



A Newsletter For Prisoners
Based on the Conversations with God Material

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Karma: What The Heck Is That?

I'm sure most all of you had heard about karma. I'm sure many of you understand it. But today, sitting in front of my computer, I felt the need to clarify (to myself, as usual) what karma is all about.

I believe in the law of karma, or reaping what you sow as is more often heard here in the Western world. I believe that, both in a theoretical way and from my own experience.

Let's start with the theory. There are laws that we all live by without thinking about them too much. For instance, we know that if we hold a cup of coffee in our hands and we let go, the cup will fall. We know that depending on how far from the ground we were holding it, it will hit harder or more gently. It will break depending on the material it is made out of and its weight. This is the law of gravity that, although poorly understood even by scientists, we all live by.

Many other laws govern our lives. To give another example, we know that if we push on a swing, it will swing back to us. The harder we push, the faster it

will swing back. If the swing is very heavy, and it is given a hard shove, we know this would be a good time to get the heck out of its way. This also is a law a physics.

"...if you're very, very good at being angry, others may shut the heck up. If this was your only aim, then you 'won' that round and should feel pretty good."

For instance, have you ever been around a very depressed person? Did you not find it very difficult to remain upbeat when around that sadness?

Feelings have energy. The more strongly we feel something the more powerfully that energy is released into the world. But in this case 'release' is not the end of the feeling. The feelings that go from us do not get out of us.

Very much like the swing I spoke of earlier, the energy of our emotions comes back to us.

Anger is very much like that. Just think the last time a person

But there are also laws that we know are true not from any of the physical sciences but from our own experiences.

came to you in anger. Did that not produce anger in you, defensiveness, a need to attack in retaliation. All the while thinking that if the other person sees how dealing with an angry person really feels like, they might rethink their own anger and treat us better?

How did that work for you? Granted, if you're very, very good at being angry, others may shut the heck up. If this was your only aim, then you 'won' that round and should feel pretty good.

This has happened to me more times than I am comfortable talking about. But the 'good' feeling that comes from that "win" never lasts.

What happens to me then reminds me of the story of the Master who was teaching his student that we all have two ravenous dogs in us, one for good, one for evil. The student asked which dog won. The answer was, "The one you feed the most".

Whenever I feel angry and act on it, excusing it by reminding myself over and over how right I am to be angry, how wrong the other person was to do or say whatever

Karma: What The Heck Is That?

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they did, the more I am feeding my anger.

Look at what you feel most of the time. Do you get angry a lot? Do you feel sad a lot? Do you feel light-hearted a lot? Do you frown more than you smile?

And think....What if those emotions came back at you like the swing? If you really believed they did, what would you change about the way you look at life?

Because the way we look at life determines how we will feel. Do you agree with me on this?

Just look at people you know. Can you not predict with a good deal of accuracy who will react in anger at disturbing news? Who will be depressed for a long time after hearing sad news? Who will get through rough times fairly easily?

We all have patterns of behavior, don't we? We all have a 'usual' way of dealing with life. We have habits of reactions. Those habits make our lives easier. We don't need to think very much about any given situation, we react now as we did before. Not always a happy set of reactions, but comfortable in that we know them very well.

But what if the habits bring about unhappy results? What if every time we get angry, our lives suddenly dim, our happiness diminishes. What if our sadness brings about more sadness? What if....

That is my own experience of how things work. This is why I recognize the swing coming back at me. The anger I feel does not always come back from the person I aimed it at, nor do any of my emotions.

But whenever I feed my anger, my life is worst off for days because of it. Whenever I do a good deed, my

whole being feels better, all I see grows brighter, my cup runneth over.

So now I've spoken about some theories concerning cause and effect and how I see this law in my own experience.

But what the heck does all this have to do with karma?

Those of you who do not believe in reincarnation can, I hope, get something out of simply looking at your own emotions and working to feed the positive dog and let the negative one starve.

But for those of you who believe reincarnation is a real possibility, as I do, the swing has a whole other dimension.

It is difficult to believe we reap what we sow when we see, for instance, people who are greedy and selfish gain from their way of living. It is difficult to believe in karma when we see tyrants taking cruel advantage of their people and gain from it.

But if you believe in reincarnation, as I do, then you understand what Jesus said on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

I do not believe he meant that his executioners did not know they were killing Jesus; I do not even believe he meant that they did not understand they were killing the Son of God. I believe he meant that they should be forgiven because they did not know what they were doing to themselves by committing this act.

Karma is the consequence of our actions, plain and simple.

By consequence, I do not mean punishment. That is not a consequence. I may write about justice

one of these days, to try and figure out if justice is even possible without a grain (or two) of revenge. But karma is not at all about punishment. Is the swing punishing me by smacking me right on the nose if I push it hard and don't get out of the way? Of course not.

I believe karma is very impersonal that way. We choose to do whatever....we will get whatever back.

This is not to say that once bad karma is created it must absolutely come to pass. I believe that we can correct our karmic debt (so to speak) by changing which dog we feed.

I believe karma is energy that is out there. Karma has brought us to this life, in this place, at this time; karma accounts for the parents we had, the difficulty or ease of our time here; karma accounts for what looks totally unfair in what people face in their lives on earth.

Karma is the biggest swing you can ever imagine.

If you do not believe in reincarnation, then look only to your own emotions to judge what works for you here and now and what doesn't. That alone will help you be happier.

If you believe in reincarnation, in having many, many lives to work out who you choose to be, how you experience yourself, then karma can be a wonderful guarantee that all IS fair, that good deeds always bring good results. And since the Universe is Benevolent, our good deeds weigh more heavily than the bad ones. In this way, bad karma can be worked out by good deeds.

Isn't that great? So choose wisely which dog you feed.

Wishing you all Good Karma

Transformation:: Rick's Story

As published in the newsletter *A Little Good News*
<http://humankindness.org/spring02.html>

Josh Lozoff interviewed Rick, as he explains below:

Rick Smith has served 21 years on a life-without-parole sentence in Alabama. During that time, he has gradually transformed from a self-centered, violent young killer, to a true elder in his prison community; one who has helped thousands of other cons get their lives together. Rick helps run a therapeutic community unit at Donaldson prison, leading classes on men's issues, psychology and spiritual growth. The prison authorities denied my request to interview Rick in person with a tape recorder, so he and I corresponded by mail over the course of several months. I have been personally very inspired by our exchange. Rick's story is a wonderful and powerful reminder that true change is possible.

Rick, what kind of guy were you when you went to prison? What were your values? I don't think I really had any values by the time I got locked up. Human life meant nothing to me, I was so hurt and angry about the way my life had turned out. Life just sucked... big time! The only thing important to me was getting high so that I could escape the pain. I was very, very immature, filled with self-pity. I partied a lot to take away the pain.

Did you think about your future?

Yes, although it was bizarre really, it seemed I was waiting for Santa Claus to come. I expected that someone would recognize my greatness and get me out of the mess I had made of my life, and then life would be happy ever after.

And then?

When Santa Claus didn't come I became dangerous. In my memory today, it's like I was two people. I could be kind and gentle to my family, and then walk out the door and kill. One night while sitting at the table stoned and drunk, I told my girlfriend "I need help." She said "What kind of help do you need," and I said "I don't know, but I need help bad."

Can we talk a little about your crime?

Well, a few days later on the coldest day of the year, I found myself sitting in my car lashing out at God. I was in a RAGE! It was like I was trying to blackmail God. I was so sick. I was sober and I could feel the full impact of all my pain. I can remember threatening God with killing someone - who, it didn't matter. I said to God, "You made me who and what I am, You can change me. You're God." Then I felt God telling me to go home, everything would be alright.

But instead of going home, I noticed a shoe store and went in. A lady came from the back and asked me what she could do for me. I told her to give me all her money, and she did. I told her to empty the cash register, and she did. Then I told her to lie down on the floor, and she did. But that didn't seem to suit me so I told her to get up and go in the back of the store. As she passed by me, I stabbed her with my knife, and I continued to stab her until she was dead. This period of time seemed surreal. It was as if time slowed down. When I came to, I was standing

over her and I'm tripping out about the violence I've done in a matter of seconds. And then I go out the door, walk to the car and sit there stunned.

Two days later I was arrested for capital murder and placed in jail with no bond. I sat in jail looking back at the horror of what I had done. I was so overwhelmed with guilt and shame. So much so that it didn't even occur to me that anyone in my family would come to jail to visit me. After all I am a "monster." When I was informed that I had visitors, I was shocked. I had not bathed and I looked exactly how I felt on the inside. My family looked at me and regarded me as the victim of the local authorities arresting anyone they could just to pin the murder on. To them, the man they knew could not have done such a thing.

Throughout the whole process, they showed immense courage. Even 21 years later, my heart breaks when I think of the negative effect I had on their lives. The ripple effect I had on so many lives in the community reaches deep in my heart today and keeps me sober, clean, nonviolent and very changed.

What was your reaction when you heard your sentence?

I was probably relieved, as strange as it sounds. And also numb. I couldn't grasp a life-without-parole sentence, it just doesn't sound real. I knew I had a shot of dope ready for me when I got back to my cell. The dope would help me get through it. It messed my family up, they were almost hysterical - you'd have thought I was sentenced to die. I guess they knew more about what life without parole meant than I did.

Do you relate to the term

"transformation?" Do you feel you've had one? More than one?

Yes, I feel I've had one, I also feel it is a lifelong process.

How did yours begin?

In 1983, I tried to escape from Holman, which landed me in lock-up. There I hit my all time low. Believe me, it let all the air out of me to not get away from prison. My heart ached... I can remember saying to myself "there has got to be a better way" and a voice that was definitely not mine answering, *Yes. Are you ready?*

But then I forgot about it for awhile.

Months later in lock up, I wanted to kill this other guy bad! I had a job in lock-up which put me in the hall each night. One night I went to the cell of a man who was known for his ability to make and keep knives in prison. I told him to give me a knife. But a true friend of mine two cells down yelled to the guy not to give it to me, that he would kick his ass. So the man didn't give me the knife, and I left fuming and angry. The next morning, before I had a chance to do anything more about it, I transferred out of that prison.

Looking back, you now see God's grace in the voice you heard in lock-up, and being transferred before you could kill that dude. But when and how did you start becoming aware of a process of deep transformation?

Well, arriving in lock-up in this prison, I met a prison legend. He became my first teacher and role model. He'd just arrived here himself from the federal system, where he'd learned yoga and meditation. His name was Buddy. He wrote out Hatha yoga postures and explained breathing techniques to me.

The postures were difficult to me, but Buddy had a simple way of explaining things and I trusted him. He got at my life habits, from smoking to the amount of sweets in my diet to being overweight. He filled out my store orders and wouldn't let me order so much sugar products. I hated him for the "change" I would have to make.

Do you feel, just by meeting Buddy, this "change" sort of happened to you, or were there some hard choices you had to make along the way?

Well, even though changes were occurring in my life - meditation and yoga were making a big difference - I was depressed and was at a point of wanting to cash it all in. I didn't think I would get out of lock-up anytime soon. I was burnt out. I had spent over 3 years locked down since I was arrested.

Finally I got on the phone and told my mother that the big Segregation Board would meet in May around the 17th, and that if they didn't let me out of Seg I was going to take out whoever was standing in front of my cell when the door opened.

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Transformation: Rick's Story

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Mother did something I wouldn't know about for many years. She called the warden, and begged him to give me a chance in population.

Well the board met, including the commissioner who'd told me that as long as he was in charge, I'd never be in population again! And the warden went against all the Montgomery officials and the commissioner. The board let the warden have his way, and Buddy and I both were released to population the next day. I had only served 9 months for escape. It was a miracle!

The first day I was in population I ran one mile. The area where they moved us was so "wide open" that it was like going free. I didn't sleep for about 3 days. Buddy and I had an effect on the area. No one had ever seen yoga before - it was so exotic. Men are very afraid of yoga, and the postures you perform in yoga are not the kind of physical poses you want to do in full view of prisoners - such as a posture with your butt in the air?!

Even though Buddy taught me yoga, when we went to population, he gradually returned to the behavior that made him a legend as a kingpin and a dope trafficker. *That's what I mean by "choices." You say that Buddy returned to his old behavior. But it seems you continued this process of spiritual transformation. Did you just have a hunch that you were on to something better than your old way of life?*

The reason I stayed with the meditation, yoga, and running is the simple fact that I could feel a shift occurring. I didn't really know how to express it then, but I just knew that being disciplined felt good to me. Good habits take over and the negativity slips away - you starve it to death.

How did your pals react to the changes you

were making? Did you have people you could share your thoughts with?

About a month after I got out of lock-up I met a man who helped me through so many stages of transformation. His name was Micheal Nicastro [now Arjun Nicastro, Program Director of Human Kindness Foundation] and we seemed to like each other right from the start. He'd also just gotten out of lock-up. We both liked to smoke pot and he became my workout partner.

Was meeting another spiritual seeker like Arjun a coincidence, or were you consciously looking to associate with a different type of person than you would have several years earlier?

Meeting Arjun was not a coincidence, it was a true miracle. I don't think I was consciously looking for a friend to go deeper with. We met and it was like there was something "deeper" there for both of us. We were adventurous, curious, and there was an easygoing nature to our relationship - I think we made contact with "trust" for the first time. I trusted Arjun and I think he did the same. Oh, it was scary, but even our fears, we could laugh about. Men in here really have a hard time trusting each other. Even respect in here comes more out of fear than love.

What are your personal spiritual practices now?

I use the time I have alone with myself for meditation and reflection. I practice "mindfulness" daily and I have found great benefit from it. In this prison they feed the masses breakfast between 3 & 4 am. I do not eat breakfast, I use that time to sleep. To me, the body's meditation involves exercise. I do calisthenics and stretch and run.

At night I practice a discipline that is awesome in scope. It is called "Retrospect" and basically I reverse the day and as I go over my day mentally, I change the errors I made mentally and it clears the residue for me to head into the astral plane. Retrospect also makes me live differently during the day because I know I will be looking back at the day that night. I practice affirmations morning and night. I have a set of rosary beads that belonged to a real prayer warrior, a devout catholic nun. I use the beads to keep up with my affirmations in sets of 10. I also love to read inspirational literature - sacred scriptures and poetry, literature that makes me think about life. *What were the hardest tests of your transformation?*

The hardest test for me has always been letting go of my "escape" agendas. When you have life without parole it's almost automatic that you think about leaving prison. It's just there in the background like a ghost.

A couple of years ago, I went through a real rough period and I was spending about 3 hours a day in meditation and God took me through a dialogue about my escape fantasies. God has to speak to me like a convict or I will miss him. He shared with me that with his ability to run a whole universe and it be "perfect," did I really think he needed me to plot an escape? God pointed out that I need to totally "surrender" once and for all.

Another big thing for me several years ago was smoking pot - I didn't see anything wrong with it until it finally hit me. It was getting so I could smoke pot and it would bring me down. I was surprised when after

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A Magazine based on A Course in Miracles

Jon Mundy, one of the original people who frequented Helen Schucman, the scribe of *A Course in Miracles*, is going to begin sending **The Miracles Magazine** to prisoners. If you are interested in receiving this magazine, please let us know at *Freedom Inside* and we will forward your information to Joseph Wolfe who is responsible for the distribution. A year's subscription is \$20.00. If you cannot afford this, there are a few donated subscriptions available.

*****DONATIONS NEEDED*****

Joseph Wolfe is sending out a request for much needed donations just for the purpose of getting more subscriptions sent to prisoners. If you like *A Course in Miracles* along with *The Miracles Magazine* and would like to help, please send donations to the address that follows. (US postage stamps in any denomination would also be gratefully accepted. Mail to:

Spirit Light Outreach
Joe Wolfe
P.O. Box 20827
Sedona, Arizona 86341

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Freedom Inside now contains 12 pages. We're growing and I just love it.

A while back I bought an internet course called The Thomas Messages that I found wonderfully uplifting. I am now choosing to share this course with you in these new pages. There are 16 messages in all, I will include one in each issue until all 16 messages have been shared with you.

If some of you would like to receive the messages more quickly, please go to www.emissaryoflight.com and for a suggested donation of 50 US dollars, you will receive one of these messages every few days.

Here is how James Twyman, the author of the course, describes it.

THE THOMAS MESSAGES:

In 2002, a book was published called "Emissary of Love: the Psychic Children Speak to the World" chronicling my journey into the mountains of Bulgaria to meet a group of children who possess amazing psychic powers. One of those children, a young boy named Thomas, claimed to be able to send messages and insights over great distances, even to the other side of the world. I didn't remember this until I was sitting in a hot tub some months later and "felt him" inside me.

It was the first time I ever had an experience like this, and it was the beginning of a long discourse on the role of the New Children (sometimes called the Indigo Children) and their role in healing the world. These amazing lessons, all from the mind of Thomas, are the result of that dialogue. He claims that there are thousands of children in the world today who have the same gift, the ability to "align" with others who can then help them complete their Great Work.

If you are interested in learning this, or connecting with one of these young masters, then this course is the way. Thomas shares insights that will help you live a fulfilled life, and even teaches how to enter the "Grid" where the children work together.

It is important for you to decide why you are taking this course. Is it because you want to perform miracles? Do you want to feel more powerful than you have ever allowed yourself to be in the past? If these ideas approach the reasons you are reading this right now, then it would be best for you to stop. Find something else to occupy your time. You will not achieve these things if they are the goal you seek. However, if you are reading this because you have decided that you are on this planet to be an "Instrument of Peace," and to heal the world by healing your own mind, then please continue. If you open your heart and mind to these simple lessons and dedicate yourself to this mission, then you will achieve it. Guaranteed!

And here is the paradox: If you do seek these higher ideals, to love and to realize that you are already whole and enlightened, then the miracles will surely follow, and you will realize yourself to be more powerful than you have ever allowed yourself to be in the past. They are not the goals, but they are the products of a higher goal. You are here to learn how to apply the force we call LOVE. It is as easy as learning a certain technology that has been known by the mystics of many spiritual traditions for thousands of years. Now it is your turn to learn it, then apply it to your life.

Message Eleven

Today we begin a journey that we have been preparing ourselves for over the last ten lessons. Most of us joined this Study Group because we wanted to understand the gifts of the Children, as well as integrate those gifts into our lives. They made certain promises, one of which was the opportunity to activate the psychic powers they have, and use them to bring peace to the world. Thomas promised that most of the real work would be taking place beneath the surface of our lives, not just in the lessons we study every other month. That is mainly accomplished through the Guides each one of us has drawn, for they are perhaps the most valuable assets we have on this journey. Even if you have not made conscious contact with your guide, he reminds us that they are with us, helping to remove the blocks that have kept us from SEEING reality. Most of you have reported amazing experiences with your Child Guides, and so we feel confident that everything is working as planned. But still, we have been waiting for the next step when we would be able to extend the Gift ourselves. That time has come.

I know that you are not interested in such random and meaningless skills like bending spoons with your mind or reading the thoughts of others. The fact that Marco was able to

open these doors within my mind may have intrigued you, but they are certainly not the goal. All the Children remind us that the real Gift comes from the heart, and is activated by love. When our hearts are open then miracles are natural. And so the question is, how to we crack the shield we have placed around our hearts so that the miracle of love will shine through?

Thomas has been stressing the role of SEEING what is true in everyone we meet. He claims that the path is very simple, though it takes great commitment on our part. We have to be willing to lay aside the sight the ego claims and accept what God offers instead. We have been conditioned to see what is not there, and so we are blind to what really is.

And now we are ready to use this sight to bring us what we want more than anything else. I can feel the lessons shifting tone, and there is a new level of seriousness as well. Now is when the real work begins, though it is not work at all. If we are willing to follow this instruction then it will bring us the joy we have been searching for. This is a new way of life, not just something we do a few minutes each day. If we are willing to take this seriously, then our lives will change, and we will discover the Grace we have avoided till now.

Thomas' Message Eleven

You have been wondering how the Children are able to perform the miracles that you think you cannot perform. You have read stories and have heard reports of our Gifts, and you still do not realize that there is nothing we have that is not sleeping within your own mind. Perhaps you joined this Study group thinking that it may help you discover and then awaken that place, and then you will have the same powers.

But what would it change in your life? Do you not see that performing miracles without the consciousness that supports them is valueless? That is why we have been focusing on everything other than this aspect of our work.

If you came wanting to perform magic then you have come to the wrong place. But if you are here to awaken to the fact that you ARE the miracle you are seeking, and that YOU can flow out into the world and be a Gift to everyone you touch, then you are right where you need to be.

I have said many times before in these lessons that there are no Psychic Children outside you that can do anything. Of course there are children in the world who have awakened to the infinite possibility of love, and they are guiding you now as you realize the same place within yourselves. But you will not understand this state by looking at them, at least not in the traditional sense. They will seem as any other child if you look in this way. You will not perceive it in anyone until you perceive it in yourself. And yet the opposite is also true. You will not perceive it in yourself until you offer it to another.

Perhaps you are now ready to see that these two are the same. In accepting it to yourself you are seeing it in another, and by seeing it in another you are accepting it to yourself. Don't try to understand this with your mind, but with your heart. It is the same. This is one statement, not two. Now you are ready to open your heart to the Gift that comes from SEEING.

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Healing comes from SEEING what is really there. Many of you have been taught to extend healing energy from your hands or in other ways. The Children realize that the eyes are the best way to give this Light, but not for the reason you may think. Your physical eyes were made NOT to see, in other words, to look upon the world your ego made, the world of bodies and separation. What would happen if you took this tool and used it to accomplish the goal of Spirit instead of the ego? Your Soul desires to see everything as it really is, as one with the Creator.

When you finally learn to SEE what is really there, then your eyes begin to change, because you are using them for the opposite of what they were intended to be used for. Do you understand? This may be hard to accept, but you have hopefully come far enough to learn this, and then apply it. When you use your physical eyes to see what the Spirit alone can perceive, then you become a miracle worker, and the Gift is activated.

I will say that again because it is so vitally important. When you use your physical eyes to see what the Spirit alone can perceive, then you become a miracle worker, and the Gift is activated. That is the beginning and the end of this course. It is why you are here.

When you look into another person's eyes and SEE who they really are, or see them the way God SEES them, the perfection in them, then you offer them a precious Gift. And because you are one with them, you are offering the same gift to yourself. When you use your eyes to see the truth in another, then you create a resonating pattern of peace that the other enters into effortlessly, even unconsciously. This is where the miracle happens, through Divine Resonance. A door opens that you enter along with the person you SEE. It is what you have called the Door of Eternity. By SEEING the truth then creating a resonance pattern, you enable them to literally vibrate with the reality you perceive. They may not even feel this consciously, but their soul knows what is happening, and the shift is unavoidable.

This is how the Children accept and create miracles. And you are ready to do the same. You are being called to resonate with the truth, and give it as a Gift to everyone. Then you will know that you are that Gift, and then it will flow into every area of your life. The laws of the world cannot touch you then, for you will be SEEING past the world to the Heaven God perceives.

The next few lessons will deal with this way of SEEING, and if you practice it you will see that the Gift opens by itself. Do not be surprised if you do not begin experiencing miracles everyday. Be surprised if you don't. But the miracles are not the goal, and neither is the Gift. They are the result of a higher goal, the call of love itself.

Spend as much time as you can this month SEEING the truth in others. Try to set aside a certain amount of time every day, at least half an hour. And as you perform your practice, try to feel the resonance pattern as it builds up inside you. Then consciously give this to everyone you SEE. You do not need to know how you will do this. The Light knows how to act, and where to heal. It is yours but to will the exchange. And then watch your own heart and notice how you have changed. Notice the joy you feel and the love that courses through you. The more you practice this the more you will understand. Then you will be ready for the next phase in this.

You are here to learn this Divine Resonance, and in doing so to heal your own mind.

We love you,

Thomas



Responses to CR of Florida
 from *Forgiving the Unforgivable*
 (January issue)

FROM HJ of NORTH CAROLINA

First, I sympathize with CR of Florida; for no one should be subjected to extreme temperatures without the proper clothing or shelter; nor should one have to eat improperly prepared food, eat inadequate portions per meal, or eat improperly served food.

Following are some of the ways we dealt with similar prison experiences. For instance, when we had to go out in cold temperature—as low as 35 degrees for two hours—supposedly so someone could clean-up the dormitory, we would walk around the prison yard, lift weights, and perform other exercises to keep our bodies warm until 10:00 a.m.

We would always express our dissatisfaction in speech to higher prison officials and in words in a grievance form. However, because it was a reality we had to live with, we would make the

best of the situation by choosing to not bring further trauma upon ourselves.

As we recognized that some of the pain of suffering looses some of its bite when it has meaning, we looked for and talked about ways to see our predicament differently. For example, prison food is prison food, and a prison mess-hall is no public cafeteria; as a consequence, it's crazy to expect otherwise. An angry complaint will only make the line-servers, cooks, and prison guard who are handling the food even more angry.

Whenever we were called a negative name or told we were worthless or something like that, we would check ourselves—by our own standards—and if we found ourselves out of order, we'd choose thoughts and energies to continue improving ourselves.

Sometimes, in an effort to get the prison guard off our case, we would simply say, "I'll do better next time."

Finally, forgive the unforgivable and apply some spiritual principles, we would reflect on reasons or excuses to (1) Be patient with the present because there is something about life, people, and ourselves that we don't know; the knowing of which would change our experiences, (2) Be tolerant with the offensive behavior because we believe they were doing the best that they could based on their level of conscious-awareness, (3) Intentionally sacrifice a part of ourselves because our own unconscious behavior or lack of discipline caused us to be in prison. The relief, peace of mind, and humor that we experienced because we used those practices about forgiveness was a source of our Freedom Inside.

FROM CA of TEXAS

I just read the last issue of *Freedom Inside*. I've been receiving that newsletter for awhile and this is the first time I write since I asked to be placed on the mailing list. I read almost all the articles.

Recently, I was reading the article in which you gave a response to CR regarding the mistreatment he was experiencing. His problem is very similar to the one we experience here. Not only that, but assaulting, refusing feed and violating prisoners' rights, even of prisoners who are men-

tally ill.

One day, that happened to a friend of mine. He witnessed an assault on another prisoner by two officers. He protested. One of those officers struck him with a tray as retaliation. Afterwards, they began to deny him food, recreation and showers. He attempted to assault one of those officers but he did not succeed. So they became even harsher with him and intimidated other prisoners.

He asked for my help in writing legal complaints and letters which I did and filed a lawsuit against all the officers who failed to take the appropriate steps in this matter.

Finally, they left him alone, telling him they wanted no more problems.

Three of the officers were fired for assaulting a prisoner. The

(continued on next page)



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rest were removed to another building. What would have happened if things were left as they had been? Those officers would probably still be here, doing the same things.

We are prisoners but have constitutional rights to be treated as human beings in this country.

From a spiritual point of view, yeah, one would let them do whatever they wanted to do. So we are in a dilemma: whether to accept inhuman conditions or fight where there are rights that protect prisoners.

I will fight if I know how to do it. This is a point of view from a prisoner who personally experienced such treatment.

Dear CA,

Thank you for responding to CR and for sharing your own experiences. I know that many of our readers share your point of view.

As do I.

There is absolutely nothing more 'spiritual' in allowing yourself to be mistreated. And it is certainly not less spiritual to fight for your rights to the full extent that the law allows.

It is my belief that what makes an action more or less 'spiritual' is not the action itself but the intent behind it, the feelings associated with it.

When we act as our best selves, that is when we are the most spiritual. If, while allowing someone to treat you badly, you feel hate, anger, and would like nothing better than get revenge, that is not being your best self.

I may be dreaming to believe this is possible but here goes what to me would be the best response in a situation of abuse.

If, when you are mistreated, you recognize that the others are not acting from their own best selves, you also know that, karma being what it is, they really don't

know what they are doing to themselves, you may then wish to correct the situation for your own sake, of course, but also for theirs.

This, to me, recognizes that we are not all at the same level of conscious-awareness, we do not all realize the mistakes we make as we are making them and we all need, at one time or another, a helping hand, a guiding spirit to help us make better choices.

It is also a time to realize that we are all the same; that what happens to one of us, happens to all of us. That no one can attain God-consciousness without seeing Christ in everyone around.

We truly are all in the same boat. We truly all are one.

You are a blessing to all around you, CA.

And you are blessed.

Janine

FROM WPR of VIRGINIA

CR,

Tough question. No easy answer is forthcoming. I can only tell you that I've made Inner Peace and Tranquility my primary goal. Bottom line: the "outer" reflects the "inner". It's getting the inner right that matters the most. The key is to meditate consistently.

Prison sucks! This is not my first time either. The food, the living conditions, and the lack of respect by both guards and inmates seem to be universal no matter where you go.

I'm not making light of your situation either. Ask yourself, "What is the possibility of any of those things changing?" The answer is obvious. A better question is, "How can I live among the lions

and not get eaten?"

The really crummy part about prison is that sometimes we spend more time and attention on survival than really getting to know God. Don't miss this valuable opportunity to really get to know God.

All the problems you noted are external. The secret to successfully doing time, and this is just my opinion, is to be so focused internally (the inside) that what's going on externally (the outside) doesn't matter as much. I'm not saying this is easy. But the outside won't change until you change the inside. Get your mind and emotions out of prison!

The sad truth is that if you don't raise your consciousness and level

of awareness, you'll remain "Imprisoned" whether you're in or out of jail. Why do you think so many come back to prison? Hint: it's not the food! Sorry, I couldn't help my Higher-Self.

By the way, there's a wonderful book entitled *We're All Doing Time* by Bo Lozoff. He's answered hundreds of questions from prisoners just like yourself. The book is available to prisoners for free— at the following address

**Bo Lozoff
Human Kindness Foundation
PO Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715**

(See Transformation: Rick's Story starting on page 3 for an interview conducted by Bo Lozoff)

Transformation: Rick's Story

several months, I really wasn't tempted with pot.

You've already talked some about the effect your crime had on your family. It must be even harder – scarier maybe – to think about your victim and her family. But I imagine dealing with that has been part of your journey as well.

It seems that guilt, shame and remorse is a process as well. When I first got locked up I couldn't really feel for anyone, even myself. After I got into treatment and therapy, I had the opportunity to open up my heart center and feel the terrible anguish of the horror of my actions, and the pain and suffering I have caused to so many people. I've been in treatment now seventeen years, and I still have moments when my heart goes through this tremendous aching. It wasn't until about 1996 that I came in contact with the massive amount of suffering to my victim's family. I hadn't been able to ingest the depth of my crimes to so many. *How do you process those feelings, now that you have a deeper perspective in which to examine them?*

I lecture to the guys in this program every day. So I have the opportunity to use my crimes as a channel to show other men how to deal with their guilt and shame, how to accept working with remorse. The horror of my past is a tool for me to reach my peers. I use the pain of it all to probe, shock and bless others. I don't want to forget my past and what I've done. It keeps me clean, sober, and very humble. I know that but for the grace of God and the thousands of human beings sent to help me through all this, I would be nothing. The process to human being has been a lengthy journey for me. *Do you feel you're able to make the world better from inside?*

Most certainly. The biggest service is example, especially with the young men in here. They need to see their elders with the right attitude. When men in here can see a fellow convict who is clean, sober, non-violent, and peaceful in his lifestyle, it gives them hope. Men in here will listen to you if you are not a hypocrite. You cannot speak about things if you are doing the things you speak against.

People in the free world do not seem to comprehend that almost all of these men will return to the streets one day. The real issues have to be looked at. I feel what I'm doing in here affects everything. Prisoners are just as important as any people on Earth. Since I can't do things for others who suffer across this planet, I can contribute to the area I'm related to the most. I can also meditate and pray and raise awareness about the suffering going on

across the planet as well as the planet itself. I can share with these men that it's important to be related to the earth we live on and all people who live on it. There's so much work to do.

Caring about people takes a lot of time, energy and devotion. The rewards are incredible though.

Is service work a conscious and important aspect of your path?

Service work to me is my path. Caring for others is a divine manifestation of our highest way of being related. To seek God and serve others is to have abundance. The fullness of a life devoted to others is bliss. Oh, you have days that you get stressed out and you can burn out. That's why it's important to keep balance and know when to say "no" – my new job has to do with this. I've held many positions in this drug/alcohol treatment program. I was originally hired as a "clerk," then I ended up a staff-aide, and then a program coordinator, then they changed that name to "mentor." Now I'm Educational Coordinator. Whatever?

How's your relationship with the guards and other prison staff?

I get along with C.O.s who are down on the floor with us "roving" and in the cubicles and gun towers. Some supervisors I respect and get along with. I have a strong relationship with most officers because I've been here so long. As far as the higher authorities, I don't have a lot of respect for them. We have yet to have a pro-treatment warden at this facility. We have graduations where they never come, we do not have their support. We are viewed as property and industry. But over the years I've had some great experiences with guards and other staff.

Back in 1985-86 I had an officer who used to give me the blues about crossing the hall to get to my partner's cell. Years later I asked the officer why he was so hard on me. He said he knew I was only wanting to go to the other side of the block to get high. Since he knew I was trying to change, he wanted to help me the best way he knew how. By denying me passage, he also taught me self-control and tolerance. At the time, I wanted to blow a fuse, but I cannot see him today without grinning.

Once at a banquet, one of the psychologists at Holman Prison told the crowd that many years earlier, he hated me so bad because of my attitude and how sick I was, that he'd actually had thoughts about bringing in a gun and shooting me! Then he spoke about me in a positive light that left the audience blown away. I wasn't even there. When I found out, I had no idea he felt that way.

I can remember officers in one block liking Arjun and me so well because of the Peace Advocacy they knew we promoted, that even when we did things wrong they seemed to cut us a lot of slack. One night after smoking dope, one officer came by and said, "Man, that smells pretty good, you need to get a hot rail before you get busted" and just grinned and walked away. We had a lot of experiences with officers that came out pretty cool because they could see that we were human beings. They treated us like humans. I've had officers come by during count and throw me snack cakes.

Have you been involved in, or witness to, the spiritual transformations of other guys?

Not many, but a few. I've seen some changes. But I've only seen a few go *real deep* and get serious about soul work. Most guys in here can do okay for awhile but then eventually the "script" kicks in and you are seeing the same guy you met to begin with.

Will you ever get released?

Yes, but when, only God knows.

How do you know? If you believed you were going to die in prison, would that change any of your spiritual perspectives?

Well, what I've discovered these past few years is that courage is indeed its own reward. I'm basically a coward; I have been all my life. The thing that offsets it is my recognition of that and my letting go. The life I lead today is all I know. I don't have a life apart from "The Life" that God has shown me. I trust God today, so my future is no longer in doubt. There are different ways my life can go, but I feel whichever way I go, I will go with God.

Of course, I have a preference to get out of here because I'm human. However, every day when I awaken to the Great Mystery, I find out how truly blessed Life can be, including life sentences without paroles. There are beautiful, wonderful human beings suffering on this planet today, and they did not kill anyone. They are suffering, yet committed no crimes. Who am I to not accept what my life has come to?

Arjun and I were in our cell meditating one night and I was in need of affirmation, and suddenly it was like God sent all the "wildlife" in the area around Donaldson to be outside our window and sing to us for the length of time we were sitting. It was clear that God was telling us we were loved, not forgotten. God is constantly showing us His/Her face each and every day. You just have to put on a pair of God-glasses to see it.

POETRY CORNER

THE DREAM

It was such a disappointment to wake up from the dream and find myself lying on my bed in a prison dormitory.

If only I could go back to the dream. It was there that I discovered that there was no one but me in all the human bodies that I had always believed to be other people. No matter how I saw anyone, I was just seeing myself that way. No matter how I treated anyone, I was just treating myself that way. No matter how I felt toward anyone, I was just feeling that way about myself.

What if this dream turned out to be true? It would mean that everyone would be another version of myself, another expression of how I could be, another expression of how I actually am. I would be connected to life in all its forms, to every human being no matter how different he or she might appear to be, to every animal, to every plant, to all that is.

In looking further into the dream, I would come to the conclusion that the essence of this Oneness is a Consciousness that shines forth from every pair of eyes, beats from every heart, speaks with every voice and meets Itself wherever it goes.

If we all truly believed that we are One, we would never allow 400 children an hour to die of starvation or 300,000 to be murdered in Darfur. We would not allow ourselves to be impotent in the face of genocide. We would rise in the first hour that occurred and say, "No, we cannot allow ourselves to do this to ourselves".

In a perfect dream, I envision a world in which we all deeply understand and functionally practice the truth of who we are. Then....

- ...there would be no wars because we wouldn't fight.
- ...there would be no hunger because we would feed each other
- ...there would be no environmental breakdown because we would love ourselves, each other, and our planet too much to destroy it.
- ...there would be no prejudice, oppression, or violence of any kind,
- ...there would be no sorrow,
- ...there would only be peace

CTB
Arizona

TRUTH

I ran and took a leap
In consciousness,
Now, I'm in real deep.

I didn't know what I might find.
My ego often gets in the way
And then my inner-child wants to play.

I told my mind to be quiet
And my body to be still.
Now, I'm asking, "Is this real?"

"None of it is!"
came from a booming voice.
And I said,
"Well, what about choice?"
"Yes it's up to you to decide.
From truth you cannot hide".

"No, this simply cannot be.
That's not truth that I see."

"Of course not, truth you cannot see.
Truth is only something you can Be."

WPR
Virginia

Do you have a poem that reflects the message in Freedom Inside?
If so, send it in, it just may be chosen for a future

POETRY CORNER



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