PRISON
ASHRAM
PROJECT
NEWSLETTER / SPRING 1983

A Project of the
Hanuman Foundation

The way of overcoming obstacles lies in turning inward and raising our own being to a higher level.

I CHING
Dear Friend,

Springtime; new beginnings all around us. And this newsletter has a new format, for the first time in ten years. I've noticed our newsletters got a little stale over the years, and I really want to freshen up our offering to you. I hope that this new format can help to lighten things up and to provide a greater variety of material for you to work with.

Hermann Hesse, in SIDDHARTHA, said,

"Wisdom is not communicable. The wisdom which a wise man tries to communicate always sounds foolish. Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom. One can find it, live it, be fortified by it, do wonders through it, but one cannot communicate and teach it. I suspected this when I was still a youth and it was this that drove me away from teachers."

If Hesse is right — and I think he is — then what's the purpose of our newsletters at all? What's the purpose of working on INSIDE-OUT #3, our next book? I think the answer is this: Our writings are just reminders that we love you; that we're all on the same journey; that you're not alone. So our newsletters and books can become a little more playful than they've been, and still carry that message. Instead of presuming that we're capable of hitting you over the head with wisdom, we'll try to remember that we're just writing, teasing, joking, dancing with each other, and we'll try to provide materials other than words, as well as all the usual words, to keep inspiring your own search for wisdom.

Love,

Bo

cover and border graphics: Gururam Kaur

Dear Bo & Sita,

If I could add a word to Brother HYT (in last newsletter) about guilt, sorrow and suffering over murder from the same space he occupies. I too suffer for like reasons. I pray that my guilt and pain not harden my heart, but lead me on the path. I feel the pain will never leave, but I know it is a clear connection of love to the person whose life I took.

I choose to feel the pain and guilt straight rather than hide from it, for when I hide I become irritable and judgemental. When I feel the guilt and pain, it subsides (as with any pain when mindfulness is applied long enough). At first it was weeks of deep pain, then a few hours a day, and now an hour or so every few days.

This guilt and pain has also made me more sensitive to my brothers —their pains, forgiving their slights, seeing without judgement.

I wish that I had learned these things another way, but — after the fact —without justifying what I did, I learned them this way.

I believe you can only understand your capacity for tenderness when you understand your capacity for violence.

In my situation, I chose not to contact the ones close to my victim, as it would only hurt them more. But every situation is different.

Flow like the river & be clean,

Salik
"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 when I really think about it.

"I was very sad and lonely once and I looked everywhere except to God and had nothing. Now I only look to God and He has given me everything."

L.S.,
Sandstone, Mn. FCI.

"Two years awaiting trial in a county jail were not in vain. Freedom from worldly cares, plus some kind but firm spiritual guidance from a distant friend, allowed me to open my heart and let God be at my center to replace the narrow selfishness that had been there..."

TB,
Stillwater, Mn.

"Many pieces of the puzzle are fitting; some I try to POUND in, but then I calm down and continue."

RW,
W. Va. State Pen

I'll be a lot more spiritual, as soon as...
Dear Bo & Sita,

I just re-read your newsletter for March, 1982, and once again your philosophy has affected me — could you please remember me? I do the same for you and all our brothers and sisters in the prisonashram.

On my fortieth birthday, February 14th, I began fasting from solid food. On February 22nd, I cloistered myself inside my leaky, uninsulated camper. I am also not speaking. I communicate only in writing. I am withdrawing from society and — if necessary — from life unless I am blessed with justice and/or enlightenment.

God bless you for your wonderful work.

Namaste
TC, Napa, Ca.

Dear Tom,

You're certainly in our prayers, and in the prayers of thousands of people who will read this in our newsletter. I don't know whether anything I put into words will be able to convey any- thing useful to you, but I'll try: and maybe between the lines we can communicate as if were sitting with you in your camper. I wish I could be.

You know that I've been involved for a long time now with people who have gone through the same sort of nightmare as you. I've never met anyone who had an easy time of it, or who looked back and said "Boy, I'm glad that happened," so I'm not going to bullshit you with spiritual fairy tales. But I do know, and have seen, people endure with their sanity and humanity intact — and stronger — after such a horrifying leap into Hell. A friend of ours in a Florida prison wrote a few months ago:

"I am at Pelican Bay. God has used the place so many times that I don't know if I could keep going through it. Many times I squirmed through on the thinnest shred of faith or grace, who knows which? But as I kept trying to open around the misery rather than tightening or pushing it away, every now and then I experienced the transcendence of the spiritual life. The pain is still there, and it still hurts like hell when you transcend, but you're big enough to allow it to be a part of you; it no longer takes over completely. Whether I like it or not, physical pain continues to be a part of my daily life and it continues to bring me wisdom. It's just the cut of the cards.

And then there's your pain, different from mine, and the pain of a young mother whose child was raped and murdered, and the pain of the elderly couple robbed and murdered a dozen times in their home. And the pain of a Canadian friend who fell off a mountain and is permanently paralyzed; and the subtle but equally real pain of so many countless unhappy people whose lives are no more than a succession of confused bleak days and nights; and the list goes on forever.

In a sense, all our forms of pain are different and none of us can quite understand the pain of the others; that's on the personality level, where we hold on to our differences in order to preserve our specialness. But a little farther in (or up), pain is pain is pain, and we all truly understand all pain, all humiliation, all helplessness, rage and loneliness. And we see that this is not accidental to the human condition or an abomination of it, but rather an integral part of what we're doing here on Earth. As Dennis said, "God knows what he's doing."

What more can I say to you, though, while it's hurting so much? This may all seem like meaningless words as you sit hurting in your camper. All I can do is send this along not for the words, but as a symbol of my love for you and my appreciation for this incredibly tough turn of your spiritual journey. If you do decide to get through it rather than to die, imagine the depth of compassion and understanding you can give to others as they suffer in their own forms of Hell! I hope for you, me, and everyone, that this is the end of the road from this as that kind of spiritual activism, with a loving heart forged in the hottest fire of pain.

Love,
Bo
Dear Bo & Sita,

I hope this letter finds you exceptionally well. Much has happened in my life since I last wrote you. I decided to cut my own foot to get into the hospital. When I cut it I went at the bottom of my foot in which now I'll never be able to run again. Also I got hooked on a "battery on another inmate" charge. This is my involvement with the death of my partner came here and I couldn't back off from trying to take him out after I heard him bragging about it. I took an iron leg off of a chair and walked up behind him while he was playing cards and tried to knock his brains out but it only knocked him out and put him in a coma. I was locked up and now am on maximum security lockdown.

I don't have any regrets at trying to kill him and even if he died and I received a life sentence, I still would not regret it. I know you feel I'm wrong, but I respect my partner and his friendship to the extent that I felt what I did, had to be done. I'm old fashioned Bo & Sita, when it comes to values and morals and living by the convict code, but that's me and I've never claimed to be anyone but me.

In eternal friendship,
LH

Dear LH,

I hope our friendship is really eternal, because I want to be straight with you about your letter. It sounds pretty fishy to me. You're really trying to defend your actions when neither Sita nor I have judged you in the first place. I think you're actually having a battle with yourself and using us as symbols of part of you which feels you blew it when you tried to kill that guy. Otherwise, why do you kill the convict code when you do? This is the thing is, your actions are one thing, and your attitude quite another. You seem to be busy creating a whole philosophy, which you're calling the "convict code", which would justify what you did as a noble deed committed by a good old-fashioned convict, but with high values.

But if all that were true, I don't think you'd have so much conflict with it. As far as I'm concerned, the "convict code" is bullshit as is any other code. Each one of us is a person, and we have to make choices and take responsibility for those choices as individuals. This guy you whacked had brought more suffering into the world by killing your partner and then by bragging about it, and so you went on to bring still more suffering by trying to take him out. And now maybe a friend of his will hear you telling about this noble deed and try to kill you, and then maybe one of your friends will try to get him and so forth. The state hardly needs the death penalty with good old-fashioned convicts like you around!

I think you've understood the stuff we've sent you over the years, and I think that you know what this letter would be like before I wrote it; that's why you wrote us. I can appreciate how hurt over the death of your friend, and how badly it hurts to be around so many crazy people as you are. You must have been hurting pretty badly but you're just not ready to move on. But staying in your prison and creating philosophies of convenience to make things better. You don't have to undo anything you've done, right up to this moment; but at some point you have to allow yourself to see it straight if you want to find any measure of your rightful peace. Life is really a much higher trip than you're allowing yourself to experience; don't think that's just words and poetic garbage. Keep on keeping on.

Love,
Bo

Dear KN,

Your meditation experiences sound great; I think your fear and curiosity about life and what is happening are really completely empty, the "nothingness" you mentioned, then it would be empty of fear also. So either there's still some fear and thoughts of "where do I go next" happening, or else those things happen right after the experience. Either way, they're just the natural noise of the mind that we all have to deal with in one way or another. It takes a lot of time, just feeling the fear, seeing the thoughts, letting them come up and pass again and again and again and trying not to get sucked into them. Just try to remember that fear is a hypnosis, so is "what happens next?" You can't prevent them from occurring, but you can share the stage with them rather than getting bumpy off. Have faith that your spiritual guides, that God, is superseding your progress and allow the experiences to open you up like a flower.

Much Love,
Bo
Cosmic Word Jumble

Here are five words associated with the spiritual journey. Unscramble them and write them in the blanks, and the circled letters will spell the missing word in the sentence below.

"Every Moment of Our Lives is _________."

1) sneefsrovig
2) rwko
3) nittdoamie
4) ecepa
5) efoderm

answers below

The Prison-Ashram Project is one part of Hanuman Foundation, a non-profit service organization. The Project began in 1973 as an aid to prisoners and others who are trying to use their time for spiritual awakening. Our work has been in three main areas:

1) Developing and distributing books, booklets, and tapes offering ideas & practices from many spiritual traditions.
2) Prison workshops, public lectures, and training seminars led by director Bo Lozoff.
3) Consulting, networking, helping other projects to get started, connecting prisoners to a wide variety of other resources.

Our materials are sent free of charge to prisoners, prison staff, or volunteers. Others are asked to make a donation, if possible, to help cover costs. Our books INSIDE-OUT #1 & #2 are now out of print, but INSIDE-OUT #3 is in the works and will be published as soon as possible. Newsletters are sent out about four times a year.

The Prison-Ashram Project is supported solely by private contributions. Donations are always needed and welcomed, and are fully tax-deductible. INSIDE-OUT #3 alone will require about $40,000 for the first printing of 30,000 copies. Newsletters cost up to $3,000 per issue. All correspondence and donations should be sent to:

Prison-Ashram Project
Rt. 1, Box 201-N
Durham, N.C. 27705

Answer to "Cosmic word jumble":

Every Moment of Our Lives is Grace
1) Forgiveness 2) Work 3) Meditation 4) Peace 5) Freedom