

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Spring 1995

COMMUNION AND COMMUNITY

"Those in future generations who study and practice the truth of these teachings will be blessed. ... They will attain the insight necessary to perceive the Great Truth. Following this truth with unabashed sincerity, they will become it: Whole, courageous, indestructible, and unnameable."

— Lao Tzu, approx. 2500 years ago (translated by Brian Walker)

Religion was never supposed to be complicated, abstract or distant from our daily life. In fact, both religion and philosophy arise from the *most* real, *most* practical questions of our existence: What are we doing here, and how can we make life work? Every thoughtful person, not just intellectuals or preachers, wrestles with those basic questions at some time or other.

For thousands of years, religions, philosophies, saints and sages have tried to help us find the answers to those two simple questions. We have usually been content to argue and even kill each other over the *differences* in their teachings, but when we let go of such fearful separateness and look honestly at the *similarities* instead, we discover that the great "Wisdom Traditions" all point in exactly the same two directions: Inner transcendence (Communion), and unselfish behavior (Community).

What Are We Doing Here?

The ego is a monkey catapulting through the jungle:
Totally fascinated by the realm of the senses,
it swings from one desire to the next,
one conflict to the next,
one self-centered idea to the next.
If you threaten it, it actually fears for its life.
Let this monkey go.
Let the senses go.
Let desires go.
Let conflicts go.
Let ideas go.
Let the fiction of life and death go.
Just remain in the center, watching.

And then forget that you are there.

— Lao Tzu

In response to the first question, "What are we doing here?," the Holy Ones have all said 1) It's way beyond your understanding, so give up trying to figure it out with the mind; and 2) Look within, look *beyond* the mind, be STILL, go to the Secret Place within the heart. In other words, they point to an experience of direct contact with the Christ—Allah—Great Spirit—The Almighty—Yahweh—Buddha Mind, etc., which can only be found by going inside, past all our notions about self or God. Lao Tzu's poem (below left) sums it up perfectly: **Learn how to remain in the Center, watching — and then forget that you are there.** A word for this which no tradition would argue with is **COMMUNION**. The Great Religions and masters tell us to diligently seek Communion.

How Can We Make Life Work?

In response to the second question, the holy teachings, once again, have each expressed *exactly* the same advice, the same ethics and standards for human behavior: Be kind to one another; love thy neighbor as thyself; do unto others as you would have them do unto you; live for a mightier cause than selfishness; serve the poor; make the world a better place. Another simple, unarguable word sums it up: **COMMUNITY**. The Holy Ones all tell us to dedicate our lives to the Community. Lao Tzu says it in a way that gives us no excuses:

The first practice is the practice of
Undiscriminating Virtue:
Care for those who are deserving.
Also, and equally,
Care for those who are not.

— Lao Tzu

Or, as Neem Karoli Baba put it over two thousand years later, **Do whatever you must with people, but never shut anyone out of your heart, even for a moment.** It's all the same teaching.

As Soon As...

It's easy to think of family and friends as "community," and everyone else as strangers, associates, rivals or even enemies whom we just have to cope with in order to make a living, do our time, get ahead, etc. It's easy to think "I'll practice Community and Communion as soon as I get home from work, as soon as I get out of prison, as soon as my boss stops picking on me, as soon as things smooth out for me, as soon as, as soon as..."

It just doesn't work that way. Our community is exactly where we are at every moment during the day; exactly whom life places in front of us at any time. That's the whole point! That idiot, that lecher, that bully, that pervert, that con, that cop, that snitch, that bureaucrat who drives us up the wall, that windbag politician on TV — everyone we see, hear, or meet must be respected as a brother or sister on the path, even if they have no idea there is such a thing as a path.

Clearly, this practice of Community is not for cowards; it's challenging and confusing, and it's full time. The world has become quite a mess from people only practicing it on the Sabbath, or in places where it's easy, or with people who are nice. We need some humble heroes who take it on full time. This means you. Now. Today.

Not as soon as, but now. Not when you get happier, but now. Not when people treat you more fairly, but now. Not when the world is a safer, kinder place. **NOW**. In the middle of the worst of it.

No one else in the world can play your unique role. God *knows* where you are, *knows* about your depression or anxiety, the people you face, your weaknesses, your past, your fears and doubts. Communion and Community are not for later, they are your ticket out of Hell! If you decide to devote your inner life to Communion and your outer life to Community, that little suffering self doesn't have anywhere to exist!

Don't just say it or plan it; act on it today even in the *tiniest* ways. If you are in prison, think about how long you have been there, and then ask yourself honestly whether the prison or anyone in it is better off because you have been there. Get to work. Make Communion and Community real. If you spend even a *moment* in humble silent reflection, if you help even one person or creature to feel safer or more loved, you will be on the road to the Great Recovery.

The Great Recovery

The Great Recovery is from the terrible addiction of self-centered living. That's the recovery all the prophets and sages have encouraged us to seek. Our whole modern world is hooked on looking out for #1, yet the more we do it, the worse we feel. So we up the dose of selfishness. It's classic addiction.

If the ancients are right — that Community and Communion are the only ways we're ever going to feel the joy of being alive, then imagine how it might feel if a whole nation lost touch with both Community and Communion. What would that be like? Well, as the late American sage Joseph Campbell said, "Just pick up the New York Times or turn on the TV. We're living in what it would be like."

And it's pretty sad. It reminds me of the dogs at the race track who never get to catch the rabbit. Not only do they not get to catch it, but it wasn't even a rabbit in the first place — just painted plywood! That's how we and our kids are getting ripped off daily by chasing after all the "stuff" that's supposed to make us happy but never will.

The only way we can restore Community and Communion in our society is first to restore it in our own lives: Just practice community in everything we do, and take time each day to seek communion beyond all names, forms, or identities.

Going It Alone

Few of us are ever in the ideal situation where everyone around us changes at the same time, or all the rules suddenly become fair. Most of the time we have to start this humble hero's journey by ourselves,

with little or no support.

But then we receive the *invisible* support of Truth itself, because Community and Communion are a truer way than fear and selfishness. As Malcolm X discovered in prison, there is soul-power in taking a True Path. The harder it is, the more soul-power we gain. If it weren't so hard, we wouldn't gain so much commitment, courage, and faith. If it weren't so hard, Jesus, Mohammed, Moses, Buddha and the rest would have preached to us from comfortable thrones instead of showing us the way through persecution, discomfort, rejection. It's hard because that's what it takes to move us beyond the ego; once we do, life isn't so hard anymore; even with all the same conditions in place, we find true peace and dignity.

AS SOON AS....



Is There Truth In Your Goals?

Sita and I have visited a lot of treatment programs lately, both in and outside of prisons. We've spoken to a lot of people who have been through the doors not just once, but two, three, four, five times — good people with decent hearts and a lot of sincerity, but who seem to keep finding themselves caught in addiction.

They ask why? Why can't I lead a good life? Why do I keep screwing everything up? I asked many of them what their treatment goals were, and received the same answer I've heard for over twenty years: *"I just want to stay clean and sober, get a decent job, get back with my family, have a nice little place to live, a decent set of wheels... I'm a good person; I deserve it, don't I?"*

Those goals sound right, don't they? They would be applauded on Oprah or Donahue. But are they enough to create a happy life? "Me and mine" is basically what they amount to. "Me and my family." The practice of Community gets reduced to just a few people you love the most. And Communion gets shoved aside by the never-ending effort to catch all those plywood rabbits. Even if you're chasing them for your family and not yourself, they're still just plywood.

The *fascinating* thing is, if you investigate the anatomy of recovery failures — and most recidivism in general — you find two types — one which occurs during the first year, and the other between the second and third years.

The people who go back to using drugs (or other crime) during the first year seem to crumble because they fail to achieve one or more of those standard goals: Their spouse kicks them out, or they can't find a decent job, etc., and they give up pretty quickly. It *seems* like an easy situation to understand: They didn't reach their goals, so they got discouraged and gave up.

But here's the fascinating part: The people who crumble between the second and third years, seem to fail because they reach the goals. Everyone has been there for them, gone out on a limb for them, they're loved and fed and employed... and that old constant craving begins again, and they keep it as a deep secret, until they are filled with shame and guilt, thinking "I must be a really horrible, ungrateful person to be craving drugs again after everyone has helped me so much; I must be rotten to the core." From there it's a pretty quick slide to "I may as well go ahead and get it over with; I'll never be any good, and they all may as well find out already."

The real tragedy is, they're not horrible people, they simply didn't understand that their "me and my family" goals were simply not big enough goals. They got what they wanted, and something inside was still empty and craving, because "me and mine" is not enough to make a

whole, happy human being. Not wickedness, but simple ignorance, was responsible for their failure. Has it happened to you, too? Will it happen next time?

Hit The Ground Running

If you're getting out soon, what has been your attitude about life on the streets? Has it been about showing up in your neighborhood and saying, "Sorry I've been gone; how can I help out?" or has it been more like "First I want to... and then I want... and boy, I've missed... and I hope that I can get... and there'd better be some good programs for me....and my family had better help me..."?

Please try to understand that your family and friends have probably been struggling just as much as you have; life is pretty hard everywhere. If you want the soul-power of truth to be with you, then show up and start helping out. Hit the ground running. Make it clear that their lives will be easier now because you're home, not harder. Apologize for being away while they needed you.

Plug into the problems in your community and share your experiences and ideas. We need you out here, I assure you. The kids in your neighborhood especially need to meet some truly good people who are not lily-white goody-goody, but are real, like you. Neither lie about your past, nor carry on about it. Let them meet a real adult who has been humbled by his or her pain, and is transforming it into compassion, peace, and simple happiness. Give your life away to your community and see what you get back.

Breathing Out, Breathing Out, Breathing Out.....

But remember Communion as well as Community. Trying to dedicate yourself entirely through outward activity, no matter how much you seem to be helping others, will sooner or later chew you up and spit you out if you don't take time for inner silence. It's like trying to breathe out all the time without breathing in. How long can that last? Be sure you breathe in, too, so that you're helping others from a deeper place.

Now You're An Expert On Religion

If you know — really know — that all religions boil down to Communion and Community, you could meet the Pope or the Dalai Lama, an imam or minister, rabbi or shaman, and they would welcome you as a holy friend and agree that you understand the heart of their religion: An inner journey beyond all words, and an outward path of devoting ourselves to others. Countless different *methods*, but they all lead in those same two directions. Now we know the road. Let's travel it together.

*I Love You All
Bo Log!*

Reading spiritual books is like reading the menu at a restaurant. Don't forget you must eat the meal.

— Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche



The Well

Up there each one gets what he wants. I came there a wounded man, sorely hurt by my brothers. I went to the well as directed and shouted down: "Solitude!" And that's what I got. What a relief! You have no idea. How I needed that rest.

After a few years, however, I began to long for community. I thought of the example and teaching of Christ. Was it right to be alone so much? So I went to the well. "Community," I shouted. I got it. Beautiful — for a while.

Well, there were ups and downs. At one point it got so distressing that I went to the well and shouted, "Death." I died. Peace at last. My troubles were over. I really enjoyed it.

It wasn't long, though, before I got to thinking, "Well, life — at least you're alive — it isn't all that bad. It's up to you. It's what you make of it. And you can help people. Here — what can I do?"

I began to wish I could go to the well and get back my life. But I couldn't get there, and if I could have, I had no breath to shout. I was just dead. Couldn't someone else go and shout for me? It didn't seem to occur to them. They saw me lying there, but no one thought to bring me back to life. Why were they so thoughtless, so selfish?

At last someone did think of it. He went to the well and called down, "Life for my brother." I rose from the dead. Oh, to be alive again, to breathe, to see, to walk, to hear, to relate to people.

But where was that man who raised me up? I asked everyone I met, "Have you seen the man who raised me from the dead?" They thought I was crazy. "No one comes back from the grave." "Called down the well for you? You call down for yourself, not for someone else." I searched all over. And you know, I passed many a grave before it finally occurred to me that someone else might be longing to return to life. I ran to the well. "Life for my brothers!" Ah, then I saw in the water way down there the face of the one who raised me from the dead.

— from *Tales Of A Magic Monastery*, by Theophane the Monk

PRACTICE: TONGLLEN (“GIVING & RECEIVING”)

Tonglen, an ancient Tibetan Buddhist practice which is frequently misunderstood, can be very powerful as a way of maintaining and strengthening a constant attitude of kindness. I asked Evan R., a prison friend at FCI-Englewood who is a serious practitioner of Buddhism, to write this brief explanation from his own experience of adapting Tonglen to prison life. I hope it encourages you to try it.

— Sita

Literally, “Tonglen” means “giving and receiving” in Tibetan. “Tong” means to give; “Len” means to receive. Although I have read many instructions for doing this form of meditation practice, as an incarcerated practitioner I have developed my own method that works very well for me.

It is important to have a clear state of mind before starting Tonglen, and ending the practice with the same clarity of mind. When practicing for thirty minutes, I like to just sit for ten minutes, do ten minutes of Tonglen, and bring the mind back home for ten minutes. I also break the Tonglen practice into four separate parts as follows:

- 1) Before you can benefit others, you must first have your own peace of mind. I start out by inhaling all of my own pain and confusion, filtering this “muddy” energy with love and compassion, and exhaling the pure white light energy that is inherently stashed away deep in our hearts.
- 2) As we all know, there is an enormous amount of suffering in prison. I like to focus on one noisy voice in the hallway or on the tier that is obviously driven by ego-ridden pain and confusion (I’ve yet to have trouble picking out such a voice). I’ll also sometimes think of some trivial altercation that recently occurred in the chow line, the tv room, etc. As I inhale, I concentrate on taking in all of the pain and confusion that feeds such altercations and noisy folks, and replace that pain on the exhale with warmth and compassion. With each breath, I move my concentration throughout the prison, even sharing some of this warmth with the hacks, who sometimes appear to be the most confused of all.
- 3) I then move my focus beyond the prison walls to my family and friends, and to others that I may have hurt along the way. I usually end up thinking about my young son, laying in his bed at night, wondering when I’m coming home. Once again, on the inhale, I focus my attention on the muddy, smoky suffering, and I try to exhale pure white light bliss energy.
- 4) Finally, it’s time to shoot the moon. I give a moment’s thought to all of the confusion and pain in the world — from the guy in the next cell to the starving children of Rwanda, and everything in between. Once I have a clear picture of this darkness, I again inhale the pain and confusion, filter it with pure unconditional love, and exhale compassion and warmth.

As stated earlier, I spend the last few minutes of my meditation practice just focusing on my breath, and bringing a sense of clarity back home.

The really neat thing about this practice is that it’s a complete tear-down of the ego. Rather than “looking out for number one”, we are looking out for everyone else, by using our own heart as a filter.

The one warning I would give with the practice is not to get caught up in feeding the ego. It would be easy to give yourself praise for taking on such a practice at your own “expense.” I think it’s important not to conceptualize the possibility of any merit gained, but to just treat it for what it is; a practice of compassion — in the truest sense of the word, a practice.

Namaste, Evan

LETTERS

Dear Bo,

I have about three years left on my sentence, and want to ask your advice on something. I was a paramedic for several years, then went to college and became a respiratory therapist/trauma specialist.

Back in the '70's, I hired on as "Activity Director" at a convalescent hospital. There were fifteen young men who were all permanently paralyzed from the neck down — what is called quadriplegic — from gunshots, car wrecks, sports accidents, etc.

I was clueless as to what my work could entail. I was not trained, nor emotionally/spiritually prepared for this job. There was something going on that took me quite a while to figure out. It's intense, fascinating, tragic.

These guys were each developing a strategy to psychologically manipulate me to kill them! To a man they all wanted to be dead. Their preference was an overdose of heroin, but they'd settle for anything.

Nobody warned me about this, so I went in blind and they each took their best shots at reeling me in: First playing hard to get, which made me really suck up to them to do my job; then the "getting to know you" phase, then the "best friend" phase, then "nobody cares about me but you, you mean more to me than my own family, I spoke with my lawyers to make you beneficiary of my \$100,000 life insurance policy...", and so forth.

They would always close with, "How would you feel if you were in my position?" Mercy Bo, I'd rather take the heroin too!

The job became too much for me. I wasn't going to be some great hero/mercy-killer, even if I felt it was right. But man, there wasn't much way you could argue with someone in that condition. I just didn't go to work one day, and never went back.

All these years, my mind has been burdened with what opportunities in life there could be for these "talking heads." I'm going to try to enrich the lives of such patients when I get out, perhaps even make it my career. They lay in a room most of their lives, depending on others to feed them, bathe them, turn them.

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a correctional officer in the California D.O.C. Last month, I was sorting out inmate mail when I saw your newsletter. For some reason, I began browsing through it and was truly amazed at what I read.

For the first time I have been able to get a glimpse of how inmates actually feel inside. That is something I may have never known, had it not been for your newsletter. I feel that I can benefit in my personal life and at work from your publication, so please add me to your mailing list.

Sincerely, S



My hope is to take them to the mountains, to the forests, the beach, let them smell, see, hear the outdoors, watch the sunset. I would like to get some pen-pals who are quads, to help me with new ideas. I am willing to give myself to this project and do the best I can, with God guiding me.

Seeing your perseverance in working with prisoners has made it possible for me to consider this project for my future. Bo, I need to work this out, and I respect your advice.

Love, M

Dear M,

Sounds to me like you have a genuine "calling." We who hear a calling are very lucky, you know.

A few suggestions are:

1) While you're still locked up, get in touch with organizations which do some of the work you've been thinking of — outings, etc. Tell them of your interest and experience, see if you can hook up with them. It's much better to start that way than to create your own nonprofit organization.

2) Also use this time to wrestle with your own attitudes toward quadriplegia. The only way I can deal with people in prison (some in horrible situations) is to know that this is their spiritual journey, it's where they need to be, and holds the same potential for joy & enlightenment that my life does.

If you feel that you'd rather "take the heroin" instead of being a "talking

head," I'm not sure how much value you will have to their deepest needs — which isn't to see or smell the countryside; it's to feel connected to life, which means knowing that your life has purpose and meaning.

Their physical condition is their path. Any of us could be quadriplegic tomorrow. Neither life nor the spiritual journey would be over if that were to happen. Prison has made many things impossible for you, but your life still has meaning, you still have daily opportunities to express kindness or cruelty, to turn your attention inward and experience God. All of that is true for your quadriplegic friends as well. You need to spend some time making peace with this.

You may notice that 1) is an outward step, and 2) is an inward step. I think that's a natural way to pursue anything — a balance of reflection and action. It's great that you're thinking about this now, instead of waiting until you get out. Use this time to flesh out your feelings and plans, and to make connections with people who can help put them into effect. Sita and I send you all our support and encouragement. It's a wonderful blessing to have something to dedicate your life to! Take my word for it.

Love, Bo



Dear Bo & Sita,

I was nervous about going into L prison to do something with Bo's book, with the prisoners. The first couple of visits were kind of strange because I was afraid, and did not know if I could help at all. The last three have been great.

The unit director told me these guys could not sit still for 5 minutes, let alone 15 or 20. He also mentioned that closing your eyes in a room full of cons is not a wise move.

I asked them to sit, breathe deeply and try to quiet their minds. The noise coming from the yard was pretty intense, but in five minutes I was faced with a room filled with twenty cons, who had gotten quiet, were breathing deeply, had their eyes closed, and had taken on the appearance of gentle, quiet men.

They sat this way for nearly thirty minutes, and probably would have continued, had we not run out of time.

This was a profound experience for me. I was with people whom I had been conditioned to fear my entire life. What I found was a bunch of men who loved, feared, hated, and struggled through every day of their lives just like I do.

During this last session we did Bo's meditation where each man looks at another while his partner has eyes closed. I saw one guy who let a tear escape from his closed eyes. Afterward, we all talked about what we had felt while looking at our partners. The circumstances were all different, but the feelings were the same. They talked about their kids, their wives & girlfriends, and about wanting to be loved and wanting to give their love. Who would have thought that this is what I would find here?

In Spirit, R



Dear Bo,

Thank you so much for coming and sharing your message with us here! I do appreciate your embrace and warmth toward me after your talk. I dig what you said about feeling my sadness to its fullest and using it to gain more empathy and compassion. I do care about others and try to spend time helping others, even in here.

But one of my deepest sorrows is my aloneness. I am so jealous of the deep relationship that you and Sita have! I've

spent my life in the can — never had a real love relationship. I am poignantly aware that I am missing something.

The Tao speaks of a deep need to be united with your spiritually complementary partner. Hindus too. Is it possible that I can ever feel complete while so utterly alone? Am I selfish to want this? Do I just desire this, or is it a need?

Thanks for all your love! A

Dear A,

I appreciate how honest you were in the workshop. You helped everyone there to open up. Thank you.

A lot of people on the streets complain that their romantic relationship is the biggest obstacle to their enlightenment. They say "if only I were single, then I could really do spiritual practice." I even know ex-cons who yearn for the simplicity of prison life, complaining that with family, etc., they have no time for meditation.

If we're looking for ways to feel alienated, lonely, and worried, we'll find them. Sita and I are in a relationship, so that's our circumstance to work with. You find yourself not in a romantic relationship, so that's your circumstance. We all have the same choice: To use all our circumstances toward spiritual goals. There are always hard parts of that choice.

And being alone is extremely different from being lonely. Since you quoted

from the Tao, I should mention that Lao Tzu and other Taoist Masters lived in extreme solitude most of their lives — a lot longer than you've been in prison. They chose to be alone.

Being honest with your experience of sadness is important; but justifying the sadness with a philosophy about "complementary partners" is a whole other thing.

I'm sympathetic, you know that. But the whole universe exists right where you are. Bear in mind as you move through your experiences of sadness, regret, longing, etc., that one day you will feel whole and complete, right where you are.

If you can find your completeness in prison, then it will follow you to the street, into a relationship or anywhere else you ever find yourself. If you don't find your completeness where you are, then it won't be "waiting" for you anywhere else. Check out the divorce rate!

If you can find a way to accept your present "assignment" with all your energy, you'll be living as fulfilling a life as Sita & me. Really. We believe in you and love you very much. You have a big heart and a good mind.

Your friend, Bo



NEWS, NOTES, OFFERINGS & GOOD WORKS

PRISONER / EX-CON ART SHOW

An art exhibit is being organized for May, 1995 in the Toronto area. We are seeking prisoner and ex-prisoner artists' work, such as painting, drawings, sculpture, and photos of original tattoo art for this exhibit. If participants wish to sell their work, indicate prices and how that money should be paid (to your prison account or whatever). A photo-copied catalogue of all works will be sent to all participants. For more information, contact:

Tom Jackson
269 Gerrard St. E.
Toronto, Ontario
CANADA M5A 2G3

HIV/AIDS SUPPORT NEWSLETTER

CELL COUNT is the new quarterly newsletter of PASAN (Prisoners HIV/AIDS Support Action Network). It is available free to prisoners and people living with HIV/AIDS (others please try to send donation to cover costs). We welcome articles, artwork, stories, questions, etc. Write:

Zoltan Lugosi, Editor
CELL COUNT
#324 - 517 College St.
Toronto, Ontario
CANADA M6G 4A2
phone (416) 920-9567 1-800-263-9534
(we accept collect calls from prisoners)

a little good news

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*Human Kindness Foundation
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Bo & Sita Lozoff's Spring '95 Touring Schedule

(All meetings are free of charge)

DATE	PLACE	EVENT / CONTACT # (IF OPEN TO THE PUBLIC)
May 9	San Mateo CA	San Mateo Youth Authority (Omega Youth Club)
May 10	San Bruno CA	San Bruno County Jail
May 11	Vacaville CA	California Medical Facility
May 11	Folsom CA	California State Prison - Folsom
May 11	Albany CA	Albany United Methodist Church (980 Stannage St.)(7:30-9:30 PM open dialogue)
May 12	San Francisco CA	Ca Inst. for Integral Studies (1-3 PM, for info: Holos Institute (510) 287-8816)
May 12	San Francisco CA	SF Zen Center (7:30 PM, open dialogue for prison workers, volunteers / for info: Holos Institute (510) 287-8816)
May 13	Dublin CA	Federal Correctional Institution - Pleasanton
May 14	Oakland CA	<i>A Nation Behind Bars — Creating A Safer, Kinder Society</i> (2 - 5 PM, open public meeting, for info: Open Center of the East Bay (510) 524-0798)
May 14	San Quentin CA	California State Prison - San Quentin
May 15	Woodacre CA	Spirit Rock Meditation Center ('Monday Night Class,' for info: (415) 488-0164)
May 16	Chowchilla CA	Central California Women's Facility
May 16	Oakhurst CA	Positive Living Center (7 PM, for info: (209) 683-1299 or 966-1299)
May 17	Tehachapi CA	California Correctional Institution
May 17/18	Atascadero CA	Atascadero State Hospital
May 18/19	San Luis Obispo CA	California Men's Colony
May 21	Santa Monica CA	Agape Church (AM sermon/ PM workshop; contact Unity Imojah (310) 829-2780)
May 22	Chino CA	California Institution for Men
May 22	Frontera CA	California Institution for Women
May 26/27	Snowmass, Colorado	Unity In Yoga Int'l Conference (keynote speaker, for info: (303) 697-9786)