

Prison-Ashram Project

May 1980

Newsletter

A STORY

"There was a man who had a young child. At times the father sought to frighten the boy. He would dress up in strange clothing so that his son would not recognize him. At first the child was frightened, but as time passed he came to realize that this too was his father. Then he would call out "Father!", and the father, filled with compassion, would take off his disguise and reveal himself to the boy.

So it is with those who suffer. When they come to understand that it is God Himself who is the source of their pain, they then can begin to call out to Him. But those who do not see that all is from God and seek their cures elsewhere — these will never find healing.

—Anonymous



Dear Friends,

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE THIS, BUT . . .

We're moving one last time. The Prison-Ashram Project, after three years of displacement in Colorado and California, is moving back to North Carolina where it all began. Sita, Laxmana and I are, of course, tagging along. We apologize for any inconvenience we may have caused by changing our address twice, and assure you that this time, our mailing address will be stable for a long, long time (God willing).

We'll be leaving California in mid-May and expect to be set up in North Carolina by the end of June. It will help us greatly if

you don't write to us between now and then unless something is urgent. At our normal rate of incoming mail, we would have between 500 and 600 letters to catch up on by the time we get settled in! So, please be patient with us one last time and we promise to send out a newsletter with our new address as soon as we possibly can.

And, we have several very interesting developments to share with you in this newsletter, so please read on.



THE LOZOFFS, "I AM," "WHO AM I," + "GUESS WHO I AM"
(NOT NECESSARILY IN THAT ORDER AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT)
TREKKING TOWARD THE TRUTH! —

Rick Morgan 1976

THE PRISON/COMMUNITY ALLIANCES

I've recently had the great pleasure and privilege of helping some people to form three community-based volunteer groups aimed at increasing the interaction between community residents and prisoners. In Santa Fe, New Mexico—scene of the grisliest riot in prison history—Carol DeCosta has organized the Inside-Out Support Group. The group's initial efforts include plans for an open letter to prisoners and staff through the local newspaper, a proposal to allow volunteer inmates to build playground equipment for a nearby pre-school, and coordinating the services of show-business people—possibly including the great Paul Horn—to offer an entertainment benefit at the prison.

In Cambridge, Mass., Joan Kugelmann and other members of the Rudi Foundation, have also formed a prison/community alliance over the past few months. Besides taking over our pen-pal project and conducting regular yoga & meditation classes in several prisons, the Rudi folks have developed a newsletter to help prison workers and volunteers in Massachusetts to coordinate their efforts and exchange ideas. Their alliance activities will expand to include resources in everything from counselling to job advocacy.

Stan Goudreau and Paddy Long, of Miami, Fla., are in the midst of setting up a prison/community alliance in that area. Stan & Paddy have worked informally for years in a variety of ways around local institutions. At present they're responsible for a four-evening seminar to be held on June 2nd-5th at Biscayne College in Miami. I'll be speaking there as well, and on June 6th will lead a practical workshop on establishing the Prison/Community Alliance of Miami. If you'd like to attend this workshop or the entire seminar, Stan has offered to provide lodging at no cost; all you have to do is get down there somehow. If you're interested, write to Dr. Patrick Long, c/o Continuing Education, Biscayne College, 16400 N.W. 32nd Ave., OpaLocka, Fla. 33054.



National Network

Being deeply inspired by these folks who are making inroads into their local institutions, we at the Prison-Ashram Project have decided to make a commitment of \$5,000 and three months' time to see whether a national network and resource center for these prison/community alliances may be feasible. We've hired a research associate, Scott Gassman, who has excellent qualifications to head up this effort. Scott worked for several years as coordinator of volunteer services for the New York Department of Correctional Services. He's also been trained as a trainer by PREAP (Prison Research Education & Action Project), and has a good working knowledge of what's happening and who's doing it in the field of corrections.

Scott's main task for these three months will be to seek funding for the establishment of the prison/community alliances project. What the project would mean is that we would have an effective and efficient way of helping people like Carol, Joan, Stan, Paddy, and possibly you, to organize a local group aimed at providing humane, constructive ways for people in the community to better interact with people in your local prisons or jails. Our approach emphasizes services and activities which are direct and immediately possible, *without waiting for laws, attitudes, or institutions to change*. We would like to focus on the simple ideas which seem to bring people together in ways that open our hearts to each other.

So, if we do find funding, Scott's job will be to dig up all the details of every program we can learn about, and then to make that information available to all our local alliances by way of a newsletter and occasional conferences. And we'll be involved with helping each local group to get off the ground and get its feet wet, through a complete handbook we'll be writing soon, and by putting you in touch with other interested people inside and outside of the prisons in your area.

If we abandon the bigger ideas for lack of funding after this three-month period, we'll still be very eager to help alliances to form in the same informal ways we've helped the ones in Santa Fe, Cambridge, and Miami. Our next newsletter, sent from our new home in North Carolina, will provide more details about all of this. Just wanted to give you a taste to chew over in the meantime. Although you shouldn't write us until you receive the new address, please keep in mind that we're anxious to hear your ideas and suggestions about all of this.

A WONDERFUL GIFT

Banta Company, one of the largest printers in the nation, has donated nearly 9,000 copies of *SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY GUIDE #4* to the Prison-Ashram Project. Arranged through the efforts of Parmatma Singh, director of Spiritual Community Publications, the gift will enable us to send free copies to every prisoner on our mailing list and still have some on hand for awhile to send future prison friends. The *GUIDE* is a thorough listing of communities, ashrams, monasteries, communes, spiritual organizations, bookstores, health food stores & co-ops, and publishers throughout the country. It includes informative articles by various spiritual teachers (including a brief one by me on working in prisons), and is an excellent resource book to help make connections based on your own interests. We'll be sending the free copies out sometime in the next few months as we get settled in North Carolina. Please don't bother writing to ask for a copy, as we'll automatically send them to every prisoner on our mailing list.



POWER IN YOUR OWN PEN (no pun intended)

An interesting situation has come to our attention lately. Since the project began, in 1973, we've never made any efforts to gain publicity. Our feeling was and is that word-of-mouth would be the most natural means of informing people that the project exists and is available to them. And this low-profile philosophy has proved quite accurate as far as that goes. However, one drawback seems to be that prison meditation & prison yoga are virtually unheard of by the American public at large. Although tens of thousands of prisoners and staff have requested and used our materials and have formed classes and study groups; and although many of these people feel that meditation and/or yoga, etc., have dramatically changed their lives; neither the public nor corrections administrators have been made aware of these programs as being serious and valuable. And further, they haven't been made aware that thousands of prisoners actually meditate daily and find great value in doing so; the public image of prisoners is still formed by scary prison movies, macho documentaries like "Scared Straight", and coverage of brutal riots like the one at Santa Fe.

So, we suggest that it might be a good idea for you to start letting people know about *this* slice of prison life. Write to your state corrections department, to your congresspeople, to television shows such as *60 minutes*, *Phil Donahue* and *Prime Time Saturday*; write to *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and other magazines and even newspapers or Sunday magazines. Let them know that thousands of prisoners meditate daily and work very hard on calming themselves, overcoming their anger and bitterness and so forth through meditation and many forms of yoga. If these teachings and methods have helped you find peace or strength in your life, let them know. Suggest that they write a story or film a segment on prison meditation & yoga programs. Inform them of our worldwide "family" of prison meditators who number in the thousands.

I want to make it very clear that the Prison-Ashram Project doesn't need the glory or publicity, but we're certainly happy to help establish the idea of meditation and yoga programs as serious and valuable tools for prison life. We may write and distribute the materials and do the workshops, but you're the real project. If you'd like to give a boost to meditation in prisons, then by all means get the addresses of these shows and magazines from your library or TV station, and begin making your feelings known. At least then, a state official can't claim that he's never heard of prisoners wanting to meditate or do yoga practices. In fact, if enough of you like the idea, perhaps later in the year we can help you to wage your own letter-writing campaign to selected "targets" so that one person or publication or show would receive several thousand letters at once asking for greater attention to prison meditation programs. You *do* have power in your own hands, and we'd be happy to help you focus it for the greatest effect.



LETTERS

"I didn't know a great deal about meditation & yoga when I came here; in fact, I still know very little. But I have found a happiness and freedom unequalled in my life—also a confidence.

Most of all, I met love, I've tasted it and liked it and daily I am being consumed by it. Through love I am learning how to control my thinking, my desires, my actions. This love is a most energetic thing. It seems to give me a power . . . I am filled with it. I guess I am on the bottom rung of this spiritual ladder and climbing it is far from easy, but climbing it has become all that matters. This weekend I am into reading the life of Saint Therese, the "little flower"; very inspiring!

I was very sad and lonely once, and I looked everywhere except to God; I had nothing. Now I look only to God, and He has given me everything. I am rich! Thank you."

—LEM SMITH, Sandstone, Minn.



"Soon I will be leaving Seagoville. As I reflect on my three-year stay, the statistics of recidivism come to mind. Eighty-five percent of those who swore they would never return (and that is everybody), do return. Why? Throughout my three-year stretch I searched for answers in the Christian Bible of my upbringing, Buddhist and Taoist texts, Hindu scriptures, and Western psychology until one day last spring it all came together in meditation. I finally bridged the gap between ego and universal consciousness. All of the programming of 33 years fell off me like ice water and I felt vibrant, new, alive, and intelligent. Free. The answer to recidivism, to life itself, is change. But the change is analogous to that of a moth; from the pupa to a naturally beautiful moth, the type of change is holistic. It can transform years of bitterness behind bars to compassion."

—LARRY GONZALES, Seagoville, Texas

A PRACTICE FOR LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

Try this powerful technique regularly. Even reading it, slowly and thoughtfully, will produce a state of meditation. —Bo

Sit in a comfortable but straight position, as you would for meditation. With eyes closed, first clear out all of your thoughts and feelings by breathing slowly and deeply about ten times. With each in-breath, fill yourself with calming, peaceful life-energy. With each out-breath, let out all thoughts, feelings, body sensations, etc. In with peace, out with thoughts.

Now center your attention in the area of your Heart, in the upper middle of your chest (your spiritual Heart-center, or chakra, is different from the physical heart). Imagine your breath coming in and going out from this Heart-space. Now picture the person whom you love more dearly than anyone else—not a sexual love, but a very sweet, precious love; perhaps your baby, or your mother. Feel the place in your Heart where that love seems to resonate as you think of this person; allow the breath to help open that place more and more, so that your love-feeling grows with each breath. Feel how good it feels to love.

And now, continuing to breathe in and out of the Heart and trying to keep this love-feeling strong, bring to mind the image of someone who hates you, or has hurt you, or someone whom you have hated or hurt or simply have a very rough time with. Try to keep your Heart open as you picture this person's face; try to realize that this person was once as sweet and precious as whomever you love most dearly; that this person's mother had so much love for him or her, so many high hopes and good wishes. No matter what this person's life has turned into, no matter how ugly or even evil they may have become, in your own Heart-space you can understand: "This living is so hard, how can I be anything but loving?" Repeat that thought over and over in your mind as you try to see this "enemy" in a new light; as you try to



"I am doing a life sentence although I am still fighting it in the courts. A year ago, I found myself in the hole and went through some heavy changes. I was deeply depressed and was mentally going over my whole life. Missing my two-year-old son growing up and thinking of at least ten years of my life was going to happen in here. I really couldn't see any use going on any more. I thought about it. I began to pray. I was raised in a non-religious home without any belief in a God. I said, 'If there is a God please show me another way!' Well, something happened in that hole because since then I have been receiving answers to my prayers and questions about just what this whole thing called life is all about.

I read 'Autobiography of a Yogi' by Yogananda which was simply beautiful. The Bible also makes sense and daily I become happier. I read *Inside-Out: A Spiritual Manual for Prison Life*, and had no idea there was any organization like yours existing. For six months I have read any book I could get my hands on on Yoga. From book instructions, I have put into practice the steps of meditation. I have gone through many changes. I quit smoking, lost my animosity, my awareness expanded. Sure, I want to get out, but I'm just too busy to worry anymore. I feel that this path is being shown to me in answer to my call a year ago.

I thank you for the beautiful work you all are doing. May God bless you all."

—DON MONTGOMERY, Huntsville, Texas



understand that this living is indeed very difficult for all of us, and that a person who acts miserable, feels miserable; a person who acts ugly, feels ugly. As you repeat the thought ("This living is so hard, how can I be anything but loving") further, try also to realize that your own anger or hatred or bitterness makes you feel and act miserable; makes you feel and act ugly. If another person is drowning, does it do anyone good for you to jump in and drown with him? This practice can help develop our ability to swim through the ocean of anger, hatred, and cruelty all around us, rather than drowning in it with others who can't swim.

After five or ten minutes—during which you may want to picture several people rather than just one (guards, wardens, other prisoners, lovers or friends who walked out on you)—see if you're able to see these people in your mind without all the usual heavy feelings you've had toward them. See whether you can picture them simply as fellow human beings who are struggling, and perhaps failing, in their own sea of confusion. Can you forgive them for being the way they are, and wish them a better road ahead? If you can, you'll definitely feel a lightness in your own Heart and mind, as you rid yourself of the burden you've been carrying around on your back.

To finish the practice, once again clear your mind of everything except the feeling of the breath going in and out. Don't linger on your emotions or experiences, just sit quietly and breathe once again. And now bring to mind an image of *yourself*, sitting in loving meditation, and realize how far you've come; realize that you're actually trying to love your enemies, just like Jesus and all the great masters have taught, and give thanks that God has blessed you by showing you this profound spiritual wisdom. And keep humbly asking for more.

This technique can be done before or after a period of meditation, or by itself. If you wake up in the middle of the night, or have a hard time getting to sleep, quietly sit up in bed and do it then as well. Nothing brings greater peace than opening our Hearts to those who have wronged us.

All our love and blessings,
As always

Bo & Sita Lopez



SPIRITUAL MATERIAL

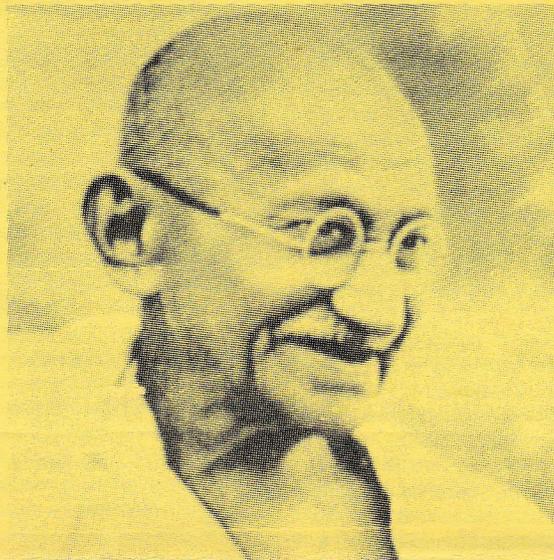
**A Project of the
Hanuman Foundation**

**PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT
2459 Fawn Creek Lane
Escondido, Ca. 92026**

“True morality consists not in following the beaten track but in finding out the true path for ourselves and fearlessly following it.”

“Unfortunately or fortunately, we have to pass through many an ebb and flow before we settle down to real peace.”

“The path to God is for the brave, not for cowards.”



“Power is of two kinds. One is obtained through fear of punishment, and the other by arts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times greater.”

“If we remember that all life is one, there is no reason why we should treat one another as enemies.”

MAHATMA GANDHI, an Indian saint who spent six years in prison during his non-violent struggle to free India from the British Empire.

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.