

Freedom



Inside

**A Newsletter For Prisoners
Based on the Conversations with God Material**

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Making Room for Something New

I am here! I have moved!! I am in Oregon!!!

Wonderful! Great!! Fantastic!!! (Had enough exclamation points yet?)

So, now what? I am sitting in front of my computer, much as I was in Canada, writing to you, much as I was in Canada, about topics that feel right at this time, much as I did in Canada.

So, what's new? What's different?

Well, one thing that has changed (other than my address, that is) is that I am not coordinator of the Prison Outreach Program of the CWG Foundation. As you may realize, I just LOVE dealing with you guys, hearing from you, responding as I can, creating this newsletter with and for you. What a trip that is for me!

So I have expanded, by coming here, what I love to do anyway, which is about connecting with as many of you as I can and seeing how I can be of service.

It feels to me that this next decade of my life (I will be 60 this year) is all about joy-filled service. It is a powerful time in my life since I am creating the Next Greatest Version I Can Hold of Who I Really Am. (Sound familiar?)

My purpose in coming here was clear from the start. And in order to fulfill it, I am choosing to do nothing outside of it. Nothing to fill in the hours, nothing to keep busy, nothing other than anything that serves my purpose: to serve.

"I believe that in order to Be the very Best I Can Be, in order to fulfill my Soul's Purpose in being here at this time, in this place, I need to allow the Universe to act."

order to allow into it the power of the Universe, God, the Life-Force or whatever else you wish to call the Energy fueling everything.

It goes a bit against what many people believe is how life works. That is, we have to work as hard as possible, as much as possible if we want to reach our goal.

I don't believe that for a second. I believe that in order to Be the very Best I Can Be, in order to fulfill my Soul's Purpose in being here at this time, in this place, I need to allow the Universe to act.

When I first read Conversations With God, book 1, I could not, in my wildest dreams, have imagined I would ever come live here and work at the CWG Foundation. But the Universe had other ideas.

Which brings me to the subject of this article: making room for something new.

It is very clear to me that I need to keep my life open in

CWG book One changed my life. It started me into a path where I could see myself in a whole new light, where I could know, deep down, that I am here for an important, divine purpose. I did not know yet what that purpose was but I knew I had one. And I was willing to wait for it to show itself.

That is what I am still waiting to do. Not to define my purpose, I found that. My purpose is clear: I am here to put my best talents to the biggest service to the most people for the greatest good.

How this will show itself, I don't know and I am not worried about it. I am blessed and I know it.

Many people do not recognize their divine nature. Many don't realize their lives are as they are for a reason. Many cannot find it in themselves to believe their souls have put them in exactly the best place at exactly the best time in exactly the best way to help them find their best path.

I am asking all of you to try and believe this for a moment. What if what I am saying is not "Pie in the Sky" stuff? What if it's true? WHAT IF IT IS TRUE!!!

I am not asking you to change beliefs you've held forever....unless it feels right to do that. I am not asking you to pretend to believe if you know very well you don't.

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What I am asking you do to is to suspend disbelief for a little while.

I am not asking you to stop doing anything you feel is important to you. I know much of what happens in prisons is very harsh. I know many of you believe you need to be wary, suspicious, always ready to defend yourselves, your possessions, your place. I have included in the Mail Bag this month, a letter that I received from a prisoner who believes exactly that.

What I am asking you is to find a moment, everyday if you can, to make room for the possibility that our lives are not as limited as we may feel they are.

We do not have to do the same things over and over again.

We do not have to think the same thoughts over and over again.

We do not have to have the same opinions over and over again.

We do not have to be the same person today that we were yesterday.

What about it? Think you could do that?

And if you could do that for a few moments once in a while, what would you choose to change?

Change. One syllable. Just a short word but does it ever have a huge impact in our lives! Not just the change itself, but mostly how we react to it.

Do you just hate it when things change or are you okay with most of the changes in your life? I will hazard a guess that most of us are more comfortable when things go along as they have been than when they suddenly change.

I believe that is why so many stay in jobs they don't like or in relationships they don't enjoy anymore. It feels easier to be unhappy with something you know than to let go of it and try to do something else with our lives.

But if we want to live our best lives—and why would we choose to do anything else?—then we have to let go of what doesn't work so well in order to make room for something different.

Letting go. And Change. Two HUGE aspects of living our best life, at least that is what it feels like to me!

So how do you make room for change? How do you let go of the things in your life that don't work so well but that feel at least familiar?

I've just read the latest book by Neale Donald Walsch. It is called, *When Everything Changes, Change Everything*. It is a wonderful book that I highly recommend.

In mid-April, I will be going to a retreat with Mr. Walsch about facing change in our lives. I would be VERY surprised if I didn't share a lot of that retreat with you guys!!!!

But for now, I would like to touch on what it feels like to let go.

I must say that, in my life, letting go seems to be a recurring theme. Everything was very stable for me during all my childhood and adolescence. But the day I got married, I started moving around with my husband. The day of our wedding is when I moved out of my country (Canada, for those of you who don't know) for the first time leaving my country, my family, my culture, my schooling (I had just finished my first year of university). It was quite a shock for a girl who had still been living with her parents until that day.

Since then, we moved many, many times, in the States, to Mexico, back to Canada and to the States again. We divorced after 28 years of marriage, and I moved back to Canada and now I am in Oregon.

In the meantime, I had 3 gorgeous sons who are now all over the place, one is in Boston, one in Phoenix and my youngest passed away at 23. My father had passed in 1991, then my son in 2001, my sister in 2002, and I took care of my mother from 2003 till last May when she passed.

My sons are now adults and, for those of you who have adult children you KNOW how much we have to let them go and live their own lives.

So I feel I've become quite an expert at letting go. An absolute top-of-the-line-grade-A-professional at letting go.

I always feel a tug when I let go of something but at this point in my life I also like the feeling of lightness that comes when I open my life to something new.

In the months to come, we'll talk more about change, about how to accept the changes that happen in your lives, how to turn even the "worst" situations, the most painful ones, into new beginnings.

In the meantime, I invite you to start thinking about changes that have happened in your lives. Let me know of some things that felt awful at the time but turned out for the best.

Let's put our heads together and come up with real life examples to share with one another.

I know that in my life, even the very worst that happened (my son's death followed so closely by my sister's) have made me see how very strong I am, how profoundly I believe the things that I do.

Those two moments, maybe more than anything else was when "the rubber met the road" for me. That was when I really knew I was first and foremost a spiritual being. That is when I knew it in my gut and not only in my mind and heart.

As Teilhard DeChardin said, we are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.

Let's share with each other examples of that kind of experience in our own lives. Write to me. I'd love to have pages in the next issue of *Freedom Inside* filled with your experiences with change.

Let's make 2010 about change. About letting go of the old to make room for a bigger, more powerful life. Let's do it together, using *Freedom Inside* to help one another be more than we were yesterday.

Ever growing,

Janine

After the Darkest Hour

by Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D

published in *Self-Realization* magazine, Spring 2009

How Suffering Begins the Journey to Wisdom

Why is it that some people see blessings in even the darkest times? Why is it that they seem able to use their experiences of pain, suffering, or loss to become better people? Like a refiner's fire, these dark times seem to catapult them into higher levels of consciousness. They become stronger, wider, more compassionate, and even spiritually awakened.

Without glamorizing suffering or reinforcing the misconception that the only human nobility lies in its ragged wounds, it's hard to miss the point that many wise thinkers believe that suffering contains remarkable gifts. Thirteenth-century Sufi mystic Rumi declared that "pain is a treasure, for it contains mercies", and reminds us that "spring seasons are hidden in the autumns." The Bible is also clear on this point: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:2-3). One of my most beloved heroes, the great humanitarian Helen Keller, lost her sight and her hearing at a very young age. Rather than cursing her fate, she instead attributed all her accomplishments to what she had learned as a result of her hardships. To Helen Keller suffering was a mighty though savage teacher. "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet," she said. "Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved." The idea that our

pain can be a source of enlightenment is even acknowledged in a bumper sticker I saw recently that made me laugh: "Oh no! Not another one of life's lessons!"

But as I've learned from some of my patients, it isn't the experience of suffering itself that gives rise to psychological and spiritual growth. Anne Morrow Lindbergh once said, "I do not believe that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering along taught, all the world would be wise, since everyone suffers." Many people not only do not become wiser or grow in positive ways through suffering but, in fact, also lose ground in enlightenment and compassion. Instead of growing, they become angry, jaded, self-pitying, pessimistic, and closed-hearted. Why? What are the differences between people who become bitter and those who become better through the gut-wrenching losses and anguish that everyone—sooner or later—will experience? What can each of us learn that will brace us for our next inevitable bout with suffering?

Twentieth-century psychiatrist Carl Jung insisted that it is not suffering itself but suffering without meaning that is the real scourge of human life. He believed that when we understand that we are all part of a world in which suffering is inevitable and universal, we can better understand how to grow through that pain. To Jung there were clear and significant differences between what he called "real" and "neurotic" suffering.

Real suffering is an authentic and realistic response to the ragged wounds of living a human life. It's also unavoidable and an essential part of every human life. Illness, loss of loved ones, disappointment, decline, death, limitations, and imperfections startle and shake us. But they awaken us to find meaning, dignity, and significance in our lives. They open the heart to pure compassion and newfound creative energy. Real suffering is useful. It propels us to new levels of consciousness and self-knowledge. It is through suffering and pain that we break down our habitual barriers between ourselves and others and allow for the entrance of a transpersonal, transcendent perspective: a full appreciation of our intimate and profound spiritual connections. The moments when we are stripped bare of our illusions and confront the relativities of human existence introduce the most important questions we can ask ourselves: *Who am I? What is my purpose here? Where do I find meaning in my life? What is my relationship to God?*

In contrast to real, authentic suffering, Jung held that another kind of suffering, neurotic suffering, offers no meaning. Jung called it an "unconscious fraud" and declared neurotic suffering to be bogus and with no moral merit. He saw neurotic suffering as a flight from the wounds of life and as an unconscious—and unsuccessful—attempt to heal them. Symptoms such as anxiety, worry, ruminations, low self-esteem, depression, projec-

tions of unconscious complexes onto other people, addictions, and a sack-cloth-and-ashes kind of guilt that causes people never to feel worthy are all aspects of neurotic suffering. Neurotic suffering is a refusal to discover the meaning in our pain through a childish insistence that things should be as we want them to be and not as they are. Neurotic suffering expresses itself as self-pity and envy toward people whose lives seem better, less difficult, than our own.

To Jung, neurosis "must be understood, ultimately, as the suffering of a soul which has not discovered its meaning." Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl agrees. Frankl survived the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps; his mother, father, brother, and wife did not. However, in spite of the pain and torture he experienced, Frankl refused to relinquish his humanity, his love, or his sense of responsibility to bear witness to the world. In spite of the atrocities around him, he remained courageous and filled with hope. In choosing "to be worthy of suffering—as Dostoyevsky had once written—Frankl was able to rise above his outward fate, by making inner, conscious decisions about how he would respond to his circumstances.

To Frankl, meaning can be found in the fact that human beings are self-determining. Although we cannot always change the fact that terrible things happen to us, we have every power to change how

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From the Inside

FLYING LESSONS

When a mother eagle is about to let go of her eaglets, she does a couple of things to get them out of the nest. She starts bringing them less food every day. She also begins to remove their nest, branch by branch. She dismantles the resting place.

From one point of view that can seem cruel. What a terrible thing to do! But when we look at it from a larger perspective, from a bigger viewpoint, we see that she's giving her young the freedom to exercise their wings and fly.

When we graduate from a certain level of being here, life does the same thing to us. It withdraws old sources of nourishment and reminds us it's time to go to another level of awareness. By removing our old source of nourishment, we discover greater reserves of strength and power within us.

No bird can fly without opening its wings, and none of us can love without exposing our hearts. Any time we hesitate revealing who we are, we can picture ourselves as a bird perched on a roof, wings tucked at our sides. To enter a relationship without opening our heart is to jump off that roof without spreading our wings. That we must move through the fear of flying before being upheld is what trusting is all about.

When we bring up what we keep inside, it is sacred and scary, and we're often not sure if we want to touch it or not. By going inside, though, and being with whatever we find there, we discover that it makes all the difference. Our revelations become our wings. Then we can say, "This is who I am when no one is looking." For each of us is a fledgling that eventually, if fed, will fly.

A MORNING WALK

This morning I went for a walk
On the prison rec yard.
The sky was clear
And the air was cool.

I stopped in my walking
To appreciate the rising sun.
There was nothing else in the world
Except this sunrise and me watching it.

Then I noticed the sunlight was filtered
Through the chain-link fence topped with razor-wire
It was beauty witnessed through something
Meant for confinement and intimidation

But the sun continued to warm my face
And brighten the morning sky

The fence couldn't stop that

CTB
Arizona

we will respond to those painful events in our lives. We do not simply exist but have the intrinsic authority to decide what our existence will be, what we will become in the next moment. “When we are no longer able to change a situation,” Frankl writes, “we are challenged to change ourselves.”

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Have you ever considered, while watching or flicking past the television show “Wheel of Fortune”, that it is based on esoteric medieval symbolism that addresses one of the fundamentals of human existence? In the Middle Ages this circular symbol called the “Wheel of Life” was ubiquitous throughout Europe. This popular image attempts to explain the cycle of change in life and the common psychological reactions to different stages of that cycle.

The late Roman philosopher Boethius, who lived in the early sixth century, offered the most popular interpretation of the Wheel of Life. He pointed out that the center—the only part of the wheel that does not move or change—is the only place where one can truly be protected from Fortune’s fickle touch. This center contains deeper, more axial truths—the laws of God and nature—that remain untouched by Fortune’s waxing and waning.

In “The Consolation of Philosophy”, written as a dialogue between a character named Boethius and the magical Spirit of Philosophy who appears as a beautiful woman, the spirit reminds Boethius that man has a divine destiny and that he suffers not because of his situation but only because of his bad attitude and failure to endure his agony with a calm mind. In his wretched pain, he’s forgotten who he is and what the divine aim of life is all about. Fortune owes him nothing just because she took back what she had loaned him, the Spirit tells him. Gems, servants, clothes, noble birth, power, money, and status are not good in and of themselves. To pursue them is to seek value in worthless things. Rather the true blessings in life—real goodness and happiness—come from knowing and mastering our-

selves, realizing our divine nature, and following the force of love. This is the core, the heart of the matter, untouched by changing Fortune. Residing in the hub of the wheel moves us away from our own self-absorbed nature and into a centered place in which we can experience the right relationship with something greater than ourselves no matter what happens in our lives.

AVOIDABLE SUFFERING

Life sometimes feels like a trip in a sailboat on the open sea that is being driven by the tides and winds that change daily and which cannot be seen except by their effects. Given these powerful forces beyond our control, don’t we have license to sit on the bottom of our boat eating bonbons as we are driven here and there by prevailing winds and tides? After all, how can our small efforts direct our little boat against the jet stream and other prevailing currents? Bonbons and basking in the sun sound great, but allowing the forces of fate to entirely control our destiny is not a good idea. We do have some other alternatives that will serve us much better in our water journey. We can learn about our boat, its strengths and weaknesses, where it does well and when we have to work harder to hold the rudder. We can learn how to navigate these larger forces, knowing when to raise the sail, ways to tack, and how best to move in concert with the wind and waves.

My father once gave me a small gift of a rock with the following words inscribed on it: “If there is no wind...row.” I love it and live by this bit of good advice. The truth is that all our lives will be buffeted by many of the realities and losses of human existence. My Aunt Theresa always told me to live with the understanding that “what doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger.”

When you think about illness, aging, death, the loss of loved ones, and natural disasters, it becomes very clear that a great deal of suffering is simply unavoidable. Although this is true, there are two areas of our lives that often create great pain and that each of us has the full, individual power to change. The first is what I call “preventable

suffering,” and the second is our self-image.

Under the heading of preventable suffering are all those terrible outcomes that result from our decisions (or lack of decisions), choices, and behaviors that we can see will lead to very predictable pain. Think about how adultery creates crisis in a marriage, how addictive behaviors result in serious health problems, illegal activities land us in jail, and how unwise, unsafe risk-taking can cause injury or even death. A significant number of events that we prefer to label as “accidents” or “fate” do not really just happen out of the blue. Enormous suffering and even many injuries and fatalities occur in predictable patterns, and many are quite preventable. Everyday decisions in large and small matters set us in the direction toward good outcomes or disaster.

The second source of preventable suffering requires reflecting on our self-image. How we think about ourselves and the philosophies and worldviews we believe in hold very powerful emotional, cognitive, and evaluative components. Our self-image is all encompassing and affects every aspect of our life, including our abilities to meet the challenges of life’s dark times.

Look at your own self-image. Does it contribute to your suffering in life? To assess that, let’s look at a few questions. Do you feel unworthy of good things? Listen carefully to your inner voice. Do you hear excessive negative talk? Simply, do you love yourself enough?

A sign that you do love yourself enough is a healthy self-image that engenders a personality that is confident but not overbearing. It is an ability to act with courage without bravado and practice self-reliance without isolation. There is great humility in true self-love and it’s expressed in deliberate movement toward life, toward consciousness, and away from fear and judgment. To love oneself is not selfish, egotistical, grandiose, or conceited. Instead it is the full awareness of our fundamental lovability, our authentic identity as Self rather

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Words, no matter whether they are vocalized and made into sounds or remain unspoken as thoughts, can cast an almost hypnotic spell upon you. You easily lose yourself in them, become hypnotized into implicitly believing that when you have attached a word to something, you know what it is. The fact is: You don't know what it is. You have only covered up the mystery with a label. Everything, a bird, a tree, even a simple stone, and certainly a human being, is ultimately unknowable. This is because it has unfathomable depth. All we can perceive, experience, think about, is the surface layer of reality, less than the tip of an iceberg.

Underneath the surface appearance, everything is not only connected with everything else, but also with the Source of all life out of which it came. Even a stone, and more easily a flower or a bird, could show you the way back to God, to the Source, to yourself. When you look at it or hold it and *let it be* without imposing a word or mental label on it, a sense of awe, of wonder, arises within you. Its essence silently communicates itself to you and reflects your own essence back to you. This is what great artists sense and succeed in conveying in their art. Van Gogh didn't say: "That's just an old chair." He looked, and looked, and looked. He sensed the Beingness of the chair. Then he sat in front of the canvas and took up the brush. The chair itself would have sold for the equivalent of a few dollars. The painting of that same chair today would fetch in excess of \$25 millions.

When you don't cover up the world with words and labels, a sense of the miraculous returns to your life that was lost a long time ago when humanity, instead

of using thought, became possessed by thought. A depth returns to your life. Things regain their newness, their freshness. And the greatest miracle is the experiencing of your essential self as prior to any words, thoughts, mental labels, and images. For this to happen, you need to disentangle your sense of I, of Beingness, from all the things it has become mixed up with, that is to say, identified with. The disentanglement is what this book is about.

The quicker you are in attaching verbal or mental labels to things, people, or situations, the more shallow and lifeless your reality becomes, and the more deadened you become to reality, the miracle of life that continuously unfolds within and around you. In this way, cleverness may be gained, but wisdom is lost, and so are joy, love, creativity, and aliveness. They are concealed in the still gap between the perception and the interpretation. Of course we have to use words and thoughts. They have their own beauty—but do we need to become imprisoned in them?

Words reduce reality to something the human mind can grasp, which isn't very much.. Language consists of five basic sounds produced by the vocal cords. They are the vowels *a, e, i, o, u*. The other sounds are consonants produced by air pressure: *s, f, g*, and so forth. Do you believe some combination of such basic sounds could ever explain who you are, or the ultimate purpose of the universe, or even what a tree or stone is in its depth?

THE ILLUSORY SELF

The word "I" embodies the greatest error and the deepest truth, depending on how it is used. In conventional usage, it is not only one of the most frequently used

words in the language (together with the related words: "me," "my," "mine," and "myself") but also one of the most misleading. In normal everyday usage, "I" embodies the primordial error, a misperception of who you are, an illusory sense of identity. This is the ego. This illusory sense of self is what Albert Einstein, who had deep insights not only into the reality of space and time but also into human nature, referred to as "an optical illusion of consciousness." That illusory self then becomes the basis for all further interpretations, or rather misinterpretations of reality, all thought processes, interactions, and relationships. Your reality becomes a reflection of the original illusion.

The good news is: If you can recognize illusion as illusion, it dissolves. The recognition of illusion is also its ending. Its survival depends on your mistaking it for reality. In the seeing of who you are not, the reality of who you are emerges by itself. This is what happens as you slowly and carefully read this and the next chapter, which are about the mechanics of the false self we call the ego. So what is the nature of this illusory self?

What you usually refer to when you say "I" is not who you are. By a monstrous act of reductionism, the infinite depth of who you are is confused with a sound produced by the vocal cords or the thought of "I" in your mind and whatever the "I" has identified with. So what do the usual "I" and the related "me," "my," or "mine" refer to?

When a young child learns that a sequence of sounds produced by the parents' vocal cords is his or her name, the child begins to equate a word, which in the

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mind becomes a thought, with who he or she is. [...]

And so as the child grows up, the original I-thought attracts other thoughts to itself: It becomes identified with a gender, possessions, the sense-perceived body, a nationality, race, religion, profession. Other things the “I” identifies with are roles—mother, father, husband, wife, and so on—accumulated knowledge or opinions, likes and dislikes, and also things that happened to “me” in the past, the memory of which are thoughts that further define my sense of self as “me and my story.” These are only some of the things people derive their sense of identity from. They are ultimately no more than thoughts held together precariously by the fact that they are all invested with a sense of self. This mental construct is what you normally refer to when you say “I”. To be more precise: Most of the time it is not you who speaks when you say or think “I” but some aspect of that mental construct, the egoic self. Once you awaken, you still use the word “I,” but it will come from a much deeper place within yourself.

Most people are still completely identified with the incessant stream of mind, of compulsive thinking, most of it repetitive and pointless. There is no “I” apart from their thought processes and the emotions that go with them. This is the meaning of being spiritually unconscious. When told that there is a voice in their head that never stops speaking, they say, “What voice?” or angrily deny it, which of course *is* the voice, is the thinker, is the unobserved mind. It could almost be looked upon as an entity that has taken possession of them.

Some people never forget the first time they disidentified from their thoughts and thus briefly experienced the shift in identity from being the content of their mind to

being the awareness in the background. For others it happens in such a subtle way they hardly notice it, or they just notice an influx of joy or inner peace without knowing the reason.

THE VOICE IN THE HEAD

That first glimpse of awareness came to me when I was a first-year student at the University of London. I would take the tube (subway) twice a week to go to the university library, usually around nine o'clock in the morning, toward the end of the rush hour. One time a woman in her early thirties sat opposite me. I had seen her before a few times on that train. One could not help but notice her. Although the train was full, the seats on either side of her were unoccupied, the reason being, no doubt, that she appeared to be quite insane. She looked extremely tense and talked to herself incessantly in a loud and angry voice. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she was totally unaware, it seemed, of other people or her surroundings. Her head was facing downward and slightly to the left, as if she were addressing someone sitting in the empty seat next to her. Although I don't remember the precise content, her monologue went something like this: “And then she said to me...so I said to her you are a liar how dare you accuse me of...when you are the one who has always taken advantage of me I trusted you and you betrayed my trust...” There was the angry tone in her voice of someone who has been wronged, who needs to defend her position lest she become annihilated.

As the train approached Tottenham Court Road Station, she stood up and walked toward the door with still no break in the stream of words coming out of her mouth. That was my stop too, so I got off behind her. At street level, she began to walk toward Bedford Square, still engaged in her imagi-

nary dialogue, still angrily accusing and asserting her position.

My curiosity aroused, I decided to follow her as long as she was walking in the same general direction I had to go in. Although engrossed in her imaginary dialogue, she seemed to know where she was going. Soon we were within sight of the imposing structure of Senate House, a 1930s high-rise, the university's central administrative building and library. I was shocked. Was it possible that we were going to the same place? Yes, that's where she was heading. Was she a teacher, a student, an office worker, a librarian? Maybe she was some psychologist's research project. I never knew the answer. I walked twenty steps behind her, and by the tie I entered the building (which ironically was the location of the headquarters of the “Mind Police” in the film version of George Orwell's novel, *1984*), she had already been swallowed up by one of the elevators.

I was somewhat taken aback by what I had just witnessed. A mature first-year student at twenty-five, I saw myself as an intellectual in the making, and I was convinced that all the answers to the dilemmas of human existence could be found through the intellect, that is to say, by thinking. I didn't realize yet that thinking without awareness *is* the main dilemma of human existence. I looked upon the professors as sages who had all the answers and upon the university as the temple of knowledge. How could an insane person like her be part of this?

I was still thinking about her when I was in the men's room prior to entering the library. As I was washing my hands, I thought: I hope I don't end up like her. The man next to me looked briefly in my direction, and I suddenly was shocked when I realized that I

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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
The Peace Center
6833 Stanley Avenue
Berwyn, IL 60402

Ego: The Current State of Humanity

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hadn't just thought those words, but mumbled them aloud. "Oh my God, I'm already like her," I thought. Wasn't my mind as incessantly active as hers? There were only minor differences between us. The predominant underlying emotion behind her thinking seemed to be anger. In my case, it was mostly anxiety. She thought out loud. I thought—mostly—in my head. If she was mad, then everyone was mad, including myself. There were differences in degree only.

For a moment, I was able to stand back from my own mind and see it from a deeper perspective, as it were. There was a brief shift from thinking to awareness. I was still in the men's room, but alone now, look-

ing at my face in the mirror. At that moment of detachment from my mind, I laughed out loud. It may have sounded insane, but it was the laughter of sanity, the laughter of the big-bellied Buddha. "Life isn't as serious as my mind makes it out to be." That's what the laughter seem to be saying. But it was only a glimpse, very quickly to be forgotten. I would spend the next three years in anxiety and depression, completely identified with my mind. I had to get close to suicide before awareness returned, and then it was much more than a glimpse. I became free of compulsive thinking and of the false, mind-made I.

The above incident not only gave me a first glimpse of awareness, it also planted the first doubt as

to the absolute validity of the human intellect. A few months later, something tragic happened that made my doubt grow. On a Monday morning, we arrived for a lecture to be given by a professor whose mind I admired greatly, only to be told that sadly he had committed suicide sometime during the weekend by shooting himself. I was stunned. He was a highly respected teacher and seemed to have all the answers. However, I could as yet see no alternative to the cultivation of thought. I didn't realize yet that thinking is only a tiny aspect of the consciousness that we are, nor did I know anything about the ego, let alone being able to detect it within myself.

(continued on page 10)



From the Mail Bag

Dear Janine,

[...]

When I get out [of prison] I plan on putting together a group and joining with a couple of groups to bring attention to the poor operation of the prison system.

The injustice and prejudice is really wrong. There is this feeling by most people that anyone who is in prison should not get a “chance” and everyone who is in prison is such a terrible person.

However, the people and cases I have worked in prison have shown me that a remarkable number of PRISONERS never got a chance in court and were convicted without PROOF.

The factor that causes this is peer pressure. The judges and attorneys suffer from fear of losing a job or position or rebuke by the brotherhood or their group.

It is better to wrongfully convict a person than risk conflict with peers.

Their sense of fairness is: if I wrongfully convict this guy, he will be able to get relief by appeal.

That doesn't work. Once you are in prison, the appellate attorney must show that a judge made an error and a prosecutor used wrong evidence.

That won't happen. It is against the CODE of brotherhood to do that. Only a death sentence will justify that.

Now I have given you a simple idea of what I plan. I seek no money or earthly gain, only to show prejudice and the need for justice.

There have been four changes in the sentencing laws since I have been in prison which show that they see the errors.

They all lessened sentences but non were made retroactive.

The federal court ruled that a case does not need to be declared retroactive. “if the merits of a case ifit the criteria of the change of law it may be presented”

Maybe I will be able to write you another letter or send you an email when I get something done.

Your friend in Christ,

JMT
Arizona

Dearest JMT,

I don't usually publish letters that slam the system. Not because I believe the Justice System is perfect, or even great, but because I believe that for most prisoners, discussions of the Justice and Correctional systems would only lead to frustration, anger, resentment and all kinds of feelings I don't think are very constructive.

But I chose to publish this letter because it made me think. At this time of my life when change is everywhere, where making a difference is part of my own purpose, I wondered about your determination to improve the system, JMT.

I believe we all have a purpose here. So your purpose may very well be to improve the fairness and justice of these two systems we have. A worthy one for sure.

But I also believe that we cannot fight against anything if we want to change it. By fighting against anything, we give it power, strength and energy.

That is the reason the Justice system does not work, at least this is my opinion. It doesn't work because it is fighting against crime.

The anger and resentment I hear in your letter, JMT, may be very counter-

productive to what you really wish to accomplish.

Ghandi had a wonderful way of putting it: BE the change you want to see in the world.

Albert Einstein said that you cannot solve a problem with the same thinking that created it in the first place.

So here you have me wondering. How can you change a system without “fighting” it?

I believe you must start by feeling compassion for people caught in it, whether judges,attorneys or prisoners.

In order to correct the injustices of this world you have to be particularly careful not to commit any yourself. Thinking all judges and attorneys are part of a brotherhood whose code would dictate they look away from injustice is, I believe, just as unfair as some of the verdicts and sentences may have been.

I believe being treated unfairly is possibly one of the most difficult things to accept and deal with and forgive. But I also believe that we must do just that if we wish to decrease the amount of unfairness in the world.

Being fair means that if we want others to forgive us our trespasses, we must forgive those who trespass against us. (sound familiar?)

Your determination to bring more justice and fairness to the world is a beautiful one, dear JMT. Just make sure all your dealings reflect this choice.

Or as Gandhi would have put it, “Be just and fair”. That way the world will know more justice and more fairness.

How wonderful of you to choose to do that for all of us.

We are forever grateful to you,

Janine

After the Darkest Hour

(continued from page 5)

than as a mere ego. It's an acceptance and awareness of our place in the universe, and of our truest nature, which is that of a "divine spark." It is the simple understanding that, as the mystic Julian of Norwich said in the fifteenth century, "We have been loved since before the beginning."

A self-loving internal image is reflected in the belief that one deserves to be happy, and it is the foundation for meeting the challenges of life with grace, courage, and confidence. It's the bedrock of the ability to feel love and compassion for others. For if we don't know how to love ourselves, how can we expect to practice it with others?

The importance of a healthy self-image, self-esteem, and self-confidence cannot be overstated. Think of yourself as a drinking glass. Imagine that each challenge in life comes in the form of liquid being poured into that glass. When the glass is full, it spills over. It's no longer able to contain what it needs to. In human terms, this is a psychological crisis. How long will it take the glass to spill over? Well, it depends on two things: how much is poured into it from life and how much is already there that we have brought along in ourselves. A poor self-image immediately fills the glass almost to the top. It's not hard to imagine that when even a small amount of additional liquid (stress, challenges, losses, suffering) is poured in, the glass will overflow. A glass that is almost empty can be filled with a great deal more of life's obstacles before it spills over. Because challenging and difficult times in life will be poured into our glass, we owe it to ourselves to get rid of what we add with a negative self-image. If we work to create a positive, loving approach to our human condition, we will find so many more resources at our disposal when we need them.

LESSONS FROM SUFFERING

There is a lot to be learned from the great minds and bold spirits who have tackled hard questions about suffering and learned something in the process. This does not mean that we should feel bad about ourselves or guilty because we don't bear suffering as well as we might. I like to take the gentle approach with myself—learning rather than scolding. To be sure, most of us have had our share or neurotic, self-imposed suffering, myself included. Mostly it's much easier to ask, "Why me?" than "Why not me?" when hard times present themselves. Transformation is always a struggle. But the experiences and wisdom of people who have grown from and found enlightenment in life's darkest moments could be our greatest teachers.

We're all bound to suffer. Some of us will experience great tragedies in our lives like the death of a loved one, the diagnosis of a serious illness, or a natural disaster that wipes away everything we've ever held dear. The loss of a relationship burns through our sense of well-being and can send us spiraling. Being fired or downsized or "outsourced" from a job engenders loss of confidence and outright fear about how we'll pay the bills. Isolation and loveliness often render a pain that chills the soul and swamps the spirit. It's clear to me that there are lots of ways to suffer and lots to learn. Being able to tell the difference between authentic suffering and the avoidable, unhealthy neurotic type would be a tremendous toll and provide a great potential for personal growth for all of us. For if we can master the art of suffering we'll very likely find our courage, our meaning, and a renewed sense of joy at the remarkable mystery of life. In the process of all that, we could very well find ourselves.

Ego: The Current State of Humanity

(continued from page 8)

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE EGO

The egoic mind is completely conditioned by the past. Its conditioning is twofold: It consists of content and structure. In the case of a child who cries in deep suffering because his toy has been taken away, the toy represents content. It is interchangeable with any other content, any other toy or object. The content you identify with is conditioned by your environment, your upbringing, and surrounding culture. Whether the child is rich or poor, whether the toy is a piece of wood shaped like an animal or a sophisticated electronic gadget makes no difference as far as the suffering caused by its loss is concerned. The reason why such acute suffering occurs is concealed in the word "my," and it is structural. The unconscious compulsion to enhance one's identity through association with an object is built into the very structure of the egoic mind.

Once of the most basic mind structures through which the ego comes into existence is identification. The word "identification" is derived from the Latin word *idem*, meaning "same" and *facere*, which means "to make." So when I identify with something, I "make it the same." The same as what? The same as I. I endow it with a sense of self, and so it becomes part of my "identity." One of the most basic levels of identification is with things: My toy later becomes my car, my house, my clothes, and so on. I try to find myself in them. That is the fate of the ego.

Quotable Quotes

- *By bringing about a change in our outlook toward things and events, all phenomena can become sources of happiness.*
- *It is the enemy who can truly teach us to practice the virtues of compassion and tolerance.*
- *There is often a big disparity between the way in which we perceive things and the way things really are.*

The Dalai Lama

Phoenix Returns

From heaven's darkest angel
To the stars sparkling at twilight
And the deepest love within....
A black rose's encompassing light
Our bond is what guides us
Through the tribulations of worldly plights

It's been some years, sweet Freedom
Since our paths crossed but once
And your tangible nectar
It's memory as desirable as the first
Satisfies....
my....
thirst

For, without your Love
Life would be a curse

As our reunion speedily inclines
To a unification so divine
There can be no Love
Greater than yours and mine
The flames will not consume us
As you stand with me...
Sifting...
The sands of Time

TL
North Carolina

Best poem in the world.

I was shocked, confused, bewildered
As I entered Heaven's door,
Not by the beauty of it all,
Nor the lights or its decor.

But it was the folks in Heaven
Who made me sputter and gasp"
The thieves, the liars, the sinners,
The alcoholics and the trash.

There stood the kid from seventh grade
Who swiped my lunch money twice.
Next to him was my old neighbor
Who never said anything nice.

Herb, who I always thought
Was rotting away in hell,
Was sitting pretty on cloud nine,
Looking incredibly well.

I nudged Jesus, 'What's the deal?
I would love to hear Your take.
How'd all these sinners get up here?
God must've made a mistake.

'And why's everyone so quiet,
So somber - give me a clue.'
'Hush, child,' He said, 'they're all in shock.
No one thought they'd be seeing you.

Author Unknown

By my side

When I'm alone you come to my side,
when I'm upset you let me know it will be alright.
You use no words and are blind to my eyes,
but I know you are here and above in the sky.
My one and only, my spirit guide.
You see my every tear, watch my every move,
you guide me the right way in hopes I won't lose.
When hard decisions come
and I don't know what to do,
you come down from your cloud
to show me what to choose.
Lessons learned, through all I grow,
I'll never forget my past.
How I'm so lucky to be aware and know you,
I'll always ask.
I thank you for all your love,
For all your help as my angel above.

Jeffrey Stevens
As published in *The Spirituality of Incarceration*
By Katja Farnden with Jeffrey Stevens

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Janine*