

PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT

Fall 1982

Newsletter

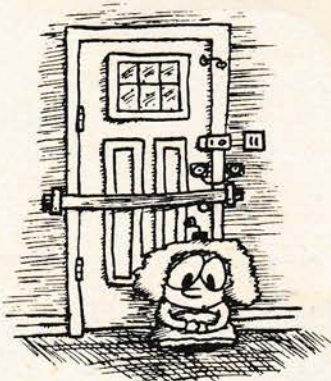


Dear Prison-Ashram Friends,

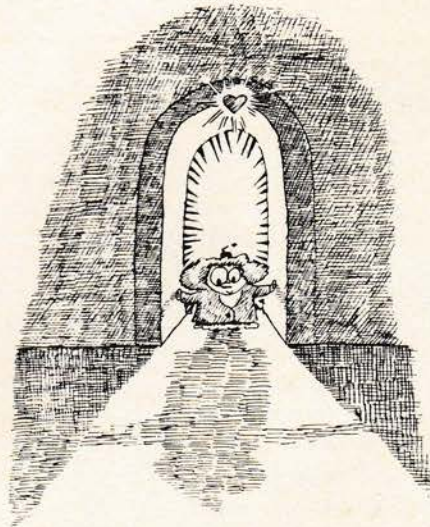
We've just returned from another trip across the country, visiting people inside and outside all along the way. Another 6,000 miles on the car, some tired bones and muscles, and the ever-fresh reminder once again how much the same we all are everywhere, amid our thousands of seeming differences. Visiting prisons, friends and relatives, we managed within a two-month period to experience a mind-blowing range of human creation, from the bowels of Oklahoma State Prison to a peaceful self-sufficient community 9,000 feet up in the New Mexico mountains, to the Golden Nugget Casino on the boardwalk in Atlantic City. That's a pretty far range, I can assure you. And yet in all those extremes and everywhere in-between, everyone we met was just all of us, right here, where we always are, struggling to feel good and make some sense of the moment we find ourselves in.



Back in our office I found some recent drawings by our friend Rick Morgan, and they reminded me so much of what we saw in our travels. Looking around towns and cities it boggles the mind how **busy** our lives have become with fascinating things to do. Yet it seems that the folks who stay the busiest, who are always playing something or reading something or tasting, hearing, watching, or feeling something, feel lonely and afraid behind the half-dozen locks on their doors. Things become so important in our lives that we all begin to fear that every knock on the door may be someone trying to get some of what we have. And all our time is spent in our things, either enjoying them, wanting them, or protecting them.



And then along the way we meet the people who for one reason or another decide to take some of their time *away* from doing, reading, playing, talking and watching; people who spend some time in each day to just be alone, al-one, all-one, with the universe just as it is. Just some time to quiet down and face ourselves without having to rush here or there responding to a desire or a fear. Some people decide to take this time because the casino life in the fast lane burns them out after awhile; for some people it's the prospect of spending many years in a dreary prison; for some, like a new friend in Pennsylvania, it may be because his wife just died of cancer at an early age leaving him with two young children and a lot of confusion. We all have our unique reasons, yet the first moment is really the same: We find ourselves knocked off-balance, our minds suddenly a half-beat off from our busy daily rhythm, and we look around and begin to wonder what our lives are actually about.



And rather than getting "back in the groove" as soon as possible, it's a wonderful idea to make such quiet time part of our lives. Soon the confusion melts into peace, and we begin to look around like the little lady below, feeling like we've begun to enter a brand-new world with eyes, mind, and heart all fresh and open. "See, I shall make all things new." It's that one, and it's just a matter of individual choice.



OFFERINGS FROM THE HEART . . .

Prison Book Project, One More Time

After we mentioned in our last newsletter that our book project was being abandoned for a while, we heard from the folks at HOHM, a spiritual community in Arizona, who said that they'd love to perform that service on a permanent basis. So, for the fifth and hopefully last time, if you wish to request or donate any spiritual books, magazines, cassettes or so forth (*other than* the regular Prison-Ashram Project materials like *INSIDE-OUT*), please write to:

Prison Book Project
Box 6403
Prescott Valley, AZ 86312

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Dearest People,

We want to let you know that complimentary copies of our publication are available to prisoners. Our paper keeps people informed of the raising of consciousness across the planet through interviews with people in many different fields of teaching, business, music, and spirit. We have monthly

columns on various subjects which present an overview of new age events to expand the awareness of the whole person. Thanks . . . and God bless you in your work.

The MOVEMENT Newspaper
Box 19458
Los Angeles, CA 90019

* * *

A friend from California, without any group or agency behind him, has produced a catalog of 226 spiritual tapes and books which are available to prisoners and prison libraries or groups. To get a copy of the catalog, just write to him. He emphasizes that the 82 titles he personally supplies have a first preference to study groups rather than individuals, but individual requests will also be met whenever possible. The other 144 titles are available through a few other sources which he lists in his catalog.

Spiritual Catalog
Paul Dempsey
Box 818
Atascadero, CA 93423-0818



INSIDE-OUT: Update

As we've mentioned in earlier newsletters, we're busy at work on *INSIDE-OUT* #3, our final book in the *INSIDE-OUT* series which began in 1975. Most of our time this fall and winter will be spent in putting the book together (we're already well along the way), and we hope it'll be in your hands in 1983. At the same time, we're now just about out of copies of *INSIDE-OUT* #2. We've decided not to reprint it, so that means there'll be several months to a year (at most) in which we'll just be sending out all our pamphlets and newsletters and copies of *SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY GUIDE* #4. Much of the material from *INSIDE-OUT* #2 will be used in the third book, so it's not gone forever. If you're in prison, please keep sharing your *INSIDE-OUT* with those who can no longer get a copy. If you're not in prison, and your copy is just collecting dust on a bookshelf, we'd be happy to receive it back from you so we can continue to pass it on to those who need it inside.

"Life is but a dream. Every major philosophy and religion says the same thing. Even our own Bible says Adam fell asleep and never woke up. There's no account of his waking up. So it becomes obvious as we journey back towards God, what we are actually doing is awakening in God. We are asleep in the arms of God, dreaming that we are bodies just as we do at night. One of the most important recognitions is that this dream is never going to end in and of itself. It will just go on and on, like the soap operas on T.V. It will always be something else. And it will always seem important. Sooner or later we have to make a decision to begin very gently to turn away from the dream."

— Hugh Prather





LETTERS . . .

Dear Bo,

My sentence is 5-15 years for manslaughter. I received this sentence while on parole for second degree murder for which I received a sentence of 3-20 years. In both cases, the victim was my common-law wife. The cause of death in each case was strangulation. I was under the impression that my love for these lovely persons was genuine, absolute, or sure thing. After stepping onto the path in myself, I discovered that this love was conditional, superficial — not even love at all. I am now in touch with my wrong thinking that led to their deaths. However, there is not total peace within me. There is this burning urge to communicate with their families. Even if their families do not receive me with open arms and even if they want to kill me, I am willing to confront death just to communicate what I feel deep within me. It has taken me until now to free myself from guilt, sorrow and other sufferings, but I am not totally free. Though I am aware that my freedom should not be dependent on something on the outside, I do feel that I must make this communication. None of these persons has heard from me in five years. This brings me to my first question: Should I contact these persons or leave the past alone?

I have three other questions: First, how do I know when I am seeing the world clearly? By this I mean without coloring it with my beliefs, prejudices, and opinions. Second, Is there a time when I should separate myself from another human being? I mean this in the physical sense. For example, if one of my brothers attacked another brother, should I see this as a predicament to facilitate my growth or should I attempt to bring harmony into their midst? I could also choose not to see the circumstance at all. How can I view this without separation?

The third and final question is, how is it that the universe is unfolding as it should and simultaneously, I am the creator of everything in my world? How can I be responsible for various incidents if the world is unfolding as it should? The fact that two people are dead because of me can be viewed as having created this for myself, but it can also be viewed as the world unfolding as it should. How do I see this clearly?

Peace and love,
HYT

Dear HYT,

I feel like the single issue you're touching on in your letter is this: You're trying with the mind to travel a journey of the heart. The universe is indeed unfolding as it should, and yes, you do bear full responsibility for killing two people. The rational mind can't hold both these ideas at once because they seem to be in conflict. But the heart, or the deeper mind — what Buddhists call "big mind" — can hold both these and many more all at once, without conflict. The only way you'll be able to see this clearly, as you asked, is by seeing from a quieter place than usual. You ask about seeing, yet you wrote really about thinking. You may not ever be able to think the whole thing through. Fortunately, we don't have to.

When we think that we know what the spiritual path is all about, then our lives become full of "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts," just like you're wrestling with your mind about how to react when you see a fight going on in prison. Even your first question, about seeing things clearly, seems based on "I shouldn't see things with beliefs, prejudices, opinions." The punch line of the joke is that the very question itself is one of your beliefs, prejudices and opinions. While we're in human form, how can we help it?

So the strategy becomes something different from the sort of dramatic, 180-degree change overnight into our image of an enlightened being who does this, doesn't do that, sees things this way, etc. Instead, we just begin quieting the mind, just as we are, and gently investigating ourselves throughout each day. It's got to be a light journey rather than a heavy one, right from the start. Really, the aim is to let go of attachments to our ideas and opinions rather than letting go of the ideas and opinions. We don't want to walk

around like spiritual zombies, pretending that we don't feel anything at all. We're just trying to quiet down so that we can see what's really going on in our lives.

The things that we have done to hurt other people are powerful teachings on the spiritual journey. A feeling of shame might open up our deepest humility. Guilt might show us the need for self-control and taking responsibility for our actions. And feeling bad about someone else's pain — the pain that we've caused — might be what we need to feel how deeply connected we truly are to other human beings. We can feel all these things from a quiet, "watching" space without getting lost in attachment to these feelings. This is a very tricky issue, and I think that most of us tend to either be lost in attachment or else deny the feelings entirely. This is not necessary. The spiritual journey is a process of opening and then opening farther, and then farther. . . . just opening all the time to deal with whatever is.

If you're looking in some way for your wives' families to forgive you, then you may want to take some more time with it all before you contact them. You didn't really mention in your letter just what it is that you feel the need to communicate, so that's hard for me to respond to. If you're trying to "educate" them about giving up guilt and blame, and how the world unfolds as it should, my guess would be that you're not the right person to do that. It might be appropriate sometime for you to simply express to them how sorry you are for having caused them such pain, and that you hope their lives are going well. If you express that without attachment, it may feel very different to them than some sort of needy plea from you for their forgiveness. I guess what I'm saying is that you would be writing them for their sake as well as yours. But don't be in too much of a rush; let yourself bounce it around in the quietest parts of yourself for awhile.

All Light for your Journey,
Bo

Dear Bo & Sita,

Wonderful things are going on here behind the walls and bars! Thought I'd share some of them with you.

The prison in Freiburg (Germany) is a huge red-brick monstrosity housing over 500 men. Across the courtyard, in a smaller building, is the jail, where men are kept for a year or longer before being judged or sentenced. The best thing about the whole place is the boss, a really nice guy who cares somehow; at any rate, he's always open for new ideas to help make life a little better for the prisoners. So, he was immediately helpful when I wanted to start a yoga group six weeks ago, and again when I asked for time for a meditation group two weeks ago.

I've also had a lot of individual contact with prisoners, since I'm there all day as a trainee social worker. There are ten men in my two groups, and over the weeks a really deep relationship with quite a few of them has developed. It's a joy to see them waking up, discovering themselves, reaching out for God. One of them is here on a charge of assault and robbery. In the few months he's been here, he's given himself so totally to God's transforming power that he's become an entirely new person, learning to love God in everyone. His job — serving meals — enables him to go from cell to cell, and for everyone he has a word of encouragement and love. The little he earns he sends to the people he robbed. His attitude toward the future is that God's will works through the judge, whatever that may be. His sentence may be 5 years or 7, 8, or 10; and he sees it as all God's will. I'm beginning to understand why there's more joy in heaven over the one sheep that was lost and found than over the ninety-nine. The gratitude, the surrender, is so much deeper!

All in all, this is the most rewarding time of my life. Last week at the end of our meditation group, the whole room seemed so full of love and harmony and togetherness, and everyone felt it and we laughed and laughed because the people "out there" think of them as a bunch of dangerous criminals!

Lots of love,
Sharon G.



*A Project of the
Hanuman Foundation*

PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT
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Permit No. 205



*Do not let the ways of the world dismay your heart,
being a warrior.*

— *from RAMAYANA,*
retold by Wm Buck