Meditation and Breathing Practice
by The Buddha
adapted by Murshid Samuel Lewis (Sufi Sam)

Begin by simply becoming aware of your in-breath and out-breath. Then breathe in a heavy breath and be aware that you are breathing in a heavy breath, and breathe out a heavy breath and be aware that you are breathing out a heavy breath. Do this a few times.

Then breathe in a gentle breath and be aware you are breathing in a gentle breath, and breathe out a gentle breath and be aware you are breathing out a gentle breath. Breathe in a short breath, breathe out a short breath. Breathe in a long breath, breathe out a long breath.

After doing each of these a few times, gradually make your breath long and gentle, long and refined. And for the rest of the practice, attentively breathe in and out this long, refined breath. On this breath, breathe in all the joy you are capable of breathing in and breathe out all the joy you are capable of breathing out. Joy in and joy out. Do this for a few minutes.

Then breathe in all the love you are capable of breathing in and all the love you are capable of breathing out. Love in and love out. Finally, make the breath even more gentle, even longer and more penetrating, and breathe in all the peace you are capable of breathing in, and all the peace you are capable of breathing out. Peace in and peace out. As you do this, fill the room with peace. Fill the prison or neighborhood with peace. Breathe peace for the whole city in which you live, for the whole world in which you live.

"Why is it," Jonathan puzzled, "that the hardest thing in the world is to convince a bird that he is free, and that he can prove it for himself if he'd just spend a little time practicing?"

—Richard Bach
Jonathan Livingston Seagull
We're all doing time.

As soon as we get born, we find ourselves assigned to one little body, one set of desires and fears, one family, city, state, country and planet. Who can ever understand exactly why or how it comes down as it does? The bottom line is, here we are. Whatever, wherever, whenever we are, this is what we've got.

It's up to us
Whether we do it as easy time or hard time.

Living in truth is the only way to do easy time.
And the truth is,

Peace Lies Within.

The Kingdom of Heaven Lies Within.

Get This One Straight
and
Everything You Need Will Be Provided.
Wealth, fame, power and pleasure are over-rated. Look at Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Freddy Prinze, Jim Morrison, Judy Garland, Billie Holliday and all the others who got everything we think would be cool. They all died young, lonely and desperately unhappy because they reached the limits of what the outside world can provide.

It doesn’t matter if we climb the highest mountains, swim the deep blue sea, discover a cure for cancer, set up colonies on the moon, or skydive in the nude;

Life Will Be Hard Time
Unless We Get Things Straight On The Inside.

May As Well Get Down To It.

True spiritual work is not a part-time thing. It’s not something we can just squeeze into our schedule.

The only way it’s done is in the quality of how we act, how we think, how we react to the dude who spills hot coffee on our pants — how we do our time, each and every moment of our lives.
Life is a spiritual event.

Everything we do is a mystical experience.

There's nothing else going on.

Waiting to feel God's grace is like a fish waiting to feel wet. This is all God's grace. In the sixties a lot of us dropped acid and found ourselves absolutely fascinated by our own toes or rip in the armature screen. It wasn't the acid; it was all a miracle, all the time.

The only reason for doing religious practices is to quiet down enough so that we can pay attention to this miracle discovering how incredibly holy everything really is. It's all a miracle, all the time. That's who a saint is; just somebody who has learned to pay attention all the time.
Dear Prison-Ashram Folks,

For years we have witnessed the fine work done through you. We thank you. Now I find myself coming to you for something directly connected to my own life and family.

Our daughter, who’s four, was kidnapped last summer by a two-time rapist. The police found them in 6 hours and she was remarkably alright though much of their way went on. Those hours were an incredible test of our work of these past years. Between the streams of terror and panic, we did all we could to surround the two of them with love, to listen, meditate. And we found, then and afterwards, that many many people hearing of the kidnapping were stopping what they were doing, and doing as we were.

Police, hospital, strangers, all were surrounding us and our daughter with love. And when we got her back, she was still whole and filled with innocence, in spirit and sexuality she was subjected to. She had spent most of the time talking to him, of right and wrong, of her understanding of the order around her. “I loved him a little and hated him a little,” was one of the first things she told us.

Then came months of assimilating and forgetting the great pain. And that still continues, though quieter now. And during that time, the legal issues were being drawn into it. We could not find any peace in the “Catch-22”-ness of it all: Having our 4-year-old testify and be torn apart by defense lawyers; dropping the case, which was threatened if she didn’t testify; sending this man back to jail which had not done him any good before, etc. etc. We were all victims.

Finally, we fasted and prayed for three days and came to a peaceful relationship to it all with this understanding: The proper responsibility in the guilt was in his hands and demanded a public confession. He did plead guilty and it was settled out of court. He was resentenced on the violated probation and on the new sentences. He stood up in court and said, facing my husband, that though he has no memory of the incident (supposedly he has blocked out the whole thing), he was sorry for all the pain he caused to our family.

So now, the children ask what he did in prison. How long will he be there, how will he be up when he gets out and on and on. We wonder if our relationship to him is done. Do we have any more responsibility now than to hold him in our hearts and prayers, and do our own work to come to a full forgiveness? I still wonder if I should personally go to him or write him, to tell him all the specifics of what went on so he can come to some peace with what he did instead of spending all those years in jail for an offense he has no memory of.

All I’ve come up with so far is to pass his name on to do what he can. Stand, he has a very mild and inward nature unless he’s drinking. Maybe meditation would be a door for him. Would you send him whatever you have and just know that he’s there in case you go to his prison.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all the work you’ve been doing.

In Love,

Donna (N.M.)

Dear Bo,

In my life I’ve never written to a newspaper, newsletter or whatever. I’ve been getting yours for some time now. Sometimes I read it, sometimes not. The last one I did, and I know the tone of what I’m fixing to say is not at all like where you’re coming from.

In the course of a whole lot of letters from guys sniveling about being gang-raped and being on lock-up cause they’re on preventive custody. Most of them are saying they forgive the perpetrators cause “they don’t know what they’re doing” and/or they relieve that horrible experience over and over. I don’t doubt their sincerity about that.

I’ve been down about 8 years out of my 32 years. Prisons are more or less the same world over. If a guy acts like a victim, he’s made one. I don’t need to see the results of a Princeton study on how people unconsciously invite rape attacks or mugging, ’cause I’ve seen it done with my own eyes.

In prison sometimes a punch in the nose is the only way to communicate. It’s all some guys understand. Violence won’t handle all situations or even one in 20, but sometimes it’s the only way. And most of the time winning or losing isn’t important. It’s whether a guy will stand up for his self.

You asked my advice about your relationship to R. I can’t think of any “shoulds” or “shouldnts” that wouldn’t sound stupid after all you’ve been through. R. has already been given just by the fact of you being his victims. Your forgiveness and concern are profound contributions to his spiritual journey, like Jesus forgiving those who nailed him to the cross.

My only advice is to try to be as self-honest as possible, and make sure that whatever you do is what you’re able to do from the heart, and not what your mind thinks you should do in order to be “good.” If you’re ever able to truly open to R. and offer him your kinship, I think that act could do more for world peace than a hundred summit conferences, because this is the nitty-gritty of really bringing God-consciousness into our worldly lives.

Our love to you all, Bo

Sincerely,

Buddy (Va.)

Dear Buddy,

I’ll be happy to print your letter; I think it’s powerfully written. I don’t agree with everything you said, but that’s not the end of the world, is it?

You say that if a person stands up for himself, everything will always work out. I agree that it may be generally true, and I appreciate your example about not re-living a punch in the nose for the rest of your life. But isn’t it true that sometimes you just have to put yourself out for yourself and still be beaten, raped, tortured or killed? It does happen.

Also, maybe some of what you call “sniveling” is indeed sniveling, but maybe some of it is somebody sincerely trying to put his life back together. Not everybody reacts to things the same way. So, I do value your letter, and I also hope you keep your mind open to people who might be very different from you.

Love, Bo

Dear Bo & Sita,

In my life I’ve never written to a newspaper, newsletter or whatever. I’ve been getting yours for some time now. Sometimes I read it, sometimes not. The last one I did, and I know the tone of what I’m fixing to say is not at all like where you’re coming from.

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Dear Bo & Sita,

Hare Krishna! I hope this letter finds you in good health. Thank you for your newsletter for the summer of '83, it is always interesting to receive it. I was also drawn to the article "Working with Mantra," and some of the things you said in it. For example, you said, "The mantra 'OM' is the seed sound of the universe," and is generally considered to be the chief hooncho of all mantras."

As it is said in the Bhagavad Gita by the Lord, "Of the great sages I am Bhrigu; of vibrations I am the transcendent Om. Of sacrifices I am the chanting of the Holy Names, and of immovable things I am the Himalayas," (10:25). After reading that passage I have found some interesting and exciting discoveries. One is that the Holy names mentioned have been given as the Mahamantra (maha 'great'), which is "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare."

This mahamantra was introduced in India by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu himself; Hare refers to the energy of the Lord, and Krishna & Rama are names of the Lord Himself. When we chant Hare Krishna, we are asking the Lord Krishna to please engage us in his service.

Love, Bo

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Dear Bo,

Having served twenty years and being nearly forty, Ray's story was easy to identify with, he is now back for violating my parole after being outside a little over a year. During the last eighteen months I discovered many painful things about myself, among which is that, although wanting to be outside, I wasn't equipped to be free yet.

Your answers to Tom in the "Letters" section started me thinking about a need in my life: A need to get out of the shell of penitentiary role-playing and self-centeredness and to get involved with people in a genuine, caring way.

My past, if it makes any difference, is not like Tom's. Instead of being on the receiving end of aggression and violence, I've been a "taker"—aggressive, bellicose, belligerent, taking what I wanted instead of earning or deserving it. Even my "giving" had an odor of "taking", using people and circumstances to achieve my own ends, self-concern at the expense of others (although true self-concern cannot be at someone else's expense). After so many years of being pushed aside and ignored it's difficult to change the old patterns, even with some insight into one's own behavior. Playing the penitentiary game cost me a lot of self-esteem and personal dignity, a fact which I didn't discover until I took an honest look at myself and the things I've done.

Can you give me any suggestions about what I might do to move past this "prison experience"? What can I do to find a place where I fit in society on the outside? I don't steal anymore, and I want a fulfilling life, but I just don't fit anywhere at this point. What are my options?

May the Grace of God be with you and may He hold you in the heart of His hand.

Yours in Peace,
Gary (Ks.)

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Dear Gary,

About your question as to finding a place in society. What you say is true, that's the big question. I'm not saying to look for all of us. The thing is, there isn't a "fit" which happens once and then it's stable. I think our everyday lives are a constant process of finding, changing, and wondering about how we fit into society. I've lived on a sailboat away from the whole world, and also in the slums of Queens, N.Y. I've lived in communes and ashrams, middle-class neighborhoods, the whole bit. I've run through long hair, short hair, no hair, one earring, no earring, hippie clothes, straight clothes, cross-laces, beads, sandals, boots, etc., etc.

What it gets down to are some practical issues: First of all, you need to legally earn some bread. Then the second issue is what kind of lifestyle you feel like living (as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else). If you want to earn a lot of money, you have to put your energy into the first; if you don't care so much about money, you might take more thought about the lifestyle things you really want to do—music, art, service to others, cleaning up the environment, not doing bad, etc. Whatever it is that you feel in tune with doing. And of course, there's a lot of overlap between these two areas; how you earn money and the lifestyle you lead may turn out to be one and the same.

I think the important thing is to feel relaxed and happy. There are many different possibilities there are. As Ray Neal mentioned in the last newsletter, the problem many people have is that as soon as they get out, they start buying everything on credit and going into the hole financially. If you can keep your needs light and your attitude right, you'll definitely find the perfect fit for your life in the free world.

After doing as much as you have, you may need to be patient while this fine-tuning goes on. You might want to start with a job that's not so demanding of your time. Then, after a little while, take your free time being a volunteer counselor at a crisis center, or some sort of rehab group. The sooner you begin filling the need you expressed about serving people, the more relaxed you'll feel about your own life. Service is a wonderful medicine for anything that ails us. Getting over all your old behavior patterns won't be any problem at all for someone with your self-honesty; it'll just take some time. And you know how to do time; just start making it work for you now instead of against you.

Love, Bo
Black and White Photos

As you can see, we're using more and more photos in our newsletters; we're also using many in our next book. Any photos you think we might like, please feel free to send us. We'd especially love to have more prison & prisoner photos.

Prison Library Project

Just a reminder that if you want to donate your used spiritual books to us, please don't send them to our N.C. address. The proper name and address for that project is:

Prison Library Project
Box 6403
Prescott Valley, Az. 86312

To Touch the Face of God

The quest for perfect union with God
Is like trying to catch
A butterfly... without a net.

Sometimes you can almost grasp it
And just when you think you got it,
It sails away.

But oh the wonder

When you finally do grasp it!

You see the beauty, the softness
and you are filled with

Such a Love

That can only come from the knowledge
That you have touched
The face of God.

—John Thompson
Death Row
Huntsville, Texas

This newsletter is edited by Bo and Sita Lozoff.
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