

PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT

A LITTLE NEWS MAGAZINE

SUMMER 1989

WALKING THE WALK

A dog is not considered a good dog because he is a good barker. A man is not considered a good man because he is a good talker. -- Chang Tsu

Everybody wants to find happiness, but almost nobody studies the map. -Bo

If all the prison gates across the world opened tomorrow; if all prisoners were released with no strings attached; how long do you think all those millions of people and their families would be happy and enjoying life to the fullest? Really; don't just smile and say to yourself, "a long damn time," or "long enough." Think seriously about it. Do you honestly believe that the overwhelming majority of ex-cons would be happy and stay happy? In your heart, you know they wouldn't. Also in your heart, you may have serious doubts about whether you would be one of the few who find a good life, or one of the many who gradually drift back into the quicksand of confusion, greed, substance abuse, paranoia, violence, etc.

In the past few newsletters, I've written a lot about human service as a major ingredient in a happy life. In *We're All Doing Time*, one whole chapter ("The Path of Service") is devoted to the same ideas. If you feel in tune with the things I've written, it's about time to start walking the walk instead of just talking the talk.

No matter how much you may enjoy dreaming about a warm body, a cold beer and a fast car while you're locked up, none of those will keep you happy if you don't have other, deeper stuff going on in your life. Bodies get cold, beers get warm, and cars break down. Why does life work like that? Because each one of us is supposed to be a hero, a noble figure crafted in the image of God -- not just a selfish pleasure-junkie forever chasing everything that the advertisers cram down our throats. We're supposed to be alert and good-humored, generous and compassionate, courageous and open-minded. We're supposed to leave things better than we found them, leave people happier for having met us, leave the Earth more alive rather than closer to destruction because of our presence.

So now it's time to ask yourself what you're doing, right where you are, to be that kind of human being. If you're waiting until you get out, you're missing the whole point. If you think only of yourself while you're inside, chances are it'll be a habit by the time you get out.

Start A Recycling Project In The Joint

Here's a practical idea that could help change your whole life. One of the greatest needs on Earth is to recycle more of Her precious resources. Look around the prison and begin noticing the terrible amount of waste in the form of aluminum cans and paper (glass can be recycled too, but there's not much glass allowed in most prisons). In the visiting area alone, on a weekend day, there are probably several whole barrels of soda cans that are trucked out with all the other garbage to a local landfill. And nowadays, almost every type of paper -- not just newspapers -- can be recycled. Think about how many pounds of newspapers, books, mail, and magazines get tossed out every day in your prison. And all the computer paper from the prison offices. Now multiply that by thousands of prison. This is a sin. The Earth is strangling in our waste, and prisons are high-waste institutions. It's time for prisoners to walk the walk, and take action about this.

Most communities have some sort of recycling agency. If you can't find out who or where is the closest one to your prison, then write to:

Environmental Defense Agency -- Recycling
257 Park Ave. South
NY, NY 10010

They'll send you an informational packet with everything you need to know about recycling, plus the name & address of your closest recycling agency. The idea would be to explain your situation to the closest agency and ask them if they would be willing to make a special weekly or monthly pick-up at the prison if you're able to arrange it with the administration. Then pick out the most likely staff member at the prison and try to convince him or her of the value of your idea. Explain that it would be good for the Earth, good for you, good for the other inmates who would want to be involved, and good p.r. for the prison (you could even show them this article and the EDF packet). Explain that it would also make the prison less of a burden on the

community by slowing down the need for more landfills. Your local county commissioners might be very interested in that angle. Landfills are an increasing problem in nearly every community. You may find that you can even spur the whole community on toward a better recycling program inside and outside your prison. It's one of the greatest common needs we all have, so it's a great cause for you to get involved with.

Your local recycling agency may be willing to help you put together a proposal to the administration -- details such as how many separate containers are needed, how the materials must be sorted for pickup, and so forth. On your end, you can put together a recycling crew of inmates who are willing to help out. When you present your idea to the administration, make sure it's clear and to the point. Let them see you've done your homework and you know what you're getting into.

There's a good chance the recycling agency may pay for all those cans and papers. If that's the case, part of your proposal could be to set up a special "human kindness" account with that money. This account would be used solely for charitable purposes as voted on by your recycling crew, and approved by your staff sponsor. You could send donations to charities, or respond to a local news article about a sick child, or a family whose home burned down, or a shelter for the homeless, etc. Or you might use some money every now and then to sponsor a special activity in the prison, like holiday gifts for the inmates in sick bay, or bringing in a concert or an out-of-town speaker. Or maybe an inmate's mother or family runs into a temporary rent problem or medical bill, and that inmate could apply to your group for some emergency help.

Human Kindness Committees

With or without funds from a recycling project, you can form that sort of Human Kindness Committee anyway. This can be a group of people who simply pay attention to stories in the local newspapers and on radio or TV news, or even around the prison itself, and come together to decide how they may be able to help, in big ways or small. If there's already an active group in your prison, like the Jaycees or some other organization which does works of kindness, then join it. Maybe the existing group can even propose the recycling project.

Whatever the details, a few things are very simple and clear:

- 1) Problems exist which you can help solve; suffering exists which you can help relieve.
- 2) However much energy you put into "good works", you'll get back more than you give, in terms of your own happiness and sense of self-worth.
- 3) If you're looking for an excuse not to do anything, you can always find one.

Making A Life Of It

We sometimes get letters from prisoners who are about to be released, who have read our books and newsletters and taken all this stuff to heart. They write things like, "I want to work with you and Sita when I get out, so I can help people like you do." Well, you don't have to work with us to help people. Ours is a very quiet project with no other full-time staff. And the solitude of our lives would bore most people to death. But the idea to make a life of helping others is right on, and we're doing everything we can to help find opportunities for you to do it.

For example, Habitat for Humanity (see the resource section in this newsletter for the address) is a great organization which builds homes for the poor. There are over 350 Habitat projects in this country, and many more worldwide. Being a full-time Habitat "volunteer" usually means receiving room & board plus a small monthly salary. Habitat has already accepted ex-cons in the past. The folks at their international headquarters are very willing to consider applications from prisoners getting ready to be released. I've also sent a letter recently to all 350+ local projects so that we can begin building a good list of the ones most willing to receive letters or applications directly. For people who are genuinely interested in starting a brand-new life outside of prison, I can't think of a more fulfilling, exciting way to go. Imagine a whole new start for your life -- doing good, hanging out with really fine people, discovering how much power you truly have to help others.

We're trying to find other large human-service organizations like Habitat which will welcome ex-cons, but the truth is, we're not getting much response. But we'll keep at it so that we can build a good resource file for you if you decide to try a lifestyle of kindness. But with or without our help, you are each responsible for walking your walk -- for living according to the best things you believe in. There may be less money in it, you may have to leave some old friendships and fantasies behind, but a fresh start in life may be worth whatever you're giving up. As Jesus once said, "Take courage and be of good cheer." We have to have faith that our lives will begin moving in a better direction if we take a few right steps.

RESOURCES

Habitat for Humanity has welcomed applications from a few ex-prisoners at a time and will continue to do so. The bulk of Habitat's work is done by close to 400 different local projects scattered around the country. Although it is somewhat tedious, a person wanting to apply to one of those affiliate projects is best off contacting that project directly.

A second way to be involved with Habitat in the U.S. is to work here at our headquarters. Whereas most of the work in local projects is actual building, most of our work here is office and administration. Again, we use mostly "volunteers" but can provide furnished housing with utilities and a subsistence stipend for them. It might be a good place for someone to "get back on his/her feet." We do welcome applications from prisoners who will be released. I admit to being somewhat more careful with references but I have invited a steady stream over the years to join us here. I would not want to get overwhelmed with such applications however.

I admire and support the work you do. God bless you,

MARK LASSMAN-EUL,
VOLUNTEER SERVICES
HABITAT FOR HUMANITY
HABITAT & CHURCH STREETS
AMERICUS, GA 31709

Spiritual Paradigms -- a non-sectarian spiritual journal published quarterly that addresses the underlying purpose and reasoning behind: - why each being is assigned a different path of lessons to travel that culminates in a common goal; - the process of becoming by experiencing one's own soul in its entirety through the actualization of destiny. For your FREE copy, write:

REV. H.L.B.
BOX 1308
ALAMOGORDO NM 88311

The PEN American Center Prison Writing Program administers an annual writing competition for incarcerated writers, and provides information and referrals to inmates about writing and publishing.

PEN PRISON WRITING PROGRAM
868 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, NY 10012

The Insider -- for prisoners by prisoners -- is an inmate news magazine from Riverfront State Prison seeking original material of relevance to prisoners. Poetry, articles on drugs, health issues, complaints about a particular prison or the system in general, or any topic of interest to prisoners and their loved ones. To submit material or for information on subscribing, write:

ANTHONY FRANKLIN, EDITOR
THE INSIDER
RIVERFRONT STATE PRISON
BOX 9104
CAMDEN NJ 08101

OTHER NEWS

Update on Texas Book-Banning

As mentioned last time, Bo's new book, *Lineage and Other Stories*, has been banned from all Texas state prisons. Although prisoners and prison administrators all over the world think the book is very helpful, the Texas Department of Corrections has been completely unyielding in their decision that *Lineage and Other Stories* would be a bad influence on their prisoners.

Over 1,000 Texas inmates want to read *Lineage and Other Stories* (probably more, now that it's been banned), and are waiting for us to resolve this. The Supreme Court has recently given prisons more censorship power than ever before, so the law will probably not help much in this case. Our only chance may be through public pressure, letters to the TDC, newspaper articles, and so forth.

In our last newsletter we asked you to write the TDC and let them know how you feel about this. Out of 17,000 people who receive our newsletters, only about 100 took the time to write. Once again we invite you to stand up for Texas prisoners by writing a letter to the address below, and please send us a copy. In addition, if you have any contacts in the media -- newspapers, magazines, TV, radio -- please see whether they may be interested in doing a story about why this simple little book of four short stories seems to present such a threat to the great state of Texas.

We don't have the resources to mount a huge publicity campaign ourselves, so much of what happens will be up to you. Come up with your own ideas about who may help to bring attention to this situation. Maybe local or national anti-censorship groups you may know of? Your church or meditation group or civic organization? Talk shows?

If you haven't read *Lineage and Other Stories*, that would surely be a good place to start. It's free to prisoners and only \$7 to non-prisoners. If you have read the book, you know that there's not a word in it which would be harmful to any reader. The stories are about all of us who have to face challenges and develop courage, self-honesty, kindness, humor and wonder. The stories are inspiring, not destructive. Let's see what we can do together to persuade the Texas Department of Corrections to reverse its decision. The address is:

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
DIRECTOR'S REVIEW COMMITTEE
BOX 99
HUNTSVILLE TX 77340

If you'd like to direct a very direct letter directly to the Director himself, his name is James Lynaugh, at the same address (but without "Director's Review Committee").

Todos Estamos Encarcelados Muy Pronto

Our Spanish-language edition of *We're All Doing Time* has taken seven months longer than we expected to typeset and edit, but is finally in paste-up and on its way to the printer. Its title is *Todos Estamos Encarcelados*, and we'll be printing a first run (hopefully) of 5,000 copies.

If you have already requested a copy, you don't need to write us again. If you haven't, or if you have Spanish-speaking friends who want to get on our waiting list, now is the time to let us know.

LETTERS

Dear Bo,

Greetings and best wishes from death row. It has been many years since I was able to write to you and received my last letter from you folks before you went down to NC. I lost your address during a shakedown and then spent five years in a strip cell in total 24-hr solitary confinement with no contact with anyone. No yard, no radio, no TV, no property, in a bare stone cell with a solid steel door. Your lessons in yoga and meditation worked like a charm and kept body and spirits healthy.

After that I got two death sentences for allegedly killing informers in Santa Cruz and I've been on San Quentin's death row ever since. I finally ran into a man who knew your address, and here I am back knocking on the school door looking for lessons and spiritual tools to work with before they snap me out of this incarnation.

I remember when Ram Dass and yoga instructors came in and worked with us in the yard. One of those pictures was published in your first book. Today lots of that class are dead as a result of stickings in Folsom and San Quentin and one was a suicide. I'm still hanging in strong (mid-50's) but all my family died during those years I was in "the hole", and lack of contact blew all outside friends to the four winds.

All this is just an historical update, not a problem or complaint. Every year I get more joy-filled, relaxed, calm inside and really free. I'm a happy man and content with life and its gifts. Total isolation has a way of forcing you to see yourself minus the deceptions, masks, lies and self-deceit and excuses. The "dark night of the soul" period is a real bummer but you come out into the Light a lot freer and absent any anxieties, fears, rage, resentments, and hostility. Plus, you don't judge or condemn as easily.

I'm happier now and saner than I've been in over fifty years. God keeps drawing you back to Him no matter how dumb you are or how much you resist.

Enough about me. I hope you both are happy and well. I'm very proud of you, you're still out there doing your best for people like us who the rest of society has completely written off. You are good people who live and practice your love and dreams for mankind. Your early teaching and courses in meditation, yoga and looking at reality with humor and patience gave me the path and tools to come through an experience I wouldn't even want to describe to sane folks.

Let me know what you have been up to and whether you've written any new books and how you are doing in your journey. I care a lot and have kept you both in my prayers for 10 years.

with full respect and love, R

Hello my friends,

I've read and am now studying your book, *We're All Doing Time*. It's been a genuine pleasure in my life. A friend, while doing some housekeeping, dropped it on me. Now, to be honest, it sat in my own cell for quite some time, and even wound up in the garbage can once, before for some unknown reason, I dug it out and decided to pass the time by reading a few pages. Eureka!(smile). Bo, how happy I am I made that decision! Your book has given life

to some of the best feelings I've ever experienced in twenty-nine years on this earth.

Bo, I should parole in seven or eight months, so my being in prison (for the second time) is really the least of my problems. I have a high-school sweetheart who's graced me with a beautiful son and daughter. She's been more or less the stable one in our family, keeping us growing together for twelve years now. I'm lucky, because as a family, we're still very much in love and supportive of one another. Which in turn makes for change toward the "light" that much sweeter.

Bo, my problems stem from the ghosts of my past. On nearly a daily basis, I'm confronted with confusion and the haunting knowledge of some dirty deeds of my past.

Because of lack of evidence, I was never brought up on charges in two separate murders. I still feel strong (at times) about the reason which led up to both acts, and what remorse I feel is more so for the loved ones rather than the victims themselves. However, I feel a great need for understanding in hopes of growing past these ugly chapters in my life.

Bo please, any advice, literature or correspondence you could offer would very much be appreciated. I hope to become your friend. Please keep in touch.

Please keep in touch, D

Dear D,

I notice Sita sent you a copy of *Lineage and Other Stories*, which I hope you've received by now. After reading your letter and giving it some thought, I think the very best, most useful answer I can give you is the story called *The Saddest Buddha*. It feels like it was written specifically for you. Like the character in that story, you definitely have some opening to do about the pain you've caused. And like that character, that opening will be a very personal experience.

I certainly don't think you have to confess to old crimes in order to deal with this thing. Our justice system is a whole other set of crimes. If you have a good attitude and you've rehabilitated yourself and are getting back to your family, why complicate that? A good and moral life, being of value to society, doing volunteer work to help others, etc., would be a far better way of "paying" for your crimes than going back to court and to prison.

If you've brought pain into the world, then resolve to live in a way that helps reduce pain. Let your guilt guide you to become a better person. You don't need to let it keep beating you up with no productive end in sight.

But do read the story and try to understand then what I mean about opening to your pain and guilt.

Keep working, Bo

Dear Bo,

How is it going? Thanks a lot for the books. They really help. They came right on time because I got put in the hole for hitting an inmate in the head with a lock (assault charge). So they dropped my good time and going to send me to a major pen. I'm on a camp now. I'm not but nineteen, and the camp I'm at is mostly young blacks, mostly from D.C. These fellows have real attitude problems. Nobody here is over 26 years old. All the whites

are scared of the blacks, and do not stick up for each other. You know the "I didn't see anything" attitude. This does not include me.

You see, I have fairly long hair and the face of my mom. I am a metal head. This helped me on the street (reel in the ladies) needless to say, but it is a handicap in prison. It is just dragging out my four-year bit. These guys take me for soft, but what they don't know (well, they do now) is that I was raised on fist-fighting, and I can go.

I will have been on this camp three months on the 28th of February, and have been in three fights. I know it will be a lot worse at a major, but I will keep swinging until I can't swing no more, or until you write me with a solution about this problem.

All the happiness in the world to you and Sita, you are in my heart and prayers.

Love, C

PS: After I fight, I pray for my opponent. I have learned a great amount from We're All Doing Time. Thanks.

Dear C,

Getting into fights is one of the toughest problems faced by prisoners who are trying to live more peacefully without becoming a target. I'm not going to give you a Sunday-School answer like "Well my son, you must never lift a hand against a fellow human being." I know it's not that simple. But on the other hand, there are a lot of good, upstanding convicts who know how to steer clear of most fights. Maybe you need to ask yourself how many fights are absolutely unavoidable, as opposed to your pride and anger being part of your motivation.

In other words, there's more than one way to stand up for yourself. You can do it in a way that makes a fight less likely, or in a way that makes a fight more likely. If your biggest aim is for both of you to walk away unhurt, I think you can achieve that in a lot of situations. For example, don't try to "win" the battle of words; don't be sarcastic or arrogant or threatening. If you handle yourself with respectfulness, you can still make it clear that you're not going to be somebody's punk or take too much shit, but you can do that in a way that lets the other guy off the hook instead of making him feel like he's lost the game he tried to run on you.

Believe me, I know it's hard to keep your cool when the other guy is being an asshole. But a lot of things in life are hard, and we still have to do the right thing. The right thing is to avoid a fight whenever you can. If somebody calls you names, you can live with that. If they start ripping off your property or threatening violence, you can talk to them and make it clear that you really don't want to fight, but you will if you're forced to. Reason with them, like, "Hey, I'm sure we've both been in lockup enough times already, right? Let's just leave each other alone." Treat them with the respect you wish they had toward you.

I know plenty of guys who have done years of time with no fights. You have to ask yourself whether you want to keep winding up in the hole (or possibly worse) or whether it's time to adopt a more mature, nonviolent attitude so you can do the rest of your time and get on with your life. I'd hate to see it end in prison. And of course, that's what meditation, prayer, the breathing practices, etc., are for. They help you think straight and see more clearly. They help you control your temper and eventually change your attitudes a great deal. If you're not doing any daily

practices, it would be a good idea to start. We're All Doing Time ain't just a bunch of words; it's a guide to help you change your life to be more in tune with how you'd like to be.

I love you, Bo

Dear Bo

I've been helping the AIDS patients so well that they have me working in the hospital at nights, until they can hire some new nurses aides. Now I'm working from seven in the morning 'til ten at night, seven days a week, taking care of my brothers in need.

At night, I take care of the paralyzed patients and also brain-dead. Some of these patients have a lot of money. One of the guys I work with is robbing the patients of their commissary (\$50 every two weeks). That same co-worker is in here for raping a 12-year-old. I caught him putting his fingers in one of the patient's ass. I wanted to kill him, but knew in my heart that wasn't the answer. I confronted the guy, he tried to justify he was only helping the guy move his bowels. There was no reason for this, because the nurse just gave the patient a suppository. The patient can only mumble things, but he told me that my co-worker fondles his penis when changing his diaper. The guy also denies that.

I didn't beat him up. I went back to my cell in a rage and cried. I never cry, but my heart for some reason cried. If I tell the cops, I'll be labeled a snitch. If I kill the guy, I'll end up doing more time, go backwards in my spiritual growth, and never have inner peace. By not doing anything, the patients will remain getting robbed and sexually abused.

I spoke to a few guys and they all tell me to mind my own business, because this happens in all prison hospitals.

Loving people is turning me into a real pussy and a piece of shit. I'm crying and feeling not only for the victims, but also for the attacker, because of the sickness he has, the pain he must have and is now taking out on defenseless victims, and for the karma he is creating for himself.

What the hell is happening to me? Am I the one who is turning sick? Here I am crying and feeling also for a rape-o and abuser, plus not wanting to resort to violence. I have no patience, but I've turned it over to God in prayer. Are you sure everything is perfect? What can I do, because snitching is out? How am I supposed to grow from this?

Your yoga and breathing exercises are helping me and helping my patients.

happy and hurt at the same time, J

Dear J,

You know I can't tell you exactly what to do; this is your test of courage, and no one can take this struggle in your place. But I can remind you that this whole ugly situation is indeed a spiritual lesson for you and everyone involved. It's still true that there are no accidents and that life isn't just a random bunch of events. That doesn't mean everything is beautiful, but it does mean everything is right on time. Horrible sometimes, but right on time.

I don't think you can ignore the whole thing like your friends have advised you to do. This is a test, a lesson. If you ignore it, you'll just keep getting it in other ways. It obviously has something to do with courage and compassion, and it has something to do with deciding who you are. I think you would lose a lot of respect for yourself

if you allowed helpless patients to get robbed and fondled. If you won't help them, who will?

So the question is, what's your perfect response? It seems to me you're painting yourself into a corner. On the one hand, your new spiritual self says you want to save the patients from the guy's abuses, without beating him up or killing him. Okay, that's pretty clear. But then the straight-up convict in you says "snitching is out," which means that you can't discuss this with anyone who may have the power to stop it. So the war is in yourself. If you were only the spiritual seeker, you might tell the authorities what's going on. If you were only a "righteous" con who doesn't believe in snitching, you'd probably use violence to stop the guy.

Maybe there are compromise solutions you haven't thought of. You say you don't want to kill the guy, but does that mean you can't threaten to? Remember the story of the cobra in *We're All Doing Time*? ("I told you not to bite, but I didn't tell you not to hiss!") You mention the guy is a child molester. That means he probably wouldn't be too popular with some of the other cons, especially the guys who are fathers and the guys who don't yet know what he's in for. You might threaten to talk him up in population if he doesn't ask for a transfer out of the hospital job. These are ideas which could keep you within the bounds of the Convict Code and still do your spiritual duty for the patients.

I've got to admit, though, that after sixteen years of working with prisoners, I'm pretty sick of the "Convict Code." It's a set of bullshit ethics laid down by a bunch of gangsters in the '20's and '30's, and just because it has become sacred in prisons, that doesn't mean it's right. I mean, look at what you're saying: You're telling me that if, out of compassion for defenseless, ailing convicts, you told a doctor what this guy is doing, the other cons would hate you more than they hate a child molester who robs paralyzed people, plays with their jollies, and sticks his finger up their asses! Is that the code you want to live by?

Everywhere we go, we come across situations which require personal courage. How we respond to those situations determines a lot of our self-respect and spiritual development. If it were always an easy decision to make, it wouldn't take much courage. What takes courage is to do what you feel is right, even if the whole world thinks you're wrong. It means to do what you think is right even it puts you in danger. Human progress has always been advanced by the people who lay their freedom or their lives on the line for what they know is right. A guy named Edmund Burke once said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing."

I don't know exactly what you should do, but I know you're not a "real pussy and a piece of shit." You're a loving, honest spiritual brother who is encountering a tough test along his Great Adventure. Like all the ancient stories of the trials of Hercules, Jason and the Golden Fleece, David and Goliath and so forth, you and I have the opportunity to become genuine heroes by meeting our challenges with basic human virtues such as self-honesty, courage, kindness, humor and wonder. Life may get dangerous and troublesome and tiring and confusing, but it's also a great mysterious adventure which has payoffs beyond description for the few people who live it as such.

Please let me know how you're doing and what you decide to do. Sita and I care very much.

Love, Bo

Dear Bo,

Hello! Thank you for your honest and caring letter concerning the abuse of my patients. I had already done what I felt was right to stop the abuse, but your letter sure gave me some well-needed peace. I let the nurses know what's been happening and they now have an investigation going on. I guess you would think I'm happy, but I'm not happy. Their investigation consisted of buying the one patient a new combination lock for his locker, where only the cops have his combination. The nurses, doctors, and cops don't give two fucks about the sexual abuse.

The cops would be in all kinds of trouble if the guy was proven to be sexually abusing the patients. They could also be held for legal damages, so they just call the guy a "sick motherfucker". The nurses don't want it proven because the guy would be fired, and he does all their work. Even work he's not qualified to do. He's also teaching the nurses to speak Spanish. Nothing but fucking politics. I "care," so I didn't just give up. I threatened to kill the dude, and gave him a chance to fight me, but he punked out. I'm also telling everyone in population what he's doing and what he's in for. I'm trying to make his life hard.

My job always seems to be on the line, because I try to get what the patients need. A simple thing like taking the patients out to the yard for fresh air has the cops trying to jam me up, because it makes their job harder. They have to walk to the yard with us and open the gate. Real hard work, right?

I got a nurse who gives me a hard time just because I get a 77-year-old patient out of bed to shit in the toilet instead of his diaper. They tell me it's quicker, easier, and cleaner to let him continue shitting in his diaper. I'm trying to build the guy's spirit up so he will "live". The man has already stopped eating. No one else is even trying to build his spirit up. I'm just trying to grasp at anything that might work.

I got bawled out and threatened because I tried to reassure a patient's family that I was giving him the best care possible. I told the family also that he wasn't eating, and to please build his spirits up. The cop told me not to tell the family members anything, because the families need to remember that they are in a prison hospital and not a regular hospital. They tell me this also every time I ask for something for one of the patients. I think that's bullshit. Patients are human and deserve the same care any patient on the outside gets. The system talks about rehabilitating and helping inmates, yet when those inmates truly need help and rehabilitation, the system turns its back on them.

I had something else happen I want to share with you. It has to do with a lesson I learned in false judgements and caring or helping. A patient kept asking his counselor for help in getting certain legal work done. The counselor came to see the guy and became angry with the patient because he wasn't comprehending what he was saying. Turns out, the patient is a little slow and can't read or write. I found this out by asking him if he needed help. The patient is serving time for child abuse. I put that aside for a second and sure got a surprise! He had a letter (certified) from the Child Welfare Services. This letter states that the agency found no wrongdoing on his part. The story was made up by his ex-girlfriend. Him being slow, and not able to read or write, he copped to five-fifteen years. He blew his chance for an appeal because he didn't understand that it had to be filed within 30 days. He didn't even know that the letter clears him. I'm writing the

legal aid lawyer that represented him to see what can be done. A lesson in judgement.

You mentioned in your letter that my true struggle is between being a convict and just being myself (caring). I could hug you for that statement. You made me face the truth. First, I'm now ridding myself of my old convict morals, and just doing what I feel is right in my heart. I've discovered why so many of us choose to be convicts instead of true individuals. A "convict's" life is simple: Block out all feelings and emotions. Follow the majority of other tough guys. When decisions come, don't think, just strike out. Be dependent on the weak and naive to live comfortably in prison (robbing and extorting). Never fail, because we never change. Never feel uncomfortable either, because of never changing. No real responsibilities, never seeing the truth, because we just blame others for everything. If any pain should come along, just hide in drugs and booze.

Being ourselves is being a real tough guy. It involves change, fear, possible rejection, planning, responsibility, honesty, caring, helping others and a whole lot more. Learning only to be myself is not easy, though I need to. Every day a new change or emotion comes up.

Bloom like a flower, J

Dear J,

I admire you for the hard work you're doing on yourself, and I hope that you can go through all of this realizing that you may not make all the right moves, but you're doing as best you can.

I think you should also try to remember the old prayer that goes "Give me the peace to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the

wisdom to know the difference." Some of your frustration has nothing to do with it being a prison hospital. Patient care in this country is really terrible in many hospitals and nursing homes. Thousands of orderlies and aides are frustrated by the nurses, and nurses by the doctors, and doctors by the hospital policies. Your complaints about the elderly patient and your conversations with patients' families -- no matter how heart-breaking -- are extremely typical complaints from medical workers who find out the people around them don't care as much as they do.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not saying you shouldn't try to change anything. All I'm saying is, you need to have a special kind of patience to work in that field without burning out. It sounds to me like you're burning out. You sound wired, tense, depressed, frustrated. You need to take a good, honest look at your own abilities and limitations like the prayer above talks about. How do you think Sita and I feel about all the prisoners' problems and terrible conditions we can't do anything about? If we focused only on those, we'd have burned out long ago. Instead, we focus on what we can do, and many thousands of people, like yourself, are glad that we're still around.

It gets back down to the basics -- meditate, pray, try to clear your mind enough to move through all these complicated areas of life as smoothly and compassionately as you can. And if you find yourself burned out, you may need to step back for awhile to regain your balance. No matter how terrible or wonderful the daily events seem to be, they are not the whole picture. If we keep forgetting that, we'll be suffering more and more instead of stumbling toward the Light.

I love you, Bo

All the universe is but a sign to be read rightly; colors and forms are only put here to speak to us; and all is Spirit, there is nothing else in existence. War and peace, love and separation, are hidden gateways to other worlds and other times. Let us not grow old still believing that truth is what the most people see around them.

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*interviewer to Mahatma Gandhi: "Gandhi-ji, it seems that you worship
sometimes in Temples, sometimes in Churches, sometimes in Mosques. What
is your own religion?"*

*Gandhi replied, "Follow me around for a few days. Watch what I do, how I
walk, what I say, and generally how I conduct myself. That is my religion."*