



PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT

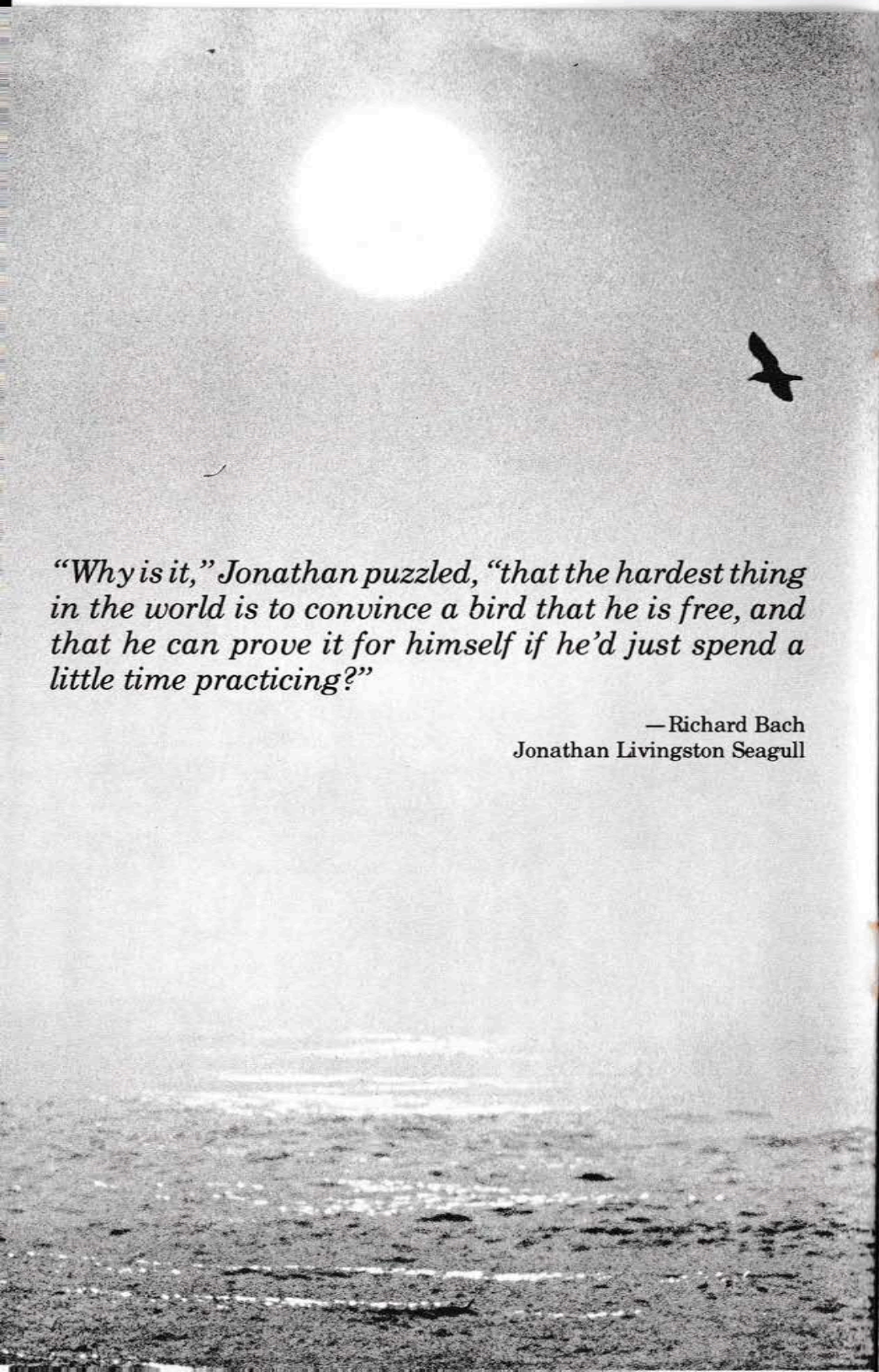
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If you have a copy of our book
INSIDE-OUT and are no longer using it,
please send it back so we can pass it on.



"Why is it," Jonathan puzzled, "that the hardest thing in the world is to convince a bird that he is free, and that he can prove it for himself if he'd just spend a little time practicing?"

—Richard Bach
Jonathan Livingston Seagull



Meditation and Breathing Practice

by The Buddha

adapted by Murshid Samuel Lewis (Sufi Sam)

Begin by simply becoming aware of your in-breath and out-breath. Then breathe in a heavy breath and be aware that you are breathing in a heavy breath, and breathe out a heavy breath and be aware that you are breathing out a heavy breath. Do this a few times.

Then breathe in a gentle breath and be aware you are breathing in a gentle breath, and breathe out a gentle breath and be aware you are breathing out a gentle breath. Breathe in a short breath, breathe out a short breath. Breathe in a long breath, breathe out a long breath.

After doing each of these a few times, gradually make your breath long and gentle, long and refined. And for the rest of the practice, attentively breathe in and out this long, refined breath. On this breath, breathe in all the joy you are capable of breathing in and breathe out all the joy you are capable of breathing out. Joy in and joy out. Do this for a few minutes.

Then breathe in all the love you are capable of breathing in and all the love you are capable of breathing out. Love in and love out. Finally, make the breath even more gentle, even longer and more penetrating, and breathe in all the peace you are capable of breathing in, and all the peace you are capable of breathing out. Peace in and peace out. As you do this, fill the room with peace. Fill the prison or neighborhood with peace. Breathe peace for the whole city in which you live, for the whole world in which you live.



We're all doing time.

As soon as we get born, we find ourselves assigned to one little body, one set of desires and fears, one family, city, state, country and planet. Who can ever understand exactly why or how it comes down as it does? The bottom line is, here we are. Whatever, wherever, whenever we are, this is what we've got.

*It's up to us
Whether we do it as easy time or hard time.*



*It's up to us
Whether we do it as easy time or hard time.*

*Living in truth is the only way to do easy time.
And the truth is,*

Peace Lies Within.

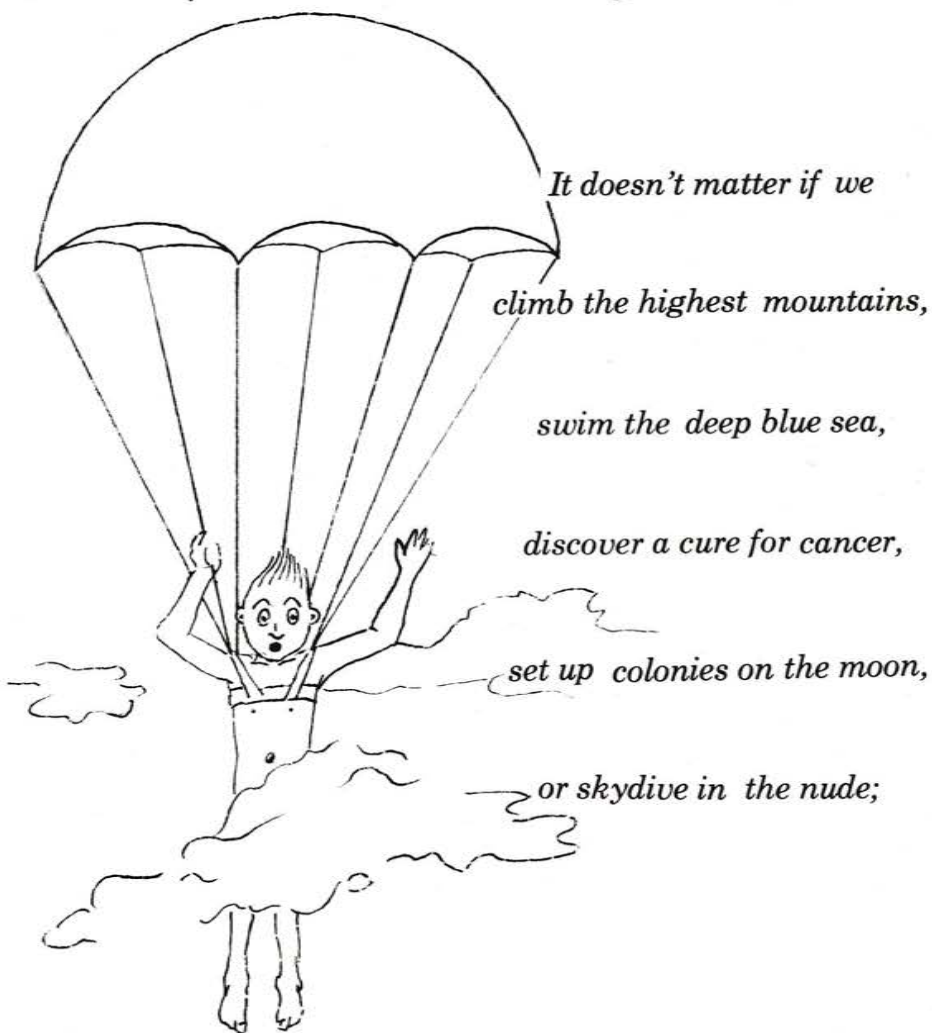


The Kingdom of Heaven Lies Within.



**Get This One Straight
and
Everything You Need Will Be Provided.**

Wealth, fame, power and pleasure are over-rated. Look at Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Freddy Prinze, Jim Morrison, Judy Garland, Billie Holliday and all the others who got everything we think would be cool. They all died young, lonely and desperately unhappy because they reached the limits of what the outside world can provide.



It doesn't matter if we
climb the highest mountains,
swim the deep blue sea,
discover a cure for cancer,
set up colonies on the moon,
or skydive in the nude;

Life Will Be Hard Time

Unless We Get Things Straight On The Inside.

May As Well Get Down To It.

*True spiritual work is
not a part-time thing.
It's not something we
can just squeeze into
our schedule.*

The only way it's done

is in the quality

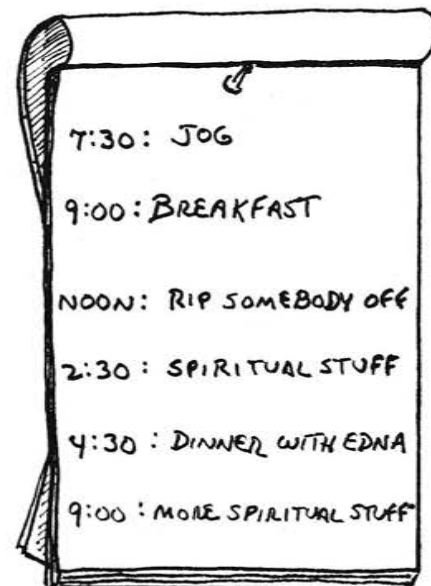
of how we act,

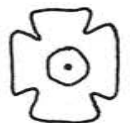
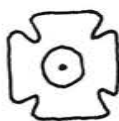
how we think,

how we react to the dude who spills hot coffee on our pants —

how we do our time,

each and every moment of our lives.





*Waiting to feel God's grace is like a fish waiting to feel wet. This is **all** God's grace. In the sixties, a lot of us dropped acid and found ourselves absolutely fascinated by our own toes, or a rip in the window screen, or an ant crawling across the floor. It wasn't the acid; it was discovering how incredibly holy everything really is. It's all a miracle, all day long.*

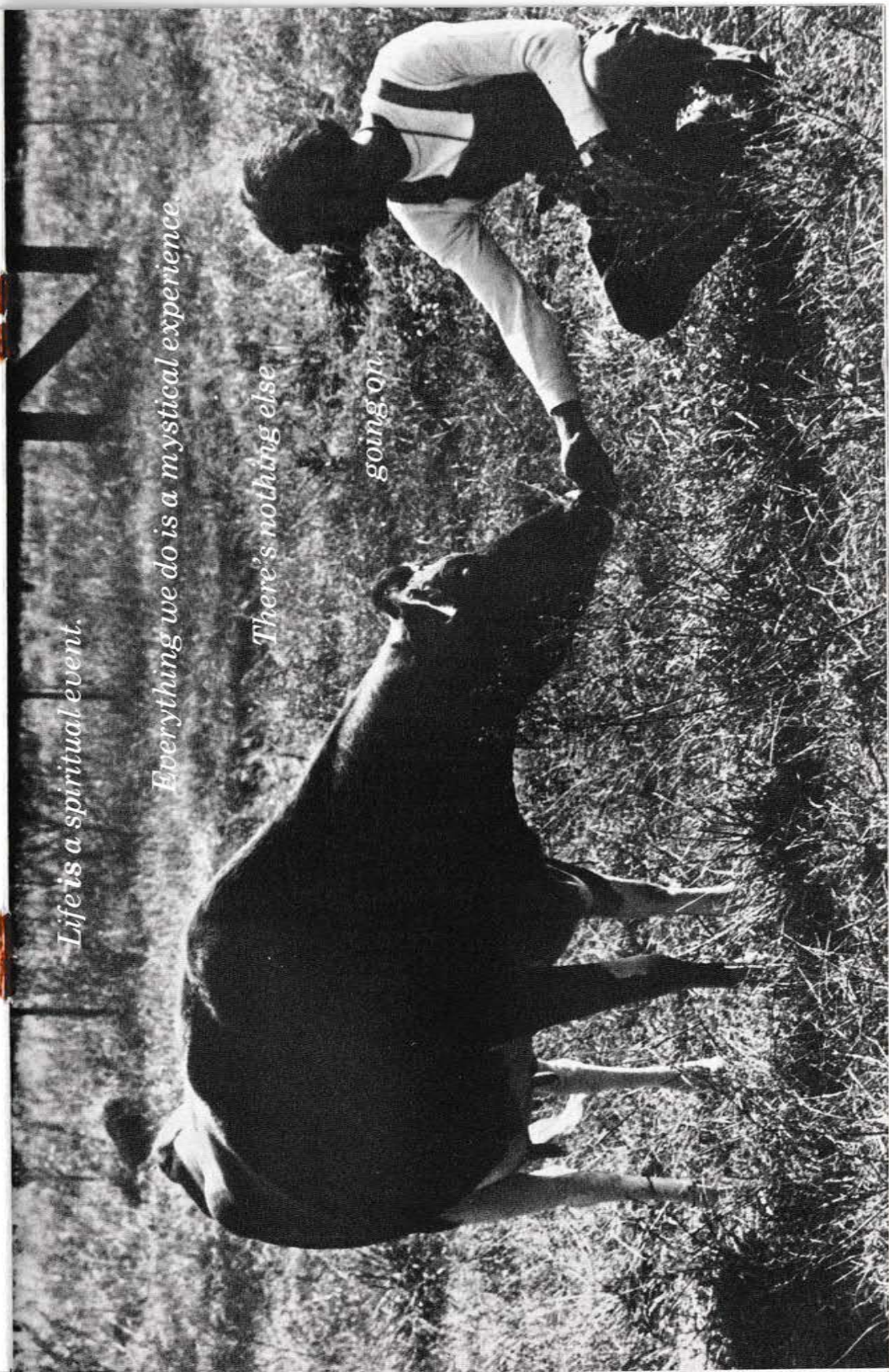
The only reason for doing meditation or yoga or religious practices is to quiet down enough so that we can pay attention to this miracle all the time. That's who a saint is, is just somebody who has learned to pay attention all the time.

Life is a spiritual event.

Everything we do is a mystical experience.

There's nothing else

going on.





LETTERS

Dear Prison-Ashram Folks,

For years we have witnessed the fine work done through you all. We thank you. Now I find myself coming to you for something directly connected to my own life and family.

Our daughter, who's four, was kidnapped last summer by a two-time rapist. The police found them in 4½ hours and she was remarkably alright though much darkness went her way.

Those hours were an incredible test of our work of these past years. Between the streams of terror and panic and tears, we did all we could to surround the two of them with love, to pray, to meditate. And we found, then and afterwards, that many many people hearing of the kidnapping were stopping what they were doing, and doing as we were.

Police, hospital, strangers, all were surrounding us and our daughter with love. And when we got her back, she was still whole and filled with innocence, in spite of the violence and sexuality she was subjected to. She had spent most of the time talking to him, of right and wrong, of her understandings of the order around her. "I loved him a little and hated him a little," was one of the first things she told us.

Then came months of assimilating and sorting the great pain. And that still continues, though quieter now. And during that time, the legal issues were being drawn into it. We could not find any peace in the "Catch-22"-ness of it all: Having our 4-year-old testify and be torn apart by defense lawyers; dropping the case, which was threatened if she didn't testify; sending this man back to jail which had not done him any good before, etc. etc. etc. We were all victims.

Finally, we fasted and prayed for three days and came to a peaceful relationship to it all with this understanding: The proper responsibility in the guilt was in his hands and demanded a public confession. He did plead guilty and it was settled out of court. He was

resentenced on the violated probation and on the new sentences. He stood up in court and said, facing my husband, that though he has no memory of the incident (supposedly he has blocked out the whole thing), he was sorry for all the pain he caused to our family.

So now, the children ask what he does in prison, how long he'll be there, how old they'll be when he gets out, and on and on. We wonder if our relationship to him is done. Do we have any more responsibility now than to hold him in our hearts and prayers, and do our own work to come to a full forgiveness? I still wonder if I should personally go to him or write him, to tell him all the specifics of what went on so he can come to some peace with what he did instead of spending all those years in jail for an offense he has no memory of.

All I've come up with so far is to pass his name on to you. From what I understand, he has a very mild and inward nature unless he's drinking. Maybe meditation would be a door for him. Would you send him whatever you have and just know that he's there in case you go to his prison.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all the work you've been doing.

In Love,
Donna (N.M.)

Dear Donna,

Sita and I thank you deeply for sharing your ordeal with us. Your letter is awe-inspiring for the compassion and consciousness you've brought to such a nightmarish experience.

I'm sure that your process of "assimilating and sorting the great pain" will go on for awhile, but it sounds like your faith and vision are remarkably unclouded. It's through such pain that many of us discover what spiritual life is really all about. The opening, deepening, pain, and wisdom all go hand in hand; sometimes God's blessings are excruciating, but blessings all the same. It seems that you and your whole family have been given one of those.

You asked my advice about your relationship to R. I can't think of any "shoulds" or "shouldn'ts" that wouldn't sound stupid after all you've been through. R. has already been greatly blessed just by the fact of you being his victims. Your forgiveness and concern are profound contributions to his spiritual journey, like Jesus forgiving those who nailed him to the cross.

My only advice is to try to be as self-honest as possible, and make sure that whatever you do is what you're able to do from the heart, and not what your mind thinks you should do in order to be "good". If you're ever able to truly open to R. and offer him your kinship, I think that act could do more for world peace than a hundred summit conferences, because this is the nitty-gritty of really bringing God-consciousness into our worldly lives.

Our love to you all, Bo

Dear Bo & Sita,

In my life I've never written to a newspaper, newsletter or whatever. I've been getting yours for some time now. Sometimes I read it, sometimes not. The last one I did, and I know the tone of what I'm fixing to say is not at all like where you're coming from.

It seems to me there's a whole lot of letters from guys sniveling about being gang-raped and being on lock-up 'cause they're on protective custody. Most of them are saying they forgive the perpetrators 'cause "they know not better," etc., and/or they re-live that horrible experience over and over. I don't doubt their sincerity about that.

I've been down about 8 years out of my 32 years. Prisons are more or less the same the world over. If a guy acts like a victim, he's made one. I don't need to see the results of a Princeton study on how people unconsciously invite rape attacks or mugging, 'cause I've seen them do it with my own eyes. In prison sometimes a punch in the nose is the only way to communicate. It's all some guys understand. Violence won't handle all situations or even one in 20, but sometimes it's the only way. And most of the time winning or losing isn't important. It's whether a guy will stand up for his self.

I've never heard of anyone re-living a punch in the nose over and over every day of his life. I mean it couldn't hurt as bad as that other thing. Why don't you print this letter as food for thought for the victims and would-be victims? Life isn't a bed of roses. If those guys aren't willing to protect their selves, nobody else will. If a man will stand up I'll stand up with him. And that's the general consensus in prison. They ain't in polite society. Keep up the good work, y'all.

Sincerely,
Buddy (Va.)

Dear Buddy,

I'll be happy to print your letter; I think it's powerfully written. I don't agree with everything you said, but that's not the end of the world, is it?

You say that if a person stands up for himself, everything will always work out. I agree that may be generally true, and I appreciate your example about not re-living a punch in the nose for the rest of your life. But isn't it true that sometimes a guy just like you will stand up for himself and still be beaten, raped, tortured or killed? It does happen.

Also, maybe some of what you call "sniveling" is indeed sniveling, but maybe some of it is somebody sincerely trying to put his life back together. Not everybody reacts to things the same way. So, I do value your letter, and I also hope you keep your mind open to people who might be very different from you.

Love, Bo

Dear Bo,

I want to thank you for answering me personally, and tell you that you gave me some food for thought. I'm afraid I was being a little judgemental (of course, a judge put me in here!).

Here where I'm at there are 500 of Virginia's meanest. I've come to the conclusion that 99.5% of them are cowardly bullies. They'll pick up a knife or stab someone in the back, but there's only that ½% that'll go against even odds. If it's on equal terms or if you're facing them, they won't bust a grape.

The new dudes don't know that. This is the message I was trying to get across in the letter I wrote you before.

Yeah, I'll try to keep an open mind. When I wrote you I was in a head where it was barely ajar. It's true a punch in the nose isn't the only way to say no, so don't take my advice to extremes. If your old lady asks you if you want some more peas and you say no and she says, "Are you sure," don't punch her.

Sincerely,
Buddy (Va.)



Dear Bo & Sita,

Hare Krishna! I hope this letter finds you in good health. Thank you for your newsletter for the summer of '83, it is always interesting to receive them. I was also drawn to the article "Working with Mantra," and some of the things you said in it. For example, you said, "The mantra 'OM' is called the 'seed sound of the universe', and is generally considered to be the chief honcho of all mantras."

As it is said in the Bhagavad Gita by the Lord, "Of the great sages I am Bhrgu; of vibrations I am the transcendental Om. Of sacrifices I am the chanting of the Holy Names, and of immovable things I am the Himalayas." (10:25). After reading that passage I have found out some interesting discoveries. One is that the Holy names mentioned have been given as the Mahamantra (maha means "great"), which is "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare, Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare."

This mahamantra was introduced in India by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu himself; Hare refers to the energy of the Lord, and Krishna & Rama are names of the Lord Himself. When we chant Hare Krishna, we are asking the Lord Krishna to please engage us in his service.

You are correct in saying that "working with these mantras is simple," and there is a large number to choose from. But if you wish to obtain the greatest effect then the Mahamantra which is authorized by the Lord Himself is your best choice.

Try to understand that it is the Lord Himself who sets the positions of the stars and the sea, and also the religion as well.

Hari Bol,
Your Servant,
Robert (Ore.)

Dear Robert,

Thanks for your letter and for your concern about pointing me in the right direction about working with mantra. But no matter how kind your motives are, religious prejudice still doesn't make it as far as I'm concerned.

There is no one form to the Spirit. There is no best or highest way to worship God or call upon God. If your path is the Krishna mantra, then, that's wonderful and it'll certainly transform your life if you do it purely. But your interpretation of that mantra as being the best for all people is a dangerous one. Right now there are more than forty-five countries in the world at war with each other, and many of those wars are over religious differences. That's completely insane.

I love chanting the Krishna mantra; it's one of my favorite ways to sing to God. But as the Muslims say, "La Illaha Illa Llah," "There is no God but God." God is certainly great, grand, and powerful enough to judge us by what's in our hearts as well as what's on our lips. Mantra is a powerful science, but when we start to argue over one mantra or another, it's time to get back to the basics. And the basic thing about God is, God is here for each one of us in whatever form we reach out. As William Buck wrote in the RAMAYANA, "I bow to God, who lives in this world within us. Whoever calls Him by any name, by that name does He come."

May your love for God continue to open you to all God's forms, names, and children. It's much more interesting than the rigid opinions of fundamentalism, whether Christian or Hindu.

Love, Bo

Dear Bo,

Having served twenty years and being nearly forty, Ray's story was easy to identify with. I'm now back for violating my parole after being outside a little over a year. During the last eighteen months I discovered many painful things about myself, among which is that, although wanting to be outside, I wasn't equipped to be free yet.

Your answers to Tom in the "Letters" section started me thinking about a need in my life: A need to get out of the shell of penitentiary role-playing and self-centeredness and to get involved with people in a genuine, caring way.

My past, if it makes any difference, is not like Tom's. Instead of being on the receiving end of aggression and violence, I've been a "taker"—aggressive, bellicose, belligerent, taking what I wanted instead of earning or deserving it. Even my "giving" had an odor of "taking" about it; using people and circumstances to achieve my own ends, self-concern at the expense of others (although true self-concern can't be at someone else's expense). After so many years of being tough and cold it's difficult to change the old patterns, even with some insight of what's behind them. Playing the penitentiary game cost me a lot of self-esteem and personal dignity, a fact which I didn't discover until I took an honest look at myself and the things I've done.

Can you give me any suggestions about what I might do to call a halt to this "prison experience?" What can I do to find a place where I fit in society on the outside? I don't steal anymore, and I want a fulfilling life, but I just don't fit anywhere at this point. What are my options?

May the Grace of God be with you and may He hold you in the heart of His hand.

Yours in Peace,
Gary (Ks.)

Dear Gary,

About your question as to finding a place in society—Whew! That's the big question for all of us. The thing is, there isn't a "fit" which happens once and then it's stable. I think our everyday lives are a constant process of finding, changing, and wondering about

how we fit into society. I've lived on a sailboat away from the whole world, and also in the slums of Queens, N.Y. I've lived in communes and ashrams, middle-class neighborhoods, the whole bit. I've run through long hair, short hair, no hair, one earring, hippie clothes, straight clothes, crosses, beads, sandals, boots, etc., etc.

What it gets down to are some practical issues: First of all, you need to legally earn some bread. Then the second issue is what kind of lifestyle you feel like living (as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else). If you want to earn a lot of money, you pour your energy into the first; if you don't care so much about money, you might take more thought about the lifestyle things you really want to do—music, art, service to others, cleaning up the environment, promoting good causes, whatever it is that you feel in tune with doing. And of course, there's a lot of overlap between these two areas; how you earn money and the lifestyle you lead may turn out to be one and the same.

I think the important thing is to feel relaxed and hang loose about how many different possibilities there are. As Ray Neal mentioned in the last newsletter, the problem many people have is that as soon as they get out, they start buying everything on credit and going into the hole financially. If you can keep your needs light and your attitude even lighter, you'll definitely find the perfect fit for your life in the free world.

After doing as much time as you have, you may need to be patient while this fine-tuning goes on. You might want to start with a job that's not so demanding, and spend some of your free time being a volunteer counselor at a crisis center, or some sort of rehab group. The sooner you begin filling the need you expressed about serving people, the more relaxed you'll feel about your own life. Service is a wonderful medicine for almost anything that ails us. Getting over all your old behavior patterns won't be any problem at all for someone with your self-honesty; it'll just take some time. And you know how to do time; just start making it work for you now instead of against you.

Love, Bo

Black and White Photos

As you can see, we're using more and more photos in our newsletters; we're also using many in our next book. Any photos you think we might like, please feel free to send us. We'd especially love to have more prison & prisoner photos.

Prison Library Project

Just a reminder that if you want to donate your used spiritual books to us, please *don't* send them to our N.C. address. The proper name and address for that project is:

Prison Library Project
Box 6403
Prescott Valley, Az. 86312



*This newsletter is edited by Bo and Sita Lozoff.
Thanks for graphics in this issue to Stephanie Ashley,
and Gururam Kaur Marini.*

To Touch the Face of God

*The quest for perfect union with God
Is like trying to catch
A butterfly ... without a net.*

*Sometimes you can almost grasp it
And just when you think you got it,
It sails away.*

But oh the wonder

When you finally do grasp it!

*You see the beauty, the softness
and you are filled with*

Such a Love

*That can only come from the knowledge
That you have touched
The face of God.*

— John Thompson
Death Row
Huntsville, Texas