


PRISON- ASHRAM PROJECT

NEWSLETTER / SPRING 1983

*The way of overcoming
obstacles lies in turning inward
and raising one's own being to a higher level.*



I CHING

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

*A Project of the
Hanuman Foundation*



Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Durham, N.C.
Permit No. 205

*If you're no longer using your copy of
INSIDE-OUT, please return it to us so we
can send it out again.*



Dear Friend,

Springtime; new beginnings all around us. And this newsletter has a new format, for the first time in ten years. I've noticed that our newsletters got a little stale over the years, and I really want to freshen up our offering to you. I hope that this new format can help to lighten things up and to provide a greater variety of material for you to work with.

Hermann Hesse, in SIDDHARTHA, said,

"Wisdom is not communicable. The wisdom which a wise man tries to communicate always sounds foolish. Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom. One can find it, live it, be fortified by it, do wonders through it, but one cannot communicate and teach it. I suspected this when I was still a youth and it was this that drove me away from teachers."

If Hesse is right — and I think he is — then what's the purpose of our newsletters at all? What's the purpose of working on INSIDE-OUT #3, our next book? I think the answer is this: Our writings are just reminders that we love you; that we're all on the same journey; that you're not alone. So our newsletters and books can become a little more playful than they've been, and still carry that message. Instead of presuming that we're capable of hitting you over the head with wisdom, we'll try to remember that we're just writing, teasing, joking, dancing with each other; and we'll try to provide materials other than words, as well as all the usual words, to keep inspiring your own search for wisdom.

Love,
Bo

cover and border graphics: Gururam Kaur



Photo: Rameshwar Das

Dear Bo & Sita,

If I could add a word to Brother HYT (in last newsletter) about guilt, sorrow and suffering over murder from the same space he occupies. I too suffer for like reasons. I pray that my guilt and pain not harden my heart, but lead me on the path. I feel the pain will never leave, but I know it is a clear connection of love to the person whose life I took.

I choose to feel the pain and guilt straight rather than hide from it, for when I hide I become irritable and judgemental. When I feel the guilt and pain, it subsides (as with any pain when mindfulness is applied long enough). At first it was weeks of deep pain, then a few hours a day, and now an hour or so every few days.

This guilt and pain has also made me more sensitive to my brothers — their pains, forgiving their slights, seeing without judgement.

I wish that I had learned these things another way, but — after the fact — without justifying what I did, I learned them this way.

I believe you can only understand your capacity for tenderness when you understand your capacity for violence.

In my situation, I chose not to contact the ones close to my victim, as it would only hurt them more. But every situation is different.

Flow like the river & be clean,
Salik

"This love is a most energetic thing. It seems to give me a power... I am filled with it. I guess I am on the bottom rung of this spiritual ladder, and climbing it is far from easy; but climbing it has become all that matters when I really think about it.

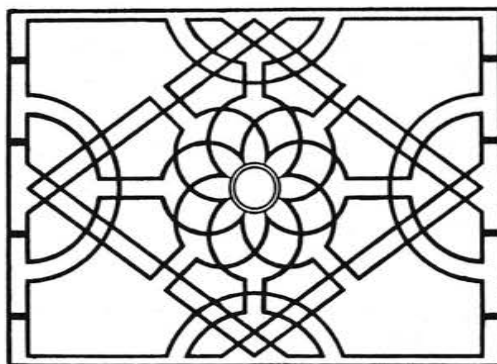
"I was very sad and lonely once and I looked everywhere except to God and had nothing. Now I only look to God and He has given me everything."

*L.S.,
Sandstone, Mn. FCI.*



"Two years awaiting trial in a county jail were not in vain. Freedom from worldly cares, plus some kind but firm spiritual guidance from a distant friend, allowed me to open my heart and let God be at my center to replace the narrow selfishness that had been there..."

*TB,
Stillwater, Mn.*



Ornament from a Persian Koran

"Many pieces of the puzzle are fitting; some I try to POUND in, but then I calm down and continue."

*RW,
W. Va. State Pen*

BULLSHIT OF THE MONTH

I'll be a lot more spiritual, AS SOON AS....





LETTERS

Dear Bo & Sita,

I just re-read your newsletter for March, 1982, and once again your philosophy has touched me.

In 1968, I was beaten, tortured, and gang-raped in a county jail. Although I was released two weeks later, I never really left it emotionally. Even as my fellow inmates were working me over, I forgave them because I had a pretty good idea who my real tormentors were. My cellmates were criminally insane, made that way by a criminally-controlled society.

I know this is judgemental and with this I've struggled for the past fourteen years. I haven't been able to let go of this incident in my mind. Emotionally, the clock stopped for me on Oct. 15th, 1968. Few days have gone by since, that I haven't experienced at least a few moments of shame and self-disgust and the wish for death. For the first few years, I numbed myself with marijuana. But after I stopped using drugs in 1972, I slipped into a depression that lasted until 1980 when I finally began therapy. After two years of therapy, my rage is greater than ever. And now my rape may be a factor in the break-up of my twelve-year marriage. A therapist has warned me that I may have become obsessed with being heard about my assault because of so long a silence.

For the two years before my rape, I had been a fulltime political activist living in the barrios of San Antonio. I published and edited a tiny liberal community paper in Spanish & English. I often marched and demonstrated alone against poverty, against the Vietnam War, against discrimination and injustice of any kind. I was in jail for smashing two closed-circuit television cameras in a restroom of a factory, to help workers publicize their grievances and win their strike. It was my first offense.

You said, "Our greatest acts of violence are how we constantly judge others." I understand these words but I feel so powerless to rid my heart of the

desire for revenge. I know how overloaded you are with pleas of help from the prisons all over the country, but in your prayers, could you please remember me? I do the same for you and all our brothers and sisters in the prison-ashram.

On my forty-sixth birthday, February 14th, I began fasting from solid food. On February 22nd, I cloistered myself inside my leaky, uninsulated camper. I am also not speaking. I communicate only in writing. I am withdrawing from society and — if necessary — from life unless I am blessed with justice and/or enlightenment.

God bless you for your wonderful work.

Namaste
TC, Napa, Ca.

Dear Tom,

You're certainly in our prayers, and in the prayers of thousands of people who will read this in our newsletter. I don't know whether anything I put into words will be able to convey anything useful to you, but I'll try; and maybe between the lines we can communicate as if I were sitting with you in your camper. I wish I could be.

You know that I've been involved for a long time now with people who have gone through the same sort of nightmare as you. I've never met anyone who had an easy time of it, or who looked back and said "Boy, I'm glad that happened," so I'm not going to bullshit you with spiritual fairy tales. But I do know, and have seen, people endure with their sanity and humanity intact — and stronger — after such a horrifying leap into Hell. A friend of ours in a Florida prison wrote a few months ago:

"I am at Polk City. God has used this place to test my inner peace and strength towards being a humble man. I would like to share with you one of the most degrading acts of violence that anyone could go through. Since I've been here I have been raped by twelve people and was

forced to shave my legs and chest. Can there be any kind of violence as low as this? I wonder.

But anyway I am okay and happy because I can truthfully say that I can forgive and forget and still love them as brothers. I pray and meditate on asking God to forgive them for their act of violence.

Am I really happy? Yes. This was my choice because God called me to show other people that forgiveness begins in the heart and if it's a true and honest love then it can show forth good works for all humanity. So now again I am locked up for my own protection. But I am still praying and studying. I shall never quit. I'm not even depressed over all this.

I'd like to thank you for helping me to open my eyes to what's real around me. It makes me realize how much this world needs total peace and love for the Earth itself and for each other. God knows what he is doing."

One part of his letter struck me especially: He started out a criminal and now writes beautiful passages about the real social change that the world needs most; you started out as an activist and then were subjected to the very same experience that turned him into one. Is this God's painful educational process for a few chosen people like yourself to discover the most profound degree of compassion and forgiveness required to really bring about social change? Maybe you really are an activist, Tom; Jesus was. And His response to humiliation and torture has endured as an inspiration to the human spirit for two thousand years.

You've been given an experience which few people could handle. I certainly can't say how I would do. The closest I can come to imagining how hard this is, is relating it to my own 100 mph collision with a tractor-trailer. I've gone through a lot of operations and intense pain during the past 18 years, and I can remember times when the pain just wore me down so much that I didn't know if I could keep going through it. Many times I squeaked through on the thinnest shred of faith or grace, who knows which? But as I kept trying to open around the misery rather than tightening or pushing it

away, every now and then I experienced the transcendence of it that the spiritual life offers. The pain is still pain, and it still hurts like hell when you transcend, but you're big enough to allow it to be a part of you; it no longer takes over completely. Whether I like it or not, physical pain continues to be a part of my daily life and it continues to bring me wisdom. It's just the cut of the cards.

And then there's your pain, different from mine, and the pain of a young mother whose child was raped and murdered; and the pain of the elderly couple robbed and humiliated a dozen times in one year; and the pain of a Canadian friend who fell off a mountain and is permanently paralyzed; and the subtler but equally real pain of so many countless unhappy people whose lives are no more than a succession of confused bleak days and nights; and the list goes on forever.

In a sense, all our forms of pain are different and none of us can quite understand the pain of the others; that's on the personality level, where we hold on to our differences in order to preserve our specialness. But a little farther in (or up), pain is pain is pain is pain, and we all do truly understand all pain, all humiliation, all helplessness, rage and loneliness. And we see that this is not accidental to the human condition or an abomination of it, but rather an integral part of what we're doing here on Earth. As Dennis said, "God knows what he's doing."

What more can I say to you, though, while it's hurting so much? This may all seem like meaningless words as you sit hurting in your camper. All I can do is send this along not for the words, but as a symbol of my love for you and my companionship at this incredibly tough turn of your spiritual journey. If you do decide to get through it rather than to die, imagine the depth of compassion and understanding you can give to others as they suffer in their own forms of Hell! I hope for you, me, and the world that you can emerge from this as that kind of spiritual activist, with a loving heart forged in the hottest fire of pain.

Love,
Bo

Dear Bo & Sita,

I hope this letter finds you exceptionally fine. A lot has happened in my life since I last wrote you. I decided to cut my own foot to get into the hospital. When I cut it I went at the bottom of my foot in which now I'll never be able to run again. Also I got hooked up in a "Battery on another inmate" charge. This dude who was involved in the death of my partner came here and I couldn't back off from trying to take him out after I heard him bragging about it. I took an iron leg off of a chair and walked up behind him while he was playing cards and tried to knock his brains out but it only knocked him out and put him in a coma. I was locked up and now am on maximum security lockdown.

I don't have any regrets at trying to kill him and even if he died and I received a life sentence, I still would not regret it. I know you feel I'm wrong, but I respected my partner's and I's friendship to the extent that I felt what I did, had to be done. I'm old fashioned Bo & Sita, when it comes to values and morals and living by the convict code, but that's me and I've never claimed to be anyone but me.

In eternal friendship,
LH

Dear LH,

I hope our friendship is really eternal, because I want to be straight with you about your letter: It sounds pretty fishy to me. You're busy trying to defend your actions when neither Sita nor I have judged you in the first place. I think you're actually having a battle with yourself and using us as symbols of part of you which feels you blew it when you tried to kill that guy. Otherwise, why tell us at all? The thing is, your actions are one thing, and your attitude quite another. You seem to be busy creating a whole philosophy, which you're calling the "convict code", which would justify what you did as a noble deed committed by a good old-fashioned guy with high values.

But if all that were true, I don't think you'd have so much conflict with it. As far as I'm concerned, the "convict code" is bullshit as is any other code. Each one of us is a person, and we

have to make choices and take responsibility for those choices as individuals. This guy you whacked had brought more suffering into the world by killing your partner and then by bragging about it, and so you went on to bring still more suffering by trying to take him out. And now maybe a friend of his will hear you telling about this noble deed, and he'll try to kill you, and then maybe one of your friends will try to get him and so forth. The state hardly needs the death penalty with good old-fashioned convicts like you around!

I think you've understood the stuff we've sent you over the years, and I think that you knew what this letter would be like before I wrote it; that's why you wrote us. I can appreciate how you hurt over the death of your friend, and how badly it hurts to be around so many crazy people as you are. You must have been hurting pretty badly to hack your foot up as you did. But lying to yourself and creating philosophies of convenience, won't make things better. You don't have to undo anything you've done, right up to this moment; but at some point you have to allow yourself to see it straight if you want to find any measure of your rightful peace. Life is really a much bigger trip than you're allowing yourself to experience; don't think that it's just words and poetic garbage. Keep on keeping on,

Love,
Bo

Dear Bo,

Lately in my meditations, I have been experiencing a feeling of total "nothingness" while at the same time, I am totally aware of every sound, movement, touch, smell, and taste. Sort of an ultra-awareness. By "nothingness" I mean, it feels as though I am not attached to my body, but rather, am just a consciousness. It is very exhilarating, yet frightening. I think this is a state I have been striving for, yet I am scared to continue with it in fear that I will get lost in it or it will control me. I quite honestly don't know where to go from here. I hope you may be able to explain this and advise me.

Sincerely, KN

Dear KN,

Your meditation experiences sound great; I think your fear and curiosity are the only problems. If the experience were really completely empty, the "nothingness" you mentioned, then it would be empty of fear also. So either there's still some fear and thoughts of "where do I go next" happening, or else those things happen right after the experience. Either way, they're just the natural noise of the mind that we all have to deal with in one way or another. It takes a lot of time, just feeling



OFFERINGS

Free subscriptions:

THE MOVEMENT newspaper
Box 19458
Los Angeles, Ca. 90019

SPIRALS magazine
Box 13157
Oakland, Ca. 94661

DREAM NETWORK BULLETIN
333 W. 21st St., #1 FW
New York, N.Y. 10011

EAST WEST JOURNAL, Dept. P
17 Station St., Box 1200
Brookline Village, Ma. 02147

YOGA QUEST
Kripalu Yoga Retreat
Box 120
Summit Station, Pa. 17979

COLLABORATION (quarterly)
Matagiri
Mt. Tremper, N.Y. 12457

Free Materials:

Prison Book Project
Box 6403
Prescott Valley, Az. 86312
(free package of books; also, you can request specific titles)

Matagiri
Mt. Tremper N.Y. 12457
(Books and other materials on the life of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother)

Institute for Advanced Studies
of World Religions
2150 Center Ave.
Fort Lee, N.J. 07024
(booklets on Buddhism in Chinese or English)

the fear, seeing the thoughts, letting them come up and pass again and again and trying not to get sucked into them. Just try to remember that fear is a hype, and so is "what happens next?" You can't prevent them from occurring, but you can share the stage with them rather than getting bumped off. Have faith that your spiritual guides, that God, is supervising your progress and allow the experiences to open you up like a flower.

Much Love,
Bo

Other Offerings:

Lucis Trust Library
866 United Nations Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10017
(lending library; please have a prison staffer sign for responsibility of books)

Spiritual Catalog
Paul Dempsey
Box 818
Atascadero, Ca. 93423
(listing of 226 tapes and books available from him and other sources)

Triangles, Dept. P
866 U.N. Plaza, Suite 566-7
New York, N.Y. 10017
(worldwide prayer link-ups between groups of people at certain times every day)

Prison Program
Diamond Sangha
2119 Kaloa Way
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822
(advice and guidance in zen practice)

Christ Brotherhood
Box 11051
Eugene, Ore. 97440
(a new and completely revised book, THE GOSPEL, free to all)

ICOA (Int'l. Center of Alternatives)
Box 1107
Chatsworth, CA. 91311
(a host of periodicals, books, and study materials)

East West Foundation
Box 1200
Brookline Village, Ma. 02147
(information on macrobiotic diet)

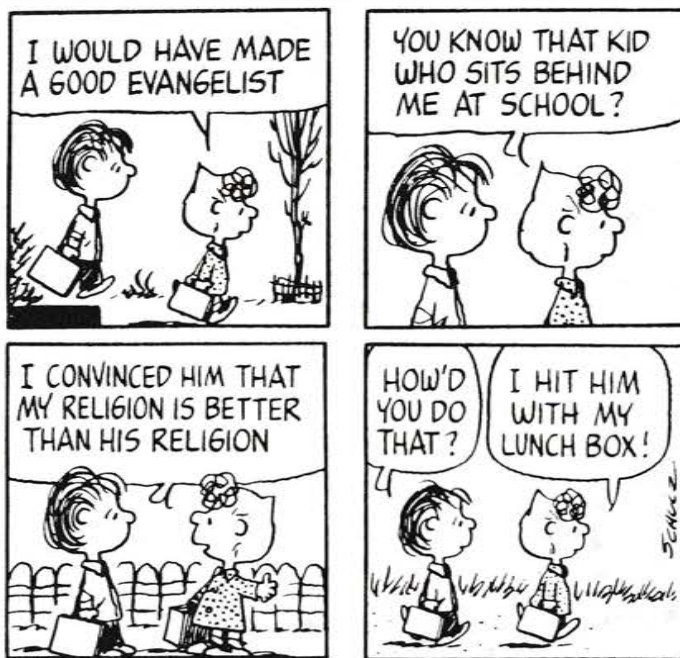
Cosmic Word Jumble

Here are five words associated with the spiritual journey. Unscramble them and write them in the blanks, and the circled letters will spell the missing word in the sentence below.

"Every Moment of Our Lives is _____."

- 1) s n e e f s r o v i g _ _ _ _ _ o _ _ _ _ _
- 2) r w k o _ _ _ o _ _
- 3) n i t t d o a m i e _ _ _ _ _ o _ _ _ _ _
- 4) e c e p a _ _ _ _ o _ _
- 5) e f o d e r m _ _ _ o _ _ _ _ _

answers below



Answer to "Cosmic word jumble":

1) forgiveness 2) work 3) meditation 4) peace 5) freedom
Every moment of our lives is Grace.

The Prison-Ashram Project is one part of Hanuman Foundation, a non-profit service organization. The Project began in 1973 as an aid to prisoners and others who are trying to use their time for spiritual awakening. Our work has been in three main areas:

- 1) Developing and distributing books, booklets, and tapes offering ideas & practices from many spiritual traditions.
- 2) Prison workshops, public lectures, and training seminars led by director Bo Lozoff.
- 3) Consulting, networking, helping other projects to get started, connecting prisoners to a wide variety of other resources.

Our materials are sent free of charge to prisoners, prison staff, or volunteers. Others are asked to make a donation, if possible, to help cover costs. Our books INSIDE-OUT #1 & #2 are now out of print, but INSIDE-OUT #3 is in the works and will be published as soon as possible. Newsletters are sent out about four times a year.

The Prison-Ashram Project is supported solely by private contributions. Donations are always needed and welcomed, and are fully tax-deductible. INSIDE-OUT #3 alone will require about \$40,000 for the first printing of 30,000 copies. Newsletters cost up to \$3,000 per issue. All correspondence and donations should be sent to:

Prison-Ashram Project
Rt. 1, Box 201-N
Durham, N.C. 27705