"If not you, who?  If not now, when?"

-- Hillel
PRISON AS CENTERS OF KINDNESS
Kindness is one of the natural laws of the universe. Everybody would like to feel it; everyone likes being around it; living without it leads to unhappiness and poor health. We award the Nobel Peace Prize to Mother Theresa for her kindness; we teach our children the virtues and benefits of it. But when some of those children get bigger and break our laws, we lock them up in places where kindness is rare and is most often considered naive, weak, or even impossible. Staff and inmates alike put on self-protective masks of toughness and cynicism, even though no one can really flourish in such an environment. Wouldn't it seem more reasonable to put outlaws in a place which cherishes kindness, reminds them of how important it is, and affords them opportunities to develop and express it?

Now, if a 20-year-old idealist, or a bleeding-heart liberal, or a preacher who'd never been inside a joint, had said what I just said, we could dismiss him as somebody who just doesn't understand the realities of life inside. But that's not who said it; I did. And I do know how tough it is, how scary it is. I've been both an outlaw and a prison worker. I've been inside over 300 prisons, and have known many thousands of prisoners and prison workers intimately. Knowing all the difficulties involved, I still say the time has come to take this next step toward being a more mature civilization.

Each of us has a part to play in taking that step; we can't pass the buck to the other guy and say we have to wait for him or her. All of us -- prisoners, prison workers and the general public -- must begin, one by one, to see how crazy it is to attempt rehabilitation without valuing kindness above all other forms of training, education or therapy. Conservatives and liberals alike have designed prisons to be narcissistic environments. Whether negative or positive -- from basic survival to getting a college degree -- an inmate's attention is focused intensely on himself. And in dealing with inmates, most of us tend to reinforce the narcissism. After awhile, it's easy for a prisoner to assume the role of always being the needy one, always the one on the receiving end, the assumption being that he or she isn't expected or able to give anything. Then the prisoner may get out, and we complain that he or she just can't seem to get along with people or be comfortable in a job or romantic relationship -- all of which require good "giving" skills, all of which require an element of kindness.

We tend to regard kindness as a "soft" issue, not a "hard" fact like the need for education or training. But kindness isn't just some corny moral or religious value; it's as scientifically verifiable as gravity. If you doubt this, then do some rigorous research: Go all over the world, correlating happiness and unhappiness with kindness and unkindness. The results will be overwhelming across all cultures and nations -- happy people value kindness; unkind people aren't happy.

As the 20th Century dawned, we left behind the notion of "insane asylums" and gradually acknowledged the need to treat mental illness with compassion, creativity, and hope. Now the 21st Century is dawning, and it's time for us to take the same step with criminal behavior -- leaving behind prisons- as-warehouses, and acknowledging the need for truly correctional facilities which surround inmates with loads of kindness, fairness, and encouragement to change their lives for the better. As my part in taking that step, I include the following "letters" written to the prison system, prisoners, and society.

Dear 20th-Century Prison System,

You can't "correct" prisoners or help them correct themselves by creating cold, impersonal environments which focus, at best, on skills or training rather than on basic, human-to-human interactions. When we put somebody back out on the street, we have to hope he or she is a more caring human being. You can't "train" or "educate" a sense of caring. It has to be shown in the environment itself, and in the way you do everything you do.

You send absurdly mixed messages out to prisoners. In many places, you call them "Mr. ___." which, according to the outside world, is a term of respect; but in prison it seems instead to be a reminder that you don't want to be personal or friendly. You insist that guards be called "correctional officers," yet you don't allow them to form friendships with inmates. You say you want inmates to develop stronger social values, yet you forbid even best friends from staying in touch with each other when one gets transferred or paroled. You claim to encourage sensible planning and reliability, yet you maintain an atmosphere in which a prisoner can be transferred to a new location without warning, or lose his job or all his prized possessions in a shake-down, with no explanations, apologies or negotiation. You expect ex-cons to be responsible, yet while they're inside, a bell or whistle defines every moment of their day. You claim to encourage future social decency among your inmates, yet you maintain an environment in which it is dangerous to speak out, help a friend, or show one's true feelings about anything.

The thousands of prisoners I've known who truly changed their lives in prison seemed to do it, for the most part, despite your system rather than because of it. Why are you so resistant to change? Why do you remain so difficult? It's bad for you, bad for your staff and officers, and bad for the people you hope to "correct." If you won't change, then it's up to your staff people to wise up and make you change bit by bit, by expressing true kindness, more common sense, and abiding by the spirit of your rules rather than the letter of them. And if they get fired for doing so, it's time for them to go to the media and let the public know what's really going on behind the walls.
It's really time to begin putting this era of incarceration into history.

There is absolutely no conflict between running a kind facility and running a secure one. Kindness is an attitude which can underlie even the strictest rules of custody. A facility expressing kindness, fairness and encouragement can also be a facility which maintains no-nonsense policies about escapes, contraband, and general inmate behavior. The vast majority of prison inmates would love the opportunity to turn their lives around for the better. It's time you, the system, opened your heart to that yearning instead of treating your programs and program specialists like nuisances or token legal requirements. Change is inevitable, because the system doesn't work. Why be dragged into this change kicking and screaming, instead of being at the forefront of it?

Dear Prison Inmates,

What if the system doesn't change anytime soon? It would be easy to lay this all off on the prison systems and say, "look here, you've got to run our prisons with more kindness." People have been saying that for years, and we're still waiting for it to sink in. But one thing I've noticed going into hundreds of prisons, is that you prisoners yourselves usually aren't very kind to each other -- especially between the races and ethnic groups. The wheels of governmental change may grind very slowly, but you don't have to wait for anything before letting go of the bigotry, brutality, con games and petty prisoner politics, and beginning to treat each other with genuine respect and kindness. If the prison system isn't wise enough to create a kind, caring environment, then you prisoners have to be the ones to do it.

I've talked with countless prisoners one-on-one, and every single one of you wanted to treat others with respect and kindness and be treated with respect and kindness. But when you leave me and go back out into population, you cop your old attitude. It's sort of like, "well, I ain't gonna be the first one to turn over that new leaf; I'd get stepped on." I know these things are much easier to say than do, especially in the hostility and paranoia of most prisons. But it's got to be done whether it's easy or not. The day-to-day feeling of prison life won't change from the top down; it's either going to change from the bottom up, or not change at all. You prisoners have to learn how to change yourselves; how to gain the qualities you value, and how to live in that new way without being stepped on.

Prisoners have to begin to stick together, not just with your own race or age, but with every other prisoner who wants to live with respect and fairness. The great majority of you don't enjoy violence or cruelty. Maybe it's time for that great majority to stop looking the other way when a new inmate is being gang-raped or somebody's being ripped off. Maybe it's time for the great majority to stop living according to the old convict codes set down by a small number of 1940's petty gangsters, and come up with a better code of values which can strengthen your humanity rather than destroy it.

I'm certainly not advising anyone who reads this to get up on a self-righteous high horse and start doing stupid or dangerous things in the name of kindness. Don't let ego extremism run away with what I'm writing about. You're the best judge of your own prison environment and how to proceed. All I'm saying is, proceed you must. If your prison life is "hey man, I'm looking out for number one, and I just want to get out of here in one piece," then that's pretty much how your street life is going to be too. It's an empty way to live. Anywhere we ever are, there are going to be values like kindness to stand up for, sometimes to suffer or even die for. That's how we gain the self-respect which can hold up anywhere, under any circumstances.

I know that cruel things have happened to each of you. But no one of you has been beaten, scorned, punished or laughed at more than Jesus was. No one of you has given up his very life for the good of others, as did Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Yet those men, even in their humiliation and deaths, showed such greatness of the human spirit that they continue to inspire us long after they passed our way. Whatever you've gone through, whatever you've suffered, however much suffering you've caused to others, none of that prevents you from caring about the people around you -- not only inmates, but guards, staff, etc. You have to break the circle of pain and selfishness or forever be lashed to it. As the Jewish scholar Hillel once said, "If not you, who? If not now, when?"

You tell me you really want to change your life for the better. Then do it. Stop lying. Don't rip anyone off. Trust somebody until they prove you can't. Cautiously open up your honest feelings with the people who seem like maybe they want the same thing. Don't manipulate or lay guilt on your family, friends, and outside organizations. Don't harden yourself to suffering just because it's painful to deal with. Put dope and booze behind you so you can pay clearer attention to the changes you want to go through. You and I have had enough dope and booze. Some of the experiences we had on drugs may even have been important for us, but there comes a time when you have to move on.

And look into this idea of kindness. Kindness is a great mystery. It heals so many old wounds and hurts we can't possibly count them all. Take up the challenge of how to become a truly kind person without being exploited or abused in a place like this. Look around for ways to express a little kindness around the prison, the outside community, or the world. Discover the magic! No one can ever do that part for you. And it's never really going to be any easier wherever you are. People who wait, tend to wait forever and die waiting. Take responsibility instead. Then you'll begin to feel the self-
Dear Society,

Probably every community in the world has needs and problems which could be met by the involvement of prisoners in a nearby institution -- men and women who really need to experience the thrill of helping out. It's time now, in our social development, to begin recognizing this natural pool of volunteers rather than trying to forget they exist. It's time to remind the authorities that prisons are part of the community, and to begin discussing ways prisoners can contribute to community life even while they're inside. We have to keep remembering that every human being needs to feel useful, and therefore we need to present as many opportunities as we can for prisoners to experience such usefulness. In this way, the community becomes part of a person's rehabilitation, which is as it should be.

Many people feel that prisons themselves are wrong, and things won't get better until we tear them all down. I say that's a cop-out. It's obviously going to be a long time, if ever, before such profound changes take place. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of human beings live in prisons as they are, and we can begin making a real change in their lives without waiting for such major breakthroughs. Let's help prisoners to change their hearts, and people in the community to change their feelings toward prisoners. What better way to show theunnecessary ness of the present system?

Kindness toward prisoners isn't pity, and it's also not gullibility. Kind people sometimes have to lock people up, or refuse to let people out on bail or parole, or remove them even from the mainstream prison population if they continue to be dangerous. A great Indian sage once said, "Do whatever you must with people, but never shut anyone out of your heart." Most prisoners have been shut out of nearly everyone's hearts for a long time. Many have never in their lives been in an environment of kindness and encouragement. Many have never once experienced the satisfaction of helping others.

These are the connections which, if strengthened, are really going to make us safer from crime. I don't know whether our prisons will ever be empty. But I'm certain we could change the recidivism rate from 70% to about 10% if we dropped our "out of sight, out of mind" attitude and focused some creative attention on the humanity of the people we lock up.
THE GREAT CONVICT
SMOKE-OUT

Here's one of those great ideas where everybody wins: How about starting a project in your prison for inmates and staff to quit smoking, and donate all the money that would have been spent on cigarettes into a charity pool?

At a women's prison recently, I looked around and did some quick calculations: 600 women, nearly all of them smokers, most of them at least a pack a day and many smoking two or three packs a day. Averaging a conservative estimate of $1 a day over 600 people, that's $600 a day being spent in that one prison, going toward nothing except poor health. $600 a day equals $219,000 a year!!!

Many of these women feel terrible that they can't help their kids, they can't help society, they can't make a difference in anyone's life. Hell, $219,000 could fund an entire shelter for battered women, abused children, or homeless people in a good-sized city. It could even fund a halfway house. And that's just one medium-size prison. Imagine how much total money is going up in smoke and into lung cancer from all the prisons across the world.

I think this idea could catch on and do a lot to change the connection between prisoners and society. If you're interested in starting this project in your own local prison (whether you're inside or outside of it), my advice is to talk with a few staff people to see who's friendliest to the idea, and keep us informed so we can share the encouragement with you all. An inmate/staff committee could be formed in each place to decide how the money would be spent. Community organizations could even apply to this committee for grants. Wild idea, huh?

NEW BOOK, NEW TAPES

The Human Kindness Foundation is getting ready to publish our first book of fiction, Lineage And Other Stories, by Bo Lozoff (ISBN 0-9614444-1-X). The longest of the stories, Lineage, about a wise, eccentric elderly convict, is currently being considered as the basis for a movie, so please send us all your best vibes and wishes for that to happen. We feel a movie like Lineage could do a lot to change the way people think about prisons and prisoners.

Lineage And Other Stories will be free to prisoners and $7/copy to our outside friends and supporters. We're taking orders for them now. If you're a prisoner, please don't write us for a copy; you'll be sent one automatically as our Christmas gift to you this year. If you're not a prisoner, please include payment with your order, as we need all the help we can get in paying for a first press run of 15,000 copies. You can expect shipment of the book no later than early December.

+++ As mentioned in our last newsletter, We're All Doing Time is being put on audio tape and will also be available shortly. It looks like it will be a set of at least six tapes. A complete set will be available to friends and supporters for a $30 donation (we're taking orders now). Because of the expense involved, we can't offer unlimited free sets to individual prisoners, but we'll certainly send free sets to prison groups, libraries, education departments, chaplains, etc.

If you're a prisoner who has trouble reading, or if you know such people) please ask around various departments of the institution and I'm sure you'll find someone willing to receive a set of these free tapes for you and others to use.
FURTHER DOWN THE LINE...

Our Spanish-language edition of *We're All Doing Time* is now being typeset, but it looks like it'll be several months before we can finish all the difficult work of pasting up and laying out the new text with illustrations. We also need to find the money to print it (we've applied for one grant already). Feel free to spread the word that a Spanish edition is in the works, but it'll take some time to fill the requests.

And, we're still collecting information for our upcoming book, *The Freedom of Kindness*, about humanitarian projects accomplished by prisoners. Please let us hear from you if you know of any such programs. Also let us hear from you if you have specific ideas about programs which could be done by prisoners in your prison or community. We'd like to include those ideas in the book as well.
Dear Bo,

Hello there once again! I hope this letter finds you in the best of spirits and health. I am glad to say I'm on a positive road and I hope that I keep this attitude once I am released next month.

A couple months ago I was in the hole for getting busted with a needle stuck off into my leg and off to the hole I went and it was while I was there I received your newsletter, and as I read the page where you printed our complete correspondence, I really got the chance to see all the hate and frustration that I have been letting rule my mind and thoughts so I told myself that I am gonna work on a whole attitude change and I am proud to say that I have been doing just that.

My first step to positive change was leaving the needle alone and my second step was to join the Jaycees here in the prison and it has turned out Bo that was the best move toward a change I could have made for myself.

I still think of the slut and backstabbing freak that drove me nearly insane but as long as I stay busy I have found that I can control them moods and thoughts instead of letting them years of hate control me. I guess I owe a big thanks to you for laying it all out in front of me so I could look at the rest of my life and stop worrying about how to revenge my past. I am forever grateful for your attention on my situation that surely could of turned out to be a nightmare.

a friend forever, TF

---

Dear Bo,

After reading We're All Doing Time, I feel that you might be the one person who can help me out.

My name is Ed. I'm 22 years old, and am currently serving the last two months of a two-year probation because I smashed two windows out of a total stranger's car, for no reason. Since that time I have cleaned up my act somewhat. I no longer use any drugs. I rarely have more than one beer on the occasions I choose to drink. I try to eat right (vegetarian). And I'm searching for something more; something that makes sense.

I have read some of Baba Ram Dass' books and I like what he has to say, but I can't seem to make much sense out of most of it. Likewise for Kahlil Gibran, Aldous Huxley, Pablo Casals, etc. Am I just not ready to understand? It would seem that knowledge or wisdom, if you will, comes only when one is ready to receive it. How do I start on the path then? I very much want to have this inner peace, strength and wisdom, but I just can't find the motivation to get up off my ass and start doing the things I need to do. Motivation is a real problem, Bo. I've never had any in my whole life. There are so many things I want to do but I never get beyond the "talking about it" stage.

I've always been very lazy and I don't know what to do about it anymore. How can I get a decent job, or play music, or paint, or draw, or write, or any of the other things I want to do if I can't motivate myself? (I've been going to write you for at least two weeks now). I don't seem to have any feeling anymore, either. Just a lot of old fear and old anger.

I don't want to be lazy anymore. I want to feel again. I think I'm becoming more and more neurotic every day. I've been to counselors and psychologists before and probably still should be, but frankly, I don't want any more "labels" to deal with. The language you're speaking makes much more sense, Bo. Please write me and tell me what you think.

Peace, Ed
being vegetarian, maybe you should make sure you're getting enough protein and other nutrients. Being a healthy vegetarian doesn't mean you just stop eating meat. It takes some awareness to have a balanced diet.

If you'll notice, everything I've said to you so far falls under one category: Accepting responsibility. Your letter tends to pass off the responsibility for your state of mind, like "Am I just not ready to understand?," and "How do I start on the path...?" as if destiny or ignorance might be holding you back. All I'm trying to get across to you is, NOTHING is holding you back. You're moving along your spiritual journey all the time. Whether you move unhappily or happily is another question, and that's what these suggestions are about.

But even if you do nothing at all, if you're the laziest, most unmotivated son of a bitch in the world and hate yourself until you die, that's still a spiritual journey, and you're still a beautiful, beloved child of God. That can't be taken away. So the best reason to get up off your ass is simply to enjoy the ride more. You obviously don't feel good with the way things are. Why suffer like this when you don't have to?

I love you, Bo

Dear Bo,

Please send me a copy of your book, We're All Doing Time. I get out in a few months but I would still like a copy. A cell mate has one but he will be leaving shortly.

I never knew where my life was going until I got run over by a train in December '84. When I'm not in jail I live on the streets. I've been all over California for 2 years, Canada, the Keys -- hitchhiking mostly. Both my legs are gone and I get out in my wheelchair and panhandle at shopping malls and go from town to town.

I enjoy this kind of life because I get to meet so many people of all sorts. And I think my purpose in life is to help other people. By just being myself I give hope and inspire other people to look at themselfs. I carry only a few clothes and books -- not much at all -- a blanket too; and I try to tell people that even though I have very little, I really have a lot, because everything I need is provided by God. People give me money and I buy food, a little beer and whatever.

But I never take more than I need and I stress that I'm a very rich man -- as long as I have a few clothes and a blanket and can panhandle enough for a big mac and a six-pak -- I'm very rich. I stress the fact that people in other countries would give anything for what the average bum on the street gets everyday. And people ask me how I can live this way and be happy, and I tell them "Because my nature is to be happy. I could be sad, but why?"

I'm very into what you teach in your book but don't yet know all the facts. Some of the things you talk about I've known for years but didn't know it was connected to anything else. But I've always felt love and compassion for my brothers and sisters. I love to give. Maybe your book will help me onward.

Thanks a lot, Ed

PS: Love is not love 'til you give it away.

RESOURCES

Unisight News -- for those who choose a better life. This newsletter is a project of the Unisight Foundation, a nonprofit spiritual organization founded in 1982 with headquarters in Los Angeles. We focus on health-related matters, personal development and spiritual awareness, with a special outreach to those in prison. For a free copy, write to:

UNISIGHT FOUNDATION
DISTRIBUTION, DEPT. G
4427 WEST 135TH, UNIT 2
HAWTHORNE, CA 90250

"Let's Heal Our Planet Together" World Healing Meditation December 31, 1988, Noon - 1 PM, Greenwich Time. At this date and time, millions of concerned people around the world will gather to think, visualize, pray and meditate for peace in our world. This extraordinary global event is a time for the entire human family to join in experiencing the power of the mind. We can change our world. I invite you to join others and participate in whatever way you find appropriate. Contact friends everywhere to give them the news to join together December 31st, 1988. You can make a difference. If you desire more information, please contact me:

MARK DE FRIEST #073061
FLORIDA STATE PRISON
BOX 747
STARKE, FL 32091

Bo, I want to thank you for your help and support in my project to produce a book for the benefit of CURE (Newsletter, summer '88). However, the ad says "payment will be a free copy of the book..." but it should say, "payment will be a free copy...to those whose articles are published." Please try to squeeze this in.

PAUL C. KRUGER, CURE OHIO
CHAPTER BOX 7010
CHILlicothe, OH 45601

Dear Paul,

Please try to adjust the ad so that it says 
payment will be a free copy...to those whose articles are published.

Thanks a lot,

Bo
In A Cockroach War, Unplanned Casualty

JERUSALEM (UPI) -- An Israeli woman's all-out war on a cockroach launched a series of mishaps that put her unsuspecting husband in the hospital with burns, two broken ribs, and a cracked pelvis.

The Jerusalem Post reported yesterday that a woman from the Tel Aviv area found a cockroach in her living room last week and tossed it into the toilet after stomping it. When the bug refused to die, she sprayed an entire can of insecticide into the toilet bowl to finish it off.

Her husband came home moments later, perched on the toilet seat and lit up a cigarette. When he finished smoking, he tossed the butt into the toilet.

The cigarette ignited the insecticide fumes and burned his "sensitive parts," the Post reported.

As paramedics carried the man down the steps of his house, they asked how he received the burns.

When he responded, they laughed and accidentally dropped the stretcher, causing the man the further injuries, the Post said.

Upcoming Talks, Workshops

Bo will be giving a weekend retreat at Southern Dharma Foundation in Hot Springs, NC on October 14th-16th. No specific topic, just a relaxing, invigorating time including discussion, meditation, chanting & singing, badminton, frisbee, walks, and watching the leaves change colors. Cost is $50, everything included. Contact us for further information.

Bo will also be speaking at the Church of Religious Science in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Sunday, October 23rd, and doing at least one prison workshop in nearby Draper. If you can help us to set up a workshop in the maximum-security unit, or if you'd like Bo to do any other public or university talks in the Salt Lake area, please contact us as soon as possible.

Bo and Sita will both be travelling to Europe in late November - early December, to speak in England and Holland. Contact us if you wish to connect with that trip in any way.
The Human Kindness Foundation is non-profit & tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code. Donations, bequests, and gifts are always needed and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Besides the Prison-Ashram Project, the Foundation also sponsors various other events, including free lectures and workshops given by director Bo Lozoff on topics such as human service, careers in non-profits, public speaking and other subjects. Our materials are offered free to prisoners, and at nominal cost to others. Currently available are Bo's books, WE'RE ALL DOING TIME ($10 U.S.) and LINEAGE AND OTHER STORIES ($7 U.S.), plus his folk/rock album STUMBLING TOWARD THE LIGHT (tape or LP, $8 U.S.), and the audiotape set of WE'RE ALL DOING TIME ($30 U.S.). Please add $2 postage per total order. All proceeds go directly to the foundation, and help us to continue producing and distributing free copies for prisoners.

newsletter editor Bo Lozoff; c 1988, Human Kindness Foundation.