together during the time of the new moon, which is a requirement of our religion. We are XAT American Indian Medicine Society People.

The Sweat Lodge is ready now, so we take off our clothes and crawl in through the small low door and sit on the ground. I sit at the back, facing the pit in the center and the door beyond. Our fire keeper fills the pit with glowing rocks from the fire outside, one by one, and we bless each rock as it comes in with a bit of cedar or sage leaf which smokes and fills the lodge with its sweet and pungent aroma. The fire keeper closes the door and seals it with earth so that no light may enter.

Here we are in the dark now. If you are an American Indian, this experience may not be strange to you, for it is a universal purification performed by traditional people all over North America. But if you have never been in an Indian Sweat Lodge, no words of mine can convey to you how it feels. If you sit on the earth cross-legged, or hunched over with your knees together, and close your eyes, you can imagine the dark. But you cannot imagine the other spirit that is in there with you, the spirit of the rocks and the fire, the water and the steam, the disappearing of time, and the going out of all that is negative from both your mind and body. And so, until I tell you what is happening, you will not know or understand why XAT people are required to take the sweat each month at the time of the new moon.

It is not required that one build an Indian sweat lodge. A

sauna or steam bath is good, it is healthy and it purifies the body. Yet, that is less than half the reason for the sweat. The greater need for all of us, is to purify the mind, the heart or spirit and unless you are totally conscious of this before and during the sweat, and all is done in a most thoughtful and sacred manner, you will not achieve the purification you seek. Not even in a traditional sweat lodge.



The rocks glow red in the pit, the pulse of heat in the center of our little dark universe. Only the familiar cool earth under us maintains a contact in our consciousness with the everyday world of matter and life which we have left behind. I begin to speak, telling of the much beauty I have seen of Mother Earth, of the truly good people I have known, both Indian and non-Indian. Starting on my left around the circle, each one in his turn speaks of a person, place, or thing of beauty and peace he has experienced. There are long periods of silence. I drop one small piece of sage on the rocks. The fumes embrace our nostrils and enter our bodies. I dip a spring of cedar into the herb water I have prepared and splash it on the rocks. A fierce wave of concentrated heat strikes out at us, and we gasp at its intensity.

Now I explain in our common language of English that it is the ancients who we must thank, who we must remember, and if any of these ones are listening we wish them to know that we remember them, that we are grateful that they lived in a good way and taught their children well, so that their good ways

would not be lost to us. I explain that I have first of all thanked the Creator, for showing us this way of cleansing ourselves and getting rid of our poisons, and I have thanked the fire and water. I then give greetings and thanksgiving to our Sacred Mother, the Earth, and to all of her children, ourselves and our relatives the animals, the trees and grasses, even the rocks. I give greetings and thanksgiving to the child of the sun that has entered our rocks and filled them with energy. And to the spirit of the winds that carry the purifying steam onto and into our bodies, our minds, hearts and spiritis.

At this time we can also send a healing to all those who are not in this sweat with us today. In the circle we have much power. If we all think of a person who is sick and send the spirit of the steam, it will reach anywhere on the earth. People who have been in the sweat with me have reported amazing cures of distant relatives and friends right at the time we sent the healing.

As I throw more water on the hot rocks we breathe the healing steam deep, through our nostrils, deep into our lungs. We feel the cleansing strength in our sinuses, in our throats and bronchial passages. The spirit of the steam enters our blood, cleanses and strengthens our hearts, our veins, capillaries and arteries, and all the living cell spirits of our bodies. The toxins and tired waste in the blocked places are dislodged and flow out of the body through the breath and the perspiration that pours freely from us now.

I ask now that we give our attention to the healing power of the spirit of the east, spirit of the dawn, whose color, like the energy of the returning sun, is yellow. This one is the enlightenment of our people, and we see this light to our lives as the Cosmic Intelligence. To this one we will pray for help in sweating away the poisons of the mind. What are the poisons of the mind? Whatever is untrue. All of our beliefs and defenses and rationalizations and other self-deceptions by which we try to seem greater and cleverer than others, the pretenses and masks we fabricate, the judgements and valuations by which we put others beneath us. All those thoughts that creep in and prevent us from seeing the Great Spirit in everyone. These poisons also include our desires, all the things we think we need, that we have been programmed to believe we must have in order to be happy, all those things that disturb the clarity and tranquility of our minds. They include our conditional thinking that we really know and understand life. That our labels are real. That the ways of our species, our race, our nation, our community, are superior to the ways of other species, races, nations and communities. That our children are foolish, our old people are out of touch, and the opposite sex is inferior. We must let the steam enter our minds and let all of that go. We must return our brains to the condition of the sharp reliable instruments that the creator means for them to be. As the steam rises once more from the rocks we pray for clarity and honesty.

We turn now to the spirit of the south, the one who brings renewing, the spirit of innocence and rebirth, of resurrection and renewal, the one whose color is green. This is the spirit that has spoken to us, telling us that anyone may start his life anew, any day, any moment, just as all creation is an ongoing evolution, and only we, each of us, can make such a decision for ourself.

We now hold in our mind the awareness that these spirits of the four quarters are all parts of the one Great Mystery. Our Indian religion tells us these are the four unique laws of the universe that have been given mankind only and is not shared by our winged or four-legged brothers. To be true Children of the Creator, to walk the "good red road," we ourselves, through our own desire to do so, must cast from our mind and heart all those bad feelings that take up residence there. Now is the chance to get rid of all these uncomfortable feelings, of anger, frustration, hurt, anxiety. Our elders have taught us that all of our bad feelings are the children of only one — and that one is fear. Now as the steam enters our consciousness in the silence, in the darkness of our ignorance and fear, we let it search out

the bad feelings that lurk within us. When we discover a bad feeling we hold on to it for a moment, to feel it and know it, until we know that we do not want to hold on to that feeling any longer and can let it go. This feeling has been hiding inside us and does not want to leave. The anger born of fear, the frustration born of fear, the envy born of fear, the greed born of fear — we cast them all out, all the children of fear. They burst from us with a cry or a sob or a shout or a sigh, and they evaporate in the healing steam.

I invite us now to turn our attention toward that block being there in the west, that beautiful truth given us by the Creator that enables us to have control over our own lives, and the outcome of the events in our lives. We breathe deeply now through our nostrils, that the steam may reach toward our mind for this is the dwelling place of the spirit of the west, the spirit of introspect, the spirit of faith or how we feel about things. The Creator in his wisdom has given us the power to think about, and feel about, and believe about anything, as we see fit. And this is a remarkable truth. But that is not the power given us by the Spirit of the West. The unique power of the west is the universal law that what we envision in our mind in spirit, will manifest for us in the material world. Be it for good or non-good. And this power is working every day in our life, whether we know it or not, and whether we believe it or not. We give thanks for this knowledge and ask this being to help cleanse our spirits. Everything in the universe has a spirit, a consciousness of itself, and that includes every atom and each particle of each atom, and the molecules formed by these atoms. It includes every cell in our bodies. Every one has its own spirit and its own consciousness. Together all our cells make up the little universe we call ourselves the totality of body, mind, and heart which also has a spirit, which some people call soul, consciousness, this is not only in our minds, but it is in each cell of our bodies. And the totality includes an external, metasomatic consciousness, a universal consciousness, which is the way of creation, the force of life working through us. All truly devout XAT people perform the ceremony of the sweat lodge each month, at the time of the new moon. This action is the conscious effort we each make to clear the negative from our mind and body.

Finally, we turn our mind's eye to the white giant of the north, the Spirit of Wisdom, of pure faith, of complete trust. We put more water on the fire, there is more steam, hotter and hotter, our shells are shedding. Here in the womb of eternity we cast off the husks of our contrived selves and become again as a pure seed, the potential of unlimited creativity. There is time now for each of us to meditate, to express ourselves in prayer or song however the spirit inclines us.

Now is the time of rebirth. I remind us all to leave our womb quietly, as gently and respectfully as we would wish our birth to be, to thank our relatives, the ancients, and our XAT Society founders. We move very slowly, crawling into the light, wash our bodies, and sit or stand or lie quietly for a while. We are in a very delicate and vulnerable condition, soft and tender as a newborn. We must quietly assimilate the powerful experience we have just had.

Now we are ready to go again into our daily life as XAT people, as people of peace and love, sharing our concerns, our dreams and visions, our hopes, our songs and stories, and most important, our love. I have told you now what the sweat lodge means to Indian people, to followers of the XAT way of life. The ancient Indian religion.





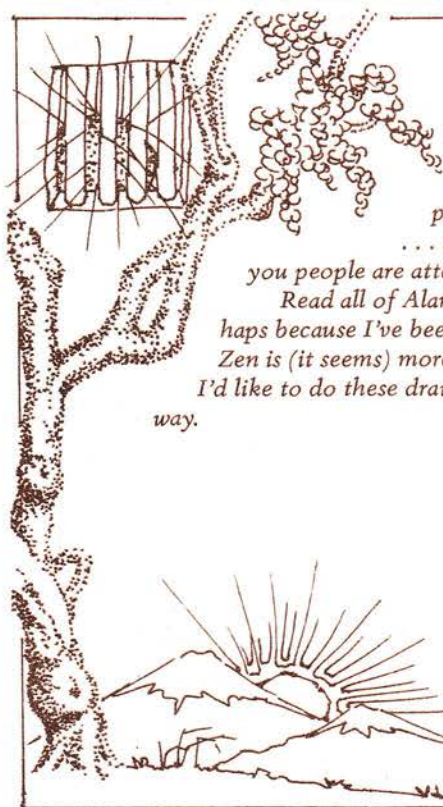
LETTERS . . .

Hello People,

Read the little booklet, *INSIDE-OUT*, and decided to get in touch. I have 18 years in prison; I'm forty-two. Lately I've been feeling a strong empathy for lots of people. It took a long time to drop the games and be a real person . . . However, I'm still full of shit, as are most people. But I'm very sincere about what you people are attempting to do and in my work here.

Read all of Alan Watts' books and heard most of his tapes; I feel my center is there, sort of — perhaps because I've been living out of my mind for so long and am still afraid to let my feelings hang out. Zen is (it seems) more aloft, while Bhakti yoga is lots of syrup. I'm an old stuffed olive — rigid in heart. I'd like to do these drawings for you in exchange for the literature. It'll help me if I can help you in some way.

Love,
Tommy Moore,
Salem, Ore.



PRISON/COMMUNITY ALLIANCES



Update

Carol DeCosta, head of the Inside-Out of Santa Fe group in New Mexico, writes the following in her continuing efforts to "break into" the prison, following the bloodiest riot in American prison history:

With a new warden at the Penitentiary of New Mexico, new and innovative programs are (finally!) being sought. Our proposal for meditation and yoga classes has been approved, and we're set to begin March 20th with weekly two-hour classes divided between hatha yoga, meditation, and discussion. Inside-Out of Santa Fe is also being allowed to sponsor its second concert the latter part of April. Two local bands are donating their time and energy, and the men at the prison are looking forward to this event with great anticipation, as it will be the first concert allowed in the men's division of the prison. We're still working on getting approval for a vegetable garden on the men's side, but have been turned down. We expect approval for the women's side, however, so our success there may eventually open up the gates to the men's division.

It's been over a year now of delays, bureaucracy, and scores of frustrating moments, but at present our possibilities at the prison seem to be rolling along very well. Persistence definitely pays off.



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.



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

*A Project of the
Hannuman Foundation*

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

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BO'S SPRING TOUR SCHEDULE

Public Talks & Workshops

(for further information, contact person listed)

- Thursday, April 9 Amherst, Ma. (Univ. of Mass.) —
Greg Jackmauh, (617) 354-2390
- Tuesday, April 28 Philadelphia, Pa.
(Bucks County Community College) —
Louis Salamone, (215) 943-7008
- Saturday, May 2 Maywood, N.J. (Wayne Public Library/
N.J. Metaphysical Center) —
Dianne Herald DiMella, (201) 845-0741
- Sunday, May 3 Maywood, N.J. (same contact as above;
this all-day workshop is "Living & Dy-
ing," and is not prison-oriented)

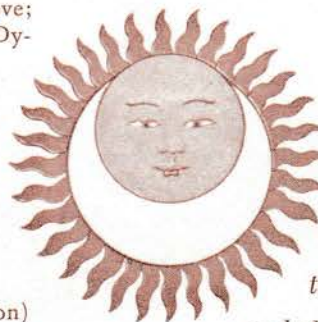
Prison Workshops

- Friday, April 10 Billerica, Ma. (State Prison)
- Monday, April 13 Salem, Ma. (County Jail)
- Monday, April 20 Jessup, Md. (Perkins Hospital)
- Wednesday, April 22 Lewisburg, Pa. (Federal Prison)
- Saturday, April 25 Camp Hill, Pa. (State Prison)
- Sunday, April 26 Philadelphia, Pa. (Bucks County Prison)
- Wednesday, April 29 } New Jersey prisons
Thursday, April 30 } (Trenton, Rahway, Bordentown,
Friday, May 1 } Yardville, & Leesburg)
- Tuesday, May 5 Kingston, Ontario (Collins Bay Prison)
- Wednesday, May 6 Kingston, Ontario (Prison for Women)
- Thursday, May 7 Auburn, N.Y. (State Prison)

Training Seminars

(for prison workers & prospective volunteers)

- Friday/Saturday/
Sunday, April 10-12 Cambridge, Ma. (weekend seminar) —
Greg Jackmauh, The Rudi Foundation
(617) 354-2390
- Thursday/Friday,
April 23-24 Harrisburg, Pa. (two-day but not over-
night) — James O. Smith, Pa. Board of
Probation & Parole, (717) 787-6151
- Monday, May 4 Syracuse, N.Y. (all-day seminar) —
Alan Jones, Holy Order of Mans,
(315) 446-2057
- Wednesday, May 6 Kingston, Ontario (all-day seminar) —
Lisa Markon, (613) 546-9222



*"The Truth upholds the fragrant
Earth and makes the living water
wet. Truth makes fire burn and
the air move, makes the sun shine
and all life grow.*

*A hidden truth supports everything. Find it and
win."*

— from the Ramayana,
retold by Wm. Buck