

# PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT

December 1980

Newsletter

## HAVE A ~~MERRY~~ ~~HAPPY~~ MEANINGFUL CHRISTMAS

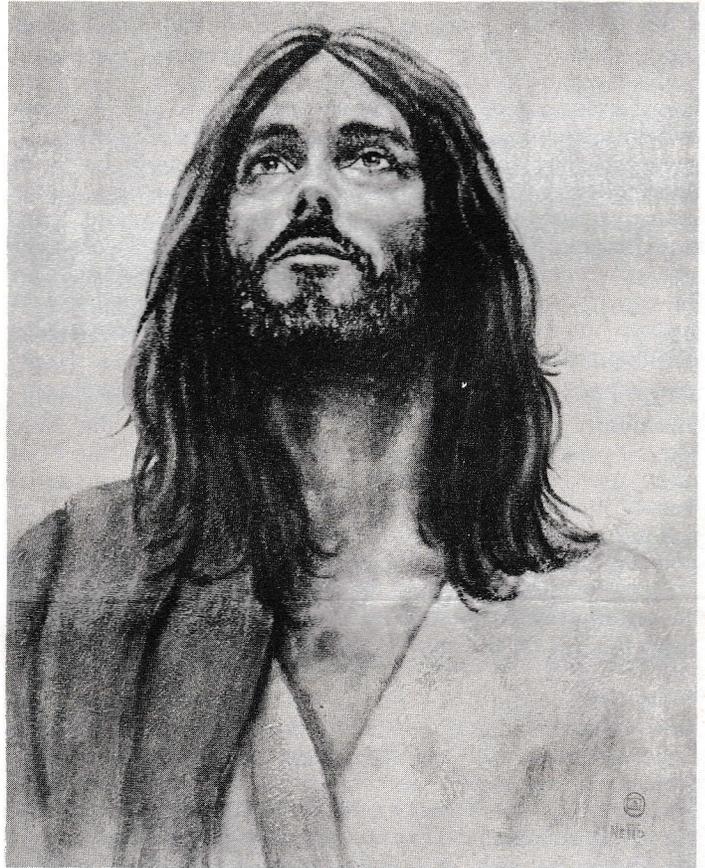
People assume that Christmas is the worst time of year for prisoners; how can you be "merry" or have Christmas "cheer" when you're locked up away from your loved ones? And yet, if we could let go of the whole notion of Christmas as some sort of "fun" time, if we could just drop the heavy association between Christmas and "happiness," perhaps you can have a very *profound* Christmas instead, even behind bars; *especially* behind bars. And you needn't be a Christian to have a meaningful Christmas; Jesus himself wasn't Christian. Let's forget about religions for a moment and consider instead the presence and teachings of this powerful spiritual master.

Jesus was not one of the nice, respectable people in his society. He was an outcast; a gaunt, intense figure who refused to water down his teachings to be more acceptable to the middle class. Against all proper social customs, he cast his lot time and again with prisoners, lepers, prostitutes and beggars, and reminded his followers to *love* these other "outcasts" if they wished to love him. Jesus' followers had to leave the comfort of their homes and the security of their jobs in order to follow him. He showed them by his own example that comfort and security have nothing at all to do with dignity or self-respect; that worldly pleasures mean nothing if one's life is empty of spirit, and that even prison, torture or death can be bearable if the living spirit is present. He showed and taught us new meanings of words such as humility, long-suffering, forgiveness and love.

It would seem that Christmas can be the *most* tolerable time to be in prison rather than the least, if you but tune in to its essence. In your deepest Heart, where do you think you would most likely find Jesus spending Christmastime: with you sitting quietly, humbly alone in a cell; or with a "nice" family madly ripping open all their K-Mart presents under an aluminum tree decorated with blinking plastic lights and phony candy canes? Where can you picture Jesus?

Century after century, most of us continue to miss the point of deep spiritual teachings such as those Jesus shared. We water down the intensity, the go-for-broke devotion of the masters in order to keep our lives orderly and comfortable. We depict Jesus in our movies as handsome, clean, and Aryan rather than a swarthy, smelly and sweaty desert-dweller. And the same thing we do to his looks, we do to his teachings. How else could we have insurance companies, when he told us not to worry about tomorrow? How else could churches still practice segregation, when he said that we are all brothers? How else could television evangelists live in millionaire palaces when Jesus told people to give up their wealth and share it with the poor?

But if all that is *missing* the point, then what is closer to the point of Jesus' teachings? Why *didn't* Jesus simply emerge as a respectable, scholarly rabbi of his day, changing the course of biblical history in more conventional ways? With all his wisdom and power, why did he endure such hardships and suffering, including imprisonment, humiliation, torture, and death on the cross? Jesus showed us that there is great power in our suffering. He showed us, really, that living without spirit is a greater form of suffering than physical pain or deprivation. And he indicated a mystical dimension of experience *behind* our suffering that we can share with him if we but surrender our pride, desires, and fears.



*This magnificent painting of Jesus was given us by a prison friend named Netto, who spent a good many years at Fla. State Prison in Raiford. Netto is now out and with the Silver Thread School of Arts, Rt. 1, Box 122, Cox's Mill, W. Va. 26342. This and other drawings and paintings are available through the school for absurdly low prices; they're true spiritual artists.*

All around you this Christmas season, people will treat you as a "poor, lonely prisoner." If you can find the strength to resist that powerful temptation of acting the part, acting out all the self-pity and bitterness and loneliness that is expected of you, then perhaps you might have a true Christmas surprise gift. Sitting alone in your cell, feeling your own self-dignity and allowing your mind to be quiet and humble, you may well find an unexpected friend sitting by your side or in your heart. You may well have the very most beautiful Christmas in your life, touched by the master who understands your imprisonment; who understands and loves you so much . . .

And we do too,

*Bo + Sita Lopez*

# PRISON/COMMUNITY ALLIANCES

— update



In our last newsletter we outlined this new idea and explained a number of different types of programs taking place that seemed to be bringing prisons and communities together (if you missed that newsletter, write us for a summary). Here is a brief update of where things now stand:

- Scott Gassman, whom we mentioned is a former volunteer services coordinator for the NY Dept. of Corrections, completed his four-month research assignment for us. Scott was looking into the idea of setting up a national center and toll-free phone to help prison/community organizers find helpful information, resources, and training opportunities. He compiled a lot of information during that time, but the idea of a national center seems premature, and he was unable to find sources of long-term funding. The \$5,000 we had budgeted for Scott's research and help is now gone, but Scott continues to work part-time on his own trying to figure out the next steps. If you'd like to contact him for any reason, write him at Prison/Community Alliances, 98 Park Terr. E., #3-B, N.Y., N.Y. 10034.

- Carol DeCosta and the *INSIDE-OUT* of SANTA FE prison/community group continues to struggle through the New Mexico prison system, which is still in disarray from the February riot. Carol has succeeded in sponsoring one concert and a weekly meditation/yoga class at the women's prison, and is patiently awaiting approval for similar programs on the men's side. She's also marshalled a great variety of willing community volunteers who will be able to offer many types of activities as the administration loosens up. The address is: Inside-Out of Santa Fe, Box 5696, Santa Fe, N.M. 87502.

- The folks at the *RUDI FOUNDATION* are also continuing their prison/community work in the Boston area. They've expanded quite a bit, and have now taken over our pen-pal project and our book project, as well as initiating a number of prison programs and working with a variety of local agencies. They publish a small newsletter for prison-interested people in their state and also offer training for volunteers. If you wish to

find out more, or if you'd like to become a spiritual pen-pal, or if you'd like to donate or request spiritual books or magazines, write: Rudi Foundation, Box 468, Cambridge, Ma. 02138.

## SPRING TOUR BEING PLANNED

We're starting to establish dates and places for our next workshop/lecture tour, which will be mid-April to early May of 1981. This tour will cover mostly the East Coast from North Carolina to the New England states. We'll be doing prison workshops, public lectures and a few training seminars for people who work or are considering working in prisons. If you're interested in helping us to arrange some sort of meeting in either your prison or your community, please get in touch as soon as possible, as our schedule tends to pack up pretty quickly. Since most of our prison workshops are done free of charge, we do need funds from the public gatherings or college lectures in order to pay for the expenses of the trip. When writing, please be as specific as possible about what you hope to arrange and a few alternative dates that would be best for you.

## BOOK PROJECT CHANGES HANDS

As mentioned briefly above, our Prison Book Project has now moved from Rhode Island to Massachusetts. Kathy Parker, who took things over from Diane Fink last year in Newport, R.I., has been frequently ill and is finally taking her doctor's advice to ease off awhile. So, the Box 746 address is no longer valid; write instead to Prison Book Project, Box 468, Cambridge, Ma. 02138, if you wish to donate or request any spiritual books or magazines.

## A WINTER'S HIBERNATION

We've been promising our third volume of *INSIDE-OUT* for nearly three years now, and we're still a long way from a published book. We're beginning to realize that the only way to get it done is to back off from other activities in order to work on the book. So, while Sita will continue to process names and send out our materials, she and I both are going to cut back on everything else between now and March, including personal replies to letters, any lectures or workshops or consulting, and any further newsletters until that time. Except for letters dealing with our spring tour, we ask that you help us by not writing.

Besides needing more time to write and collect material, I'm also personally feeling a strong need to spend a lot of time alone and quiet. At first I thought this would conflict even with developing the book, but I'm beginning to sense that it's very appropriate to quiet myself down in order to let the book happen. For years I've been encouraging people to listen to their hearts and follow their intuition, and in all honesty to those teachings I see now that it's time for me to pull my reins in for awhile and stop dealing in millions of words. And if *INSIDE-OUT* #3 is to be effective, it won't be because of the words we've managed to put together, but rather the quietness behind them.

So, we both hope you understand; you'll hear from us again in March, at which time we'll also let you know the complete schedule for the spring workshop/lecture tour.

## A NEW FRIEND AND CARTOONIST

Most of the illustrations in this newsletter were provided by a new friend from California named Krishna Dass.



JIM DANDY

Krishna Dass  
1980



## LETTERS . . .

Dear Sir,

*Please withdraw me from your mailing list. Your story on the Zen master and Samurai was cute, but that's not the teaching of Christianity. Heaven and Hell are real places and not states of consciousness as the story points out. The Zen monk most likely needs to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, born again, saved, and establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Then the Zen monk could pray to Jesus and Jesus would explain Heaven and Hell to him. Jesus will communicate to you too! If you are willing to believe in Him. He is alive you know and does communicate to his servants. Those who are born again are initiated into His Holy Spirit and he communicates/talks/teaches them. Praise God! Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?*

God Bless,  
J.T.  
Scarborough, Me.

Dear J . . .

I have no doubt that you love Jesus and are sincere in your faith. However, I've got to let you know that to me, your letter represents one of the most distorted and dangerous viewpoints that can exist under the name of Christianity. Your dogmatism and spiritual arrogance are the same sort of qualities respon-

sible for the Christian Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition — both nightmarish bloodbaths in the name of Christ.

You asked whether I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ: Yes, I do; and just as you said, He *does* communicate with me, talk to me and teach me. But what He tells me is to love *everyone*; He tells me to seek the peace that goes *beyond* understanding; He tells me to see things with my *Heart* rather than with my ego-mind. If you've ever been in the presence of a Zen Master, you can feel that peace which Jesus speaks about. So if the master says something about Heaven and Hell that doesn't go along with your understanding, you simply trust your Heart and let go of your judgement. Mankind has killed time and again because we stick rigidly to our *understandings* rather than our Hearts.

Jesus also lets me know that the Holy Spirit is beyond any one form; beyond any one religion. He reminds me that He could take a body which is white, brown, black, yellow or red, and speak any language, come from any country, He wishes to. If we are *true* followers, we won't ignore or crucify Him just because He conflicts with our mind's understanding; we'll feel His peace and presence. All the great masters have shared the same Spirit with us, because there's really only one to share. Religious bigotry, no matter how sincere, is simply not going to get you closer to Jesus. He's even greater than you realize, thank God!

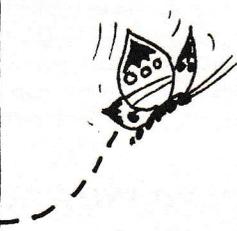
In His Love,  
Bo



*We wish you the very best of Christmases.  
Bo, Sita, and Laxmana*

### SPANISH-LANGUAGE MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE

*A friend in Bolivia has recently coordinated the translation of some of our materials into Spanish. If you need meditation/yoga instruction printed in Spanish either for yourself or for friends who have a hard time with English, just write us and we'll send you xeroxed copies of Liza McCormack's thoughtful gift. It's only a few pages at present, but it includes good clear meditation and yoga instruction; a Spanish-speaking person could use these practices for years without reading anything else.*



...AM I NOT  
*free?*

- ST. PAUL,  
OFT- INCARCERATED  
SAINT, I COR. 8:1





ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

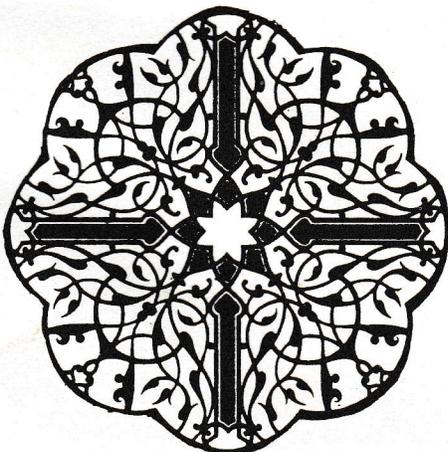
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Hanuman Foundation*

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“WE LOOK AT MAN’S LIFE AND  
WE CANNOT UNTANGLE THIS SONG.  
RINGS AND KNOTS OF JOY AND GRIEF,  
ALL INTERLACED AND LOCKING.”

— from the *Ramayana*,  
retold by Wm. Buck



The Prison-Ashram Project of the Hanuman Foundation has served, since 1973, as a source of materials and advice for prisoners throughout the world who are interested in meditation and general spiritual guidance. The Project is supported solely by private donations, which are fully tax-deductible under the IRS code. Contributions, trusts, grants and the like are always needed and welcomed.