



Every Day Love

Spring
2025

"How often do we recognize the beauty of ourselves?" Jarvis Jay Masters asked me the first time we talked. It was an unusually warm winter day in North Carolina when he surprised me with a phone call on a Friday afternoon. I was happy he called. We had never met and I had wanted to get a vibe for him before our formal interview the following week. I figured it wouldn't be possible. Then he called, right on time it seemed.

We struggled to hear each other yet marveled over the miracle of being able to talk for so long. It's a beautiful thing to connect with someone, despite the difficulties and distance. When we decided to make this newsletter about love, we thought Jarvis might have some interesting thoughts on the matter. We weren't disappointed.

"We've got our imperfections but really, there's nothing out here but love," he began. "Man, a little bit of love makes you a whole lot better. It gives you a better understanding of who you are. A little can be a lot. I've always thought that having some goodness is a whole lot more than what we think it is. I dig that part of where I am."

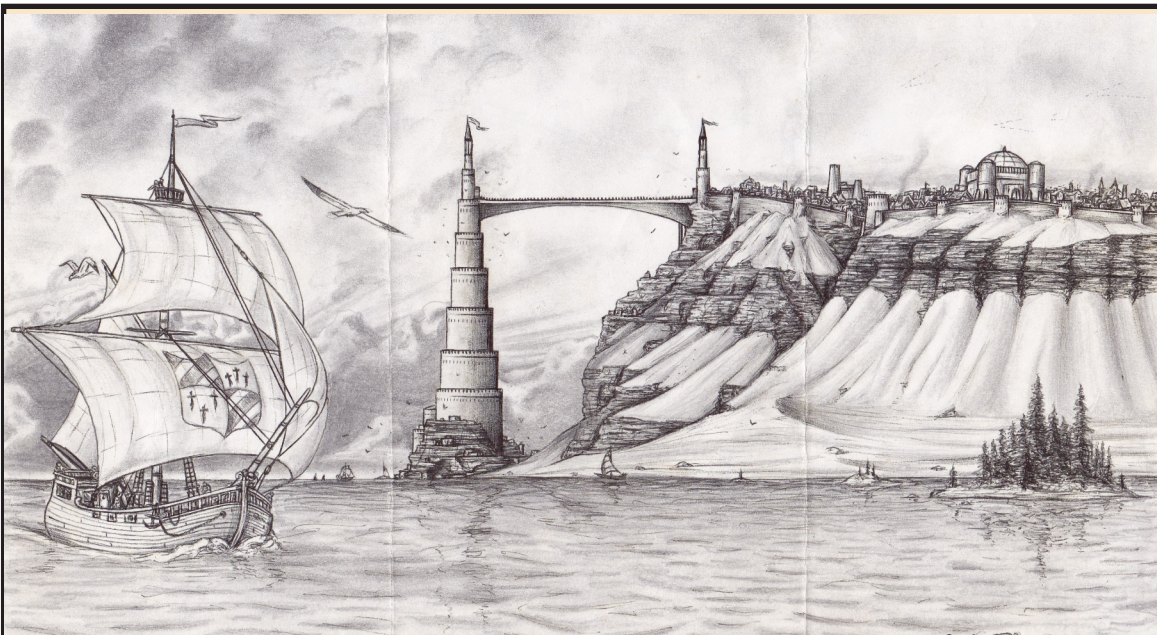


Where he is happens to be in a California prison, death row to be exact. It would be very easy to stop there and say—where's the beauty there? Where's the love? Yet, a little can be a lot—if you have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to care. Jarvis has the ability to see the beauty around him, to hear the pain and possibility in people's stories, and to show love in the simplest of ways. He finds and shares love in some of the harshest conditions, exactly where love is most needed. If Jarvis can love himself and share this great big love with others even from death row, we can do the same. It's all in how we choose to live our lives. That can be easier said than done.



"Living is not an easy thing," Jarvis offered, which in his case seems to be an understatement. From the age of five, Jarvis lived in a series of foster homes and institutions. When he was 19, he was sent to San Quentin for armed robbery, and sentenced to twenty years. Several years later, he was sentenced to death for a murder he did not commit. He spent over forty years at San Quentin—twenty-one in solitary confinement—before being transferred to a different facility last year where he is still adjusting to a new reality with different people, rules, and expectations. Living is not an easy thing.

Yet, as Jarvis says, "we learn what we can in the conditions we're living in." Throughout his decades in prison, Jarvis has been both student and teacher. He has studied Buddhism with some of the most prominent teachers in the



United States, including Pema Chödrön. "It was Pema," he recounted, "who taught me we were all born good people and we have to learn to forgive ourselves before we forgive other people. Our innate nature is goodness."

Jarvis, in turn, has shared his own gospel of goodness with

countless people inside and outside of prison through his writing, actions, and example. He has written two books, including a New York Times bestselling memoir, *That Bird Has My Wings*, which Oprah named one of the twenty books that will change your life. His story and presence is sticky. It sticks with you in a way that makes you want to open your eyes to see the beauty in the world, to open your ears to hear what people really have to say, and open your heart to show yourself and others the love we all so desperately need. The way Jarvis walks in the world makes me want to be a better person. It helps me to see the beauty that surrounds me and to offer more grace to myself and others. That must be why we came to him to learn about love.

When I asked Jarvis what prison had taught him about love, his first response was, "Shit, I don't know." Turns out though, he knew a lot. "I learned how to be compassionate from the worst place possible. I learned about compassion and love from people I really didn't like at the beginning. They're working on me and I'm working on them. I've seen so many things that have taught me how to appreciate who I am, even in going to prison. What prison has taught me is there's a lot to see in yourself. Here you learn how to love yourself. Prison teaches you how to live life and take it seriously and I like the fact that I'm being shown this."

Jarvis has learned to see himself and his surroundings clearly. He finds beauty and love in what he sees. We choose how we see the world. Do we turn our heads towards the sun or the shadow? In my case, I can focus on the unexpected warmth of a winter day or the fact that the sun overheated my phone while talking to Jarvis. In Jarvis' case during a trip to an off-site hospital, he can turn his head towards the ocean or the traffic jam.

Jarvis remembers the joy of being out of San Quentin and on the road, surrounded by the beauty of northern California. A traffic jam on a bridge just made the experience better—more time to enjoy the view. He looked around and saw his fellow travelers did not feel the same. "They're all pissed off and I'm just having a ball," he said. I could almost feel him shaking his head at the memory. "I had no idea people would get caught up in themselves like that. I just wanted to close my eyes because they were all angry and I'm wondering what's getting them so mad?"

All this anger was starting to get Jarvis down until he noticed a dog on the bridge. That dog was having the time of his life. Jarvis



felt like they were communicating with each other. "The dog was telling me—just sit back and don't try to fix this, just hang out with me." That's not a bad rulebook for love: the work of loving presence starts by just being with someone, open to what they have to offer, without expectations.

For Jarvis, the best way to cut through anger is to listen, and having others listen to him has been healing. Once people started listening, he found he had a lot more to say. Just being present and making an effort to listen is a powerful act of love, even if we don't like what we hear. Our presence might be the first time someone has ever really felt heard. Listening is an act of love when we are able to listen with acceptance and not judgement.

Often when we think we're listening, however, we do not really hear what others are saying. Jarvis had a friend who used to take a man experiencing homelessness to community meetings because she wanted him to have a seat at the table where decisions were being made. She wanted his voice to be heard. Every time she picked him up, he complained about everything—the people at the meetings didn't care about him, the rent was too damn high, all the stuff. Every time. Finally, she pulled over and told him she was sick of it. She was tired of hearing all of his complaints. He looked at her and started to cry.

"I thought you were listening to me," he said, tears in his eyes. "I wouldn't say these things if you weren't my friend." It just blew her away that he was sharing the most important things in his life and she had almost kicked him out of the car. "He didn't trust no one else but her," Jarvis recounted. "All those complaints meant he was walking with her."

Walking with each other can take many forms. It can mean listening to someone in need or searching to find the beauty within another person. Small acts of love and care can change the cultures we live in. Every group and community, including every prison and jail, has its own culture—a set of rules, values, and behaviors that guide how people think and act. Jarvis knows how to change the culture around him, and you can change the culture around you as well. An act as small as picking up someone else's trash can be a culture-changing gesture of care.

Jarvis is on a work crew at his new prison. One of his jobs is to pick up trash. "People see me picking up trash and they see me as an OG," he explained. "They say, you don't need to do that, you on death row. I tell them— I'm here to pick up your trash. You drop it and I'll pick it up for you. When they hear that, now they don't want to drop no trash. I know what I'm doing. So I tell them again—you drop this and I'll pick it up. I'm here for you. I like the fact I'm not picking up no one's trash but yours and I'm here to pick it up for you."

"Now they scatter when they see me coming because they're looking around for something to pick up. I know how to communicate with these guys. I'm not complaining or fussing. That don't work. What works is: don't worry about it, I've got you. Now they doing my job! I walk around and look for my trash now. Where's my trash at? They've picked it all up. When you create that atmosphere people learn how to get along."





I'm here for you can be another way of saying I love you. I hear you. I see you. I'm with you, even if we are not physically together. This is where a practice like Together-Apart comes in. Every Wednesday, thousands of people behind and beyond bars spend time together (usually apart) in a shared mindfulness practice dedicated to offering love to all suffering beings. Acting with love is the first step towards building a loving community.

We recently invited Jarvis to join in our Together-Apart practice. It's been hard getting the guys in his new facility to participate. They don't really see the value of sitting in meditation. People there are so focused on getting out that they're not as interested in looking inward. If he was still in San Quentin, he said, it wouldn't be a problem to find a group of men to join the practice. But this new place has a different vibe. So he sits alone. I asked him what value he saw in the Together-Apart practice.

"I'm sitting for everyone who's here," he responded, including everyone he invited from his new facility who never showed up. "If you can't do it, I'll sit here for you. That's where I want my mind to be, sitting there for everyone else. I think in Christianity and Buddhism, that's what they pray for- to be there for each other."

The simple act of spiritual solidarity that Together-Apart represents—sitting together, even if you're apart, at roughly the same time with roughly the same purpose—has a profound significance to Jarvis. "It means we've given each other a chance to be together to recognize our own individual suffering. It means I'm not alone with what I want to do in my life. It says we're in a community—one that makes it hard to be there—but that we can still show up. We're representing. Someone has to show up and if it's just me, that's what happens."

Jarvis sitting in meditation alone at his new facility—but not alone because so many of you are doing the same—is just one way to make a community based on love that honors interconnectedness as our deepest strength. "Interconnectedness is really heavy and really important, to have that interrelationship," Jarvis explained, as he thought further about the meaning of a practice like Together-Apart. "It creates the social conditions necessary so you can have relationships with the outside community. You have to. We all got some joy in our lives and we just have to tap into it."

Many thanks to our artists: page 1: Edwin Rivera; page 2: James Baggoh (top), Rob Caprood (bottom); page 3: Teela Hendrix; page 4: Beth O'Dell; page 5: Jimmy Stewart (top); Robert Joseph Swainston (bottom); page 6: Dennis White (top), Roderick Berry (bottom); page 7: K Brown; page 8: unknown artist.



We can hold each other in regard. We can do simple things with great love. We can do this thing, but we can't do it alone. We need people to help us see ourselves and the world clearly and to model what it looks like to let love guide our actions.

So many little miracles surround us if we're willing to open our eyes to see, our ears to hear, our hearts to feel. The miracles of someone picking up your trash for you, of winter warmth and good conversations with a stranger who feels like a friend—these are the miracles that bring

everyday love into our lives. These are the miracles that help us to show love to others and recognize the love that surrounds us.

May we have the eyes to see the love within and around us, the ears to hear what is crying to be heard, and a heart that is open to show and receive love. Perhaps most importantly, may we not forget to show our asses up for others and ourselves.

"In a lot of cases, I'm not sure I know what I'm doing, you know?" Jarvis admitted towards the end of our conversation. I confessed I feel the same most of the time. "It just feels like I'm guided by a belief that the only way I can really appreciate me genuinely is to appreciate other people," he concluded. "There's no way I can get to me without getting to other people first."

You don't really need to know what you're doing to love yourself and others well. There's no guidebook here. Just show your ass up, for yourself and others. Show your ass up with an open heart and see what happens.

Jarvis shows up to sit, even when no one else is there. He shows up to pick up trash, even when he doesn't have to. He shows up to listen to what others have to say, knowing what really matters is being heard. He shows up to life and sees the ocean and not the traffic jam. People watch how we move. May we move through the world knowing we are all agents of love. Every act matters. We are all we have. Let's do this thing, with love. -Erin

Together-Apart

My dear friends, please continue to sit with us on Wednesday evenings from 7 to 8pm (or any time on Wednesdays that might be convenient for you) as we send love, prayers, and blessings to the many suffering beings in the world. Use whatever practice is meaningful to you, beloveds. "See" you all on Wednesdays!
Love, Sita



Letters

Dear Sirs and Madams,

I received your winter newsletter, and it inspired me to draw a beautiful picture for everyone. In my facility, we are not allowed colored pencils or colored pens—only floppy pens, and we are limited with what we can do with them-- no pencils and no erasers also.

I use my imagination to be free and express myself...For color I use M & M's from the canteen and a toothbrush with one bristle for a brush to paint with. This drawing is yours with my permission to do as you please. I hope and pray I inspire someone. Love, peace & prayers, D

Friends,

We're getting ready to enter the year 2025! Wow! I only have like eleven years left to serve. Considering that I've been serving a 53 year sentence for felony murder since 2008, I'm anxious to shred this 2024 calendar.



Let me give you long timers one of my traditions that seems to help me erase the bad energy of the previous year.

On my calendar I write down my personal achievements. It could be an art contest, sending out cards or correspondence, even workouts and books you've read. The hope is to fill up those squares with anything that's important to you. Do this all throughout the year. As you do this, you will surely recognize the impact your little ripples have made in the universe. Micro or macro verses—who cares! The point is you exist!

Now here is the second part of this tradition. On New Year's Day, tear out January. What was January like? Did you send out a birthday card to someone you love or miss? Did you attend any functions? Or maybe it was a bad January? Okay! Then start to shred the month of January. Goodbye January! Thank you January. With every tear listen to the paper shredding. That's you kicking the crap out of January. Then proceed through the whole year. Wait till you see what a pile of pieces of the past you've made!! This practice helps me know that I've been relevant with my time alive at this place. —Roderick

HKF,

Anyakara from Ingham County, Michigan inspired me to write. I am full of love after reading her letter. It wasn't but a few minutes after reading her excerpt that my pen poured out nonsensical poetry.

It's strange that missing people creates the greatest change within me. I hope to be transformed into the perfect person for my loved ones. I hope this pain will be constructive. This type of hope is what is described in the following poem:

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Letters

A person asked me the other day what I was on...I smiled at him and said I'm high on a broken heart. He said, get out of here, what do you mean? So I explained...though there's a smile on my face, underneath there's a scar that's open that you just can't see. Yeah, even though I'm silly, I'm just hiding from my past. It's always a broken heart where the best of me can be found...this is when I'm humble enough to look beyond the me that you can see. It's when I can write and when I can chase dreams. I'm not against my pride. I don't dare claim this ego has died. All I'm saying is that I find peace in the breaking of my heart. I move on...I make room...I let go...I let in. For a heart that breaks as much a mine must hold more love than most will ever find.

—Roderick

Dear Human Kindness Foundation,

May my words be peaceful, loving, and understanding. I'm a tutor for GED which makes me sort of a counsellor to my peers—not to mention that I went to school for social work as well. So people vent to me about everything when needing a loving and conscious response to their emotions, thoughts and life.

I received the Winter 2024 newsletter and I was reminded first of all that other people care about me. I saw a woman from Michigan's letter in the newsletter which let me know that some of our cries in MDOC are being heard. I was reminded that I have to be the beauty in this ugly place.

We are mentally and emotionally abused and neglected and disrespected. We bring the beauty out of ourselves by caring for one another. We laugh, encourage, and respect each other because we are not feeling love. I took it upon myself to walk, talk, and teach righteousness to all people around and that I come in contact with. In this dismal crypt, I am a speck of light guiding who I can to the beauty within. Thank you for reminding me that I can do it. I will be meditating with you on Wednesday from 7-8 as well. With Love, Jerome

Dear HKF,

I've been meditating fifteen minutes a day every day for the past three weeks. It helps me think and see things more clearly. It's easy and hard at the same time—easy because I have to choose to do it, and hard because I have to choose to do it. I can choose to just not do it, but that feels meaningless. It's better to choose to rise above petty things and choose to walk in Love.

Every day I choose to be better. It's hard to be God's hands, feet, and heart, choosing to love others, forgiving them and just be an extension of God on earth. I'm not perfect. I fail at times, but every day I get better and stronger. If I can do it in prison I would be able to do it in the world! For me that would be walking in Love every day no matter what was done to me or what's happening to me. It's hard, but it can be done, and the books really help. Thank you! Stay blessed and sucker free, Sincerely, NB



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**“As long as I actively BE LOVE then
when the wind comes to blow me away,
I'll fly with a smile.”**

M, 2011

Reflection

Love is in everything. Love is you and you are love. Breathe in a full awareness of this love. Breathe out and imagine your breath like the wind, blowing away all that separates you from knowing, feeling and believing in this love within and around you. This right here, right now, this air, this earth, this light, this shadow are all woven through and made of love. You are a thread of this love. You are part of everything.

Questions

Who is the most loving person you know? Tell a story about how this person showed you love.

What have you learned from them?

When and where do you feel most aware of the presence of love?