



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

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THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

*What is the purpose of life?
What are we here for?*

This seems to be a question that should have been answered for all of us a thousand years ago by one or more of the Great Ones who have lived on this Earth of ours.

*But still we struggle.
Why is that, do you think?*

*Could it be that each of us has to come to our own idea about our purpose?
Could it be that each of us has a different purpose?*

Is this world a giant classroom and our purpose is to learn? Is it a place full of pain and suffering designed to make us worthy of Heaven? Is this life supposed to be lived for our own private purpose or is there something bigger going on?

Are we here to reap what we sowed in previous lifetimes while trying to deserve better the next time around?

What is the purpose of it all?

I did something unusual in this issue of Freedom Inside, I dedicated over three pages to a single

article. This piece was written by The Dalai Lama, one of the greatest spiritual leaders of our time. (See Compassion and the Individual on page 2)

“Lately, I have started to think very differently about what love is and what it is not.”

There are some thoughts I would like to share with you.

The Dalai Lama, as you will see, speaks of compassion, of our need for love.

Lately, I have started to think very differently about what love is and what it is not.

I remembered that for A Course in Miracles “special” relationships are not so good. When we feel someone in our life is special, this implies that many others are not so special. We give “special” attention to one person, we feel something “special”, different, more for that “special” person in our life.

Is there anything wrong with that you may well ask? Well, no, of course not, unless we refuse to give of ourselves equally to all people in our lives, including those we only hear about.

Universal Unconditional Love, I have come to believe, is not particular. It is not a personal feeling that is given to one person more than to another. Or to one animal, one plant, one country...

Universal Love is attraction. It is what keeps us on the earth, what keeps us orbiting around the sun. What keeps us orbiting around each other.

Universal Love is not sentimental; it is not emotional. It is neutral.

What a thought!!!!!!

This single thought blows away all I have ever thought about love before. I always thought the following: When you love someone, you set them apart, as a mother loves her children above all others, as we love our pet above all others, as we love our friends above our enemies.

But this is not Universal Love. This is “special” love, one that wants more for loved ones than we do for others.

Universal Love, I believe, would have all mothers love all children as if they were her own.

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Wanting for all of them what she wants for her own. It would have us love all animals as if they were our pets and want each to be treated as such. Universal Love would let us see ourselves in friends and foe alike, not choosing to help one and hurt the other.

Love makes the world go round. That is true. But Universal Love does that. Personal, special love makes for jealousy, inequity, arguments, fighting and, ultimately, wars and destruction.

The Dalai Lama says that, "In general, our conception took place not just in the context of sexual desire but from our parents' decision to have a child." Whether we agree with this or not, we all know that many children are unwanted, made in acts that have little to do with love, even love as we see it, the "special kind."

But Universal Love, the one that makes us need to be near one another, that is always present in our interactions.

Sometimes it feels loving, sometimes it doesn't. But this need to interact with others is a very basic need, one I believe we were born with.

This inner push toward others, this need for others to care for us in order to ensure our very survival, this is part of Universal Love. The stars feel it, the planets feel it. We feel it too.

Let us broaden our view of what love really is. Let us include all beings, all plants, all animals, all planets, stars, and galaxies in what we choose to love.

It does make the world go round!

With much love,

Janine

COMPASSION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

by Tenzin Gyatso; The Fourteenth Dalai Lama

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

One great question underlies our experience, whether we think about it consciously or not: What is the purpose of life? I have considered this question and would like to share my thoughts in the hope that they may be of direct, practical benefit to those who read them.

I believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. From the moment of birth, every human being wants happiness and does not want suffering. Neither social conditioning nor education nor ideology affect this. From the very core of our being, we simply desire contentment. I don't know whether the universe, with its countless galaxies, stars and planets, has a deeper meaning or not, but at the very least, it is clear that we humans who live on this earth face the task of making a happy life for ourselves. Therefore, it is important to discover what will bring about the greatest degree of happiness.

HOW TO ACHIEVE HAPPINESS

For a start, it is possible to divide every kind of happiness and suffering into two main categories: mental and physical. Of the two, it is the mind that exerts the greatest influence on most of us. Unless we are either gravely ill or deprived of basic necessities, our physical condition plays a secondary role in life. If the body is content, we virtually ignore it. The mind, however, registers every event, no matter how small. Hence we should devote our most serious efforts to bringing about mental peace.

From my own limited experience I have found that the greatest degree of inner tranquility comes from the development of love and compassion.

The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of well-being becomes. Cultivating a close, warm-hearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. This helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the ultimate source of success in life.

As long as we live in this world we are bound to encounter problems. If, at such times, we lose hope and become discouraged, we diminish our ability to face difficulties. If, on the other hand, we remember that it is not just ourselves but every one who has to undergo suffering, this more realistic perspective will increase

our determination and capacity to overcome troubles. Indeed, with this attitude, each new obstacle can be seen as yet another valuable opportunity to improve our mind!

Thus we can strive gradually to become more compassionate, that is we can develop both genuine sympathy for others' suffering and the will to help remove their pain. As a result, our own serenity and inner strength will increase.

OUR NEED FOR LOVE

Ultimately, the reason why love and compassion bring the greatest happiness is simply that our nature cherishes them above all else. The need for love lies at the very foundation of human existence. It results from the profound interdependence we all share with one another. However capable and skillful an individual may be, left alone, he or she will not survive. However vigorous and independent one may feel during the most prosperous periods of life, when one is sick or very young or very old, one must depend on the support of others.

Inter-dependence, of course, is a fundamental law of nature. Not only higher forms of life but also many of the smallest insects are social beings who, without any religion, law or education, survive by mutual cooperation based on an innate recognition of their interconnectedness. The most subtle level of material phenomena is also governed by interdependence. All phenomena from the planet we inhabit to the oceans, clouds, forests and flowers that surround us, arise in dependence upon subtle patterns of energy. Without their proper interaction, they dissolve and decay.

It is because our own human existence is so dependent on the help of others that our need for love lies at the very foundation of our existence. Therefore we need a genuine sense of responsibility and a sincere concern for the welfare of others.

We have to consider what we human beings really are. We are not like machine-made objects. If we are merely mechanical entities, then machines themselves could alleviate all of our sufferings and fulfill our needs.

However, since we are not solely material creatures, it is a mistake to place all our hopes for happiness on external development alone. Instead, we should consider

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as published in *Unveiled Mysteries*
by Godfré Ray king

Here Saint Germain stretched forth his hand again, and living, talking pictures of this—Great Being—passed before us. It is absolutely impossible to describe in words the—Glory—of that “Presence”. I can only say—He was truly the—Son of God—in Perfect Expression. In a moment, I heard the—Great Cosmic Master—proclaiming— “The Law”—to the people.

The Record and majesty of his “Presence” and “Decree” are burned into my memory for eternity—so clearly do they remain in my consciousness. I give his Decree to you—just as it still stands before me.

“Beloved Children of the One Mighty God—knowest thou not the Life thou art using is from the ‘One Supreme Presence’—Eternally pure, Holy, and Perfect? If thou dost aught to mar the Beauty and Perfection of that—One Life—thou cuttest thyself off from the Gifts of Thy God. Thy Life is the —Sacred Jewel—of Thy God’s Love—the ‘Source’ of the Secrets of the Universe.

“Thy God dost trust thee with—His Own Heart’s ‘Light.’ Cherish It—Adore It—and let It ever expand unto greater—Light—and greater—Glory. Thy Life is the —Pearl of Great Price. Thou art the—Keeper of God’s wealth. See thou use It for Him only and —know—thou hast received the ‘Light of Life’—for whose use—thou shalt give an accounting.

“Life is a continuous Circle—the Principle upon which thy city is builded. If thou dost create—That—which is like unto Thy ‘Source’—and knowest His Love and Peace within thee, if thou dost use Thy Powers of Creating

to bless only—then as thou dost move around thy circle of existence—thou wilt know the Joy of Life—and unto It shall be added Greater Joy. If thou createst not like thy ‘Source’, thine evil will.

“I come not always as now—to hold thy straying feet upon the Pathway of Truth—nor to remind thee of—Thy Eternal ‘Light’—set upon a mountain top for thy guidance. In a far distant day—I will speak within the Heart of man, and if thou dost Love Life—thou wilt call unto me—abiding in many selves. Let this not confound thee, my children. If thou wouldst know Me—The ‘Light’—thou wilt have to seek me—find Me—and having found, abide within Me always.

“Then, will I be Wisdom in thy Mind to govern the Love in thy heart—that thou mayest be filled with the Peace of The One Life—God. Thy body is but the instrument of thy Soul, and into thy Soul must stream—‘My Light’—or thou wilt perish.

“My Light—in thy mind is ‘The Way’ into the Heart of All Light. Only by My Light in thee—canst thou expand—the Light in every cell of thy Being—into greater and greater Being. In thy throat is My Light—which is Thy Power to speak—My Words. Through these—I always illumine, protect, and perfect my children. Words that do not this three-fold mission—are not My Words—and can only bring misery —when spoken.

“Meditate upon My Light in thy mind—in thy heart, and thou shalt see within all things—know all things—and do all things. Then that which is not of Me can never confound thee.

“I speak these words now—and

they shall be engraved upon the tablets of earth and the memory of its children. In the far off day of which I speak—one of God’s children shall receive—these my words—and shall give them forth to bless the world.

“In that time, when thou hast fully received ‘My Presence’—and art letting It always act in thy Life and thy world—thou wilt find the cells of the body—thou dost then occupy—becoming bright with ‘my Light’ and thou will realize thou canst continue on into that ‘Eternal Body of Light’—the Seamless Robe of Christ. Then and then only, wilt thou be free from the wheel of re-birth. Having traveled thy long journey through human experience, and fulfilled the Law of Cause and Effect—thou shalt transcend all conditions governed by—Law—and shalt Thyself have become ‘The Law’—All Love— ‘The One.’”

“Such is the Eternal Ascended Body of Christ,” said Saint Germain turning to me, “in which one is able to wield the Scepter of Dominion—and be Free. My son, even now you can ascend into— ‘The light of the One’—for—The Light—is in your mind—The Light—is in your heart , and if you will stand in It firmly, you can and will raise your physical body of limitation into your ‘Pure Eternal Body of Light’—forever youthful and free, transcending time, place, and space.

“Your Glorious Self stands ever waiting for you. Come into—Its Light—and receive Eternal Peace and rest—in action. It—needs no preparation. It—has All-Power. Come fully into the embrace of your ‘Light-Self’ and that moment—even today—your present body can become Ascended.”

From the Outside

by Charles Tom Brown

THE CIRCLE DANCE

"The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

-T.S. Elliot

When we began our spiritual journey, we may have imagined it to be a linear journey, one that took us over a certain landscape to a far away destination of enlightenment. However, it is better described as a circle that keeps widening and opening our hearts and our consciousness to include all of life as a spiritual whole.

We often speak of being on a path, but

in truth, there is no path at all, for that would be to place it into the realm of space and time. The past has disappeared, the future is only imagined, and the present is as fluid as water.

Whenever we touch the timeless reality, we are healed. It may come when we are caught in fear or longing, love or jealousy, or lost in the melodrama of life.

Then we will hear our inner voice say,

"Hey, you really got caught by that one, didn't you?" In that moment we laugh and are free.

To awaken is not to fix or hold but to love whatever is here. Knowing this truth releases our hearts from grasping. The mystery that gave us birth becomes a dance...a dance around the circle...a dance in which the dance and the dancer are one.

REMOVING THE MASK

In India, on meeting a total stranger, one bows and says NAMASTE: I see the diving spark within you. Each time we acknowledge the Light in another, we affirm that reality within ourself.

We often lose sight of the Light and wear masks to protect the places where the heart is bruised. Somewhere, sometime, we felt as though an open heart caused us pain or humiliation. Thus, we made a decision to put on our mask and armor our heart to protect ourselves from ever feeling that pain again.

In the future the real frontier will not

be space, the ocean's floor, telecommunications, genetic engineering, or a thousand other external pursuits. The real frontier will be in the area of human relations when we have removed our masks and we see each other in our oneness.

When that happens, we will see everything as a manifestation or expression of divinity itself. We will live in a whole other level of Consciousness than when we got lost in appearances and limiting beliefs. This single transformation of vision is the most profound happening that can take place in a human life.

Scientists are now discovering what ancient tribes have always known—that everything is connected in an infinite web and that in the making of one blade of grass or a tree or a human body the whole universe takes part. A realization of this unity brings us respect, natural gratitude, and compassion for life in all its forms.

We must remove our masks and reveal ourselves at the deepest level in order to find out how lovable we really are. When we dig deeply enough into our real nature, we do not find darkness. We find endless light.

NAME DROPPING

Once upon a time there were those who thought themselves to be superior. They were so convinced of this that they had an "S" stamped on their forehead. That way they could be easily recognized throughout the land as a superior race. The others would simply have to exist with a bare forehead and be known as the inferior ones.

After a while, an enterprising fellow developed a machine that, for a small fee, would quickly stamp an "S" on the

forehead. Then, those without the "S" rushed in and came out with it brightly emblazoned on their forehead. Of course, the original "S" people still knew how superior they were. This didn't fool them at all.

This same fellow decided that he could make even more money by providing a machine by which the "S" could be taken off the forehead. The original "S" people then went to the machine and had the "S" sign removed so that now

the superior ones were without the "S".

The money rolled in as these two machines were kept busy day and night putting on and taking off the letter "S". Soon the original "S" people didn't know who was who or what was what or who was actually a superior person and who was an inferior person. They just had to look at each other without labels or opinions.

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our origins and nature to discover what we require.

Leaving aside the complex question of the creation and evolution of our universe, we can at least agree that each of us is the product of our own parents. In general, our conception took place not just in the context of sexual desire but from our parents' decision to have a child. Such decisions are founded on responsibility and altruism - the parents' compassionate commitment to take care of their child until it is able to take care of itself. Thus, from the very moment of our conception, our parents' love is directly in our creation.

Moreover, we are completely dependent upon our mothers' care from the earliest stages of our growth. According to some scientists, a pregnant woman's mental state, be it calm or agitated, has a direct physical effect on her unborn child.

The expression of love is also very important at the time of birth. Since the very first thing we do is suck milk from our mothers' breast, we naturally feel close to her, and she must feel love for us in order to feed us properly; if she feels anger or resentment her milk may not flow freely.

Then there is the critical period of brain development from the time of birth up to at least the age of three or four, during which time loving physical contact is the single most important factor for the normal growth of the child. If the child is not held, hugged, cuddled, or loved, its development will be impaired and its brain will not mature properly.

Since a child cannot survive without the care of others, love is its most important nourishment. The happiness of childhood, the allaying of the child's many fears and the healthy development of its self-confidence all depend directly upon love.

Nowadays, many children grow up in unhappy homes. If they do not receive proper affection, in later life they will rarely love their parents and, not infrequently, will find it hard to love others. This is very sad.

As children grow older and enter school, their need for support must be met by their teachers. If a teacher not only imparts academic education but also assumes responsibility for preparing students for life, his or her pupils will feel trust and respect and what has been

taught will leave an indelible impression on their minds. On the other hand, subjects taught by a teacher who does not show true concern for his or her students' overall well-being will be regarded as temporary and not retained for long.

Similarly, if one is sick and being treated in hospital by a doctor who evinces a warm human feeling, one feels at ease and the doctors' desire to give the best possible care is itself curative, irrespective of the degree of his or her technical skill. On the other hand, if one's doctor lacks human feeling and displays an unfriendly expression, impatience or casual disregard, one will feel anxious, even if he or she is the most highly qualified doctor and the disease has been correctly diagnosed and the right medication prescribed. Inevitably, patients' feelings make a difference to the quality and completeness of their recovery.

Even when we engage in ordinary conversation in everyday life, if someone speaks with human feeling we enjoy listening, and respond accordingly; the whole conversation becomes interesting, however unimportant the topic may be. On the other hand, if a person speaks coldly or harshly, we feel uneasy and wish for a quick end to the interaction. From the least to the most important event, the affection and respect of others are vital for our happiness.

Recently I met a group of scientists in America who said that the rate of mental illness in their country was quite high - around twelve percent of the population. It became clear during our discussion that the main cause of depression was not a lack of material necessities but a deprivation of the affection of others.

So, as you can see from everything I have written so far, one thing seems clear to me: whether or not we are consciously aware of it, from the day we are born, the need for human affection is in our very blood. Even if the affection comes from an animal or someone we would normally consider an enemy, both children and adults will naturally gravitate towards it.

I believe that no one is born free from the need for love. And this demonstrates that, although some modern schools of thought seek to do so, human beings cannot be defined as solely physical. No material object, however beautiful or valuable, can make us feel loved, because our deeper identity and true character

lie in the subjective nature of the mind.

DEVELOPING COMPASSION

Some of my friends have told me that, while love and compassion are marvelous and good, they are not really very relevant. Our world, they say, is not a place where such beliefs have much influence or power. They claim that anger and hatred are so much a part of human nature that humanity will always be dominated by them. I do not agree.

We humans have existed in our present form for about a hundred-thousand years. I believe that if during this time the human mind had been primarily controlled by anger and hatred, our overall population would have decreased. But today, despite all our wars, we find that the human population is greater than ever. This clearly indicates to me that love and compassion predominate in the world. And this is why unpleasant events are news, compassionate activities are so much part of daily life that they are taken for granted and, therefore, largely ignored.

So far I have been discussing mainly the mental benefits of compassion, but it contributes to good physical health as well. According to my personal experience, mental stability and physical well-being are directly related. Without question, anger and agitation make us more susceptible to illness. On the other hand, if the mind is tranquil and occupied with positive thoughts, the body will not easily fall prey to disease.

But of course it is also true that we all have an innate self-centeredness that inhibits our love for others. So, since we desire the true happiness that is brought about by only a calm mind, and since such peace of mind is brought about by only a compassionate attitude, how can we develop this? Obviously, it is not enough for us simply to think about how nice compassion is! We need to make a concerted effort to develop it; we must use all the events of our daily life to transform our thoughts and behavior.

First of all, we must be clear about what we mean by compassion. Many forms of compassionate feeling are mixed with desire and attachment. For instance, the love parents feel of their child is often strongly associated with their own emotional needs, so it is not fully compassionate. Again, in marriage, the

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I have fallen in love with a children's book that has taught me more about adversity than anything I have ever read. Have you ever had something really awful happen to you, and when it was over and you survived, you looked back and thought it was a strange gift? *The Little Soul and the Sun* is a beautiful little book by Neale Donald Walsch that explains how that works.

Picture heaven. It's just what we imagined, lush colors, fluffy clouds, lots and lots of brilliant, beautiful Light, and lovely little souls who delight in the joy that surrounds them. They know who they really are. They are the Light. But then one of the little souls (there's always one, isn't there) decides it wants to *be* who it really is. That's serious, and the Little Soul goes to God to find out what it feels like to *be the Light*. Problem is, to know yourself as the Light, you have to know Darkness. Think about it. To know Warm, you have to know Cold. To know Up, you have to know Down. There's no Left without Right, no Here without There. We've got to have those contrasts and those conflicts.

The Little Soul has an inspirational conversation with God. (I imagine every conversation with God is inspiring, don't you?) God says that the Little Soul can experience just how special it is by choosing a special part of special. "It's special to be kind. It's special to be gentle. It's special to be creative." The Little Soul wants to experience the specialness of forgiving. It wants to learn about forgiveness. That's not so easy in heaven. After all, everyone there is perfect. What's a soul to do?

Suddenly a Friendly Soul comes out of the crowd of Souls and offers to help. "I will give you someone to forgive." This light, beautiful little soul offers to go into Life together and do something heavy and bad so the first Soul will learn to forgive.

"I will do something really terrible, and then you can experience yourself as the One Who Forgives."

Then the Friendly Soul asks a favor. "In the moment that I strike you and smite you, ...in the moment that I do the worst to you that you could possibly imagine...in that very moment...Remember Who I Really Am."

"...because, you see, I will have been pretending so hard, I will have forgotten myself. And if you do not remember me as I really am, I may not be able to remember for a very long time. And if I forget Who I Am, you may even forget Who You Are and we will both be lost. ..."

Think about someone who has hurt you. Shouldn't be too hard. Might even have a long list. But did the hurt create an opportunity to learn? Did your divorce teach you to stand up on your own two feet? Did the death of a loved one teach you how to be compassionate to someone else who is grieving? Did a terrible injustice teach you what is really important in life?

This beautiful story has made me think of all the Little Souls who have helped me grow and learn Who I Really Am. When you're in the middle of a hurricane, you don't thank the wind. In the midst of

prison, nobody says, "Oh, great, I'm learning so much. This is fantastic." No, it doesn't work that way.

I served seven years in prison. I didn't love it. I didn't think, "What a fantastic experience." But now I know that prison was a journey I was meant to take, exactly when I took it. It gave me my passion and my purpose, which I know are key to a happy life no matter where you are.

Wherever you are, find your passion and turn it into your purpose. Your life will have a great depth of meaning. You will be like the Little Soul and know Who You Really Are. Inside or out, you can create meaning in your life. You can become your own best friend, learning and growing. You can become the friend of many as you learn to serve others. God has sent us nothing but angels and some of those angels are the Little Souls who have promised to help you find out Who You Really Are.

This beautiful little book helped me realize that in prison (especially in prison) or out, we are surrounded by Little Souls to help us become our best selves. Don't forget who they really are. Love them for the love they are showing to you. Thank them for that love.

By the way, *The Little Soul and the Sun* was published in 1998 and is still available on Amazon. It is a book to treasure and to give away. If you are inside, see if you can get it in your library. Ask someone to send it to you. Share it. I think of it every day and now I look at people differently. I hope you will too.

THE FULL STORY

Sue Ellen has done an incredible job of telling the wonderful story told in [The Little Soul and the Sun](#) in very few words. The Conversations with God Foundation's Prison Outreach Program (that I coordinate) cannot afford to send those books out to you but I have typed this short story and will send it to anyone who writes me with this request.

This story holds a picture of reality that helps me every day of my life. I hope it will do the same for you. Thank you Sue Ellen, for sharing your thoughts.

*Love,
Janine*



LETTER FROM GINA TO A 15 YEAR OLD FRIEND

Dear Friend,

I am writing to you to share my life story in hopes that it will help you in some way. I come from a good, Christian family who are working middle-class. I was never abused or neglected, unlike so many of the other girls here in prison. My parents worked hard and were very loving. Perhaps their only mistake was not enforcing real discipline upon me.

When I was 14, I had an older boyfriend. I got pregnant that year. I should have talked to my parents (or any other adult close to me) about what was going on in my life. They could have helped me and maybe I wouldn't have gotten pregnant. Telling my parents that their baby was going to have a baby was frightening and shameful.

Once my son was born, I felt so out of place because I wasn't a regular teenager any longer, nor was I an adult. I was 15 years old and I didn't fit anywhere. I ended up marrying my boyfriend the next year, partly because I felt it was the right thing to do and partly because it was a way out of my parent's house. The marriage didn't last long because he wasn't ready to grow up. I left him and found myself a single mom at 17. Unfortunately, I also found out I was pregnant again! Birth control, I discovered, isn't fool-proof.

I had an apartment and was working and I did manage to finish high school, but I couldn't make enough to pay bills. I was too stubborn to go back to my parents' house. I felt I had imposed on them enough. Besides, I was supposed to be a big girl, right? While my old friends went to parties and the prom and got ready for college, I had two babies to take care of. Those teenage years that I cheated myself out of can never be replaced. I'm just now realizing how important those years are to young people and how much of an impact it has had on me to have missed that experience.

Anyway, I was desperate to make it on my own. A "friend" suggested I could get a job as a dancer (stripper) to make enough money to live on. Finally I tried it

and found it was degrading and yet exciting at the same time. The money was fast and easy. I got a big house, a new car, and did a lot of shopping! What I didn't realize was the damage I was doing to my morals, my standards, my image, my self-esteem, not to mention the dangers of that environment. My intentions of going to college were forgotten. At this point, I was an 18 year-old single mother of two children whose future was being sacrificed by my chosen "career."

It was during this same year that my now ex-husband got into a car accident because he was drinking and driving. It was devastating! He suffered massive head trauma. When I first saw him at the hospital, my knees buckled and I vomited. His head looked broken and it was so swelled up. He had staples all over, holding him together. His eye socket bone was broken, his jaw was busted in several places and he was hooked up to so many machines. The doctors said he would most likely die within a few hours. Instead he survived, but for months he was in a coma. When he finally woke up, he didn't recognize any of us. He couldn't feed himself, couldn't do anything. A full grown man in diapers. Over the next year, he learned how to do all those things again, and one day I went to see him and he saw our baby daughter. There was recognition in his eyes. His memory came back more each day after that. Today he works full time, but he lives with his parents and probably always will. The girl who was in the car with him suffered a broken back and will never walk again. Such are the consequences of drinking and driving.

When I was 19, I met and married my second husband. Let warn you that people are not always what they appear to be. Anyway, for a short while our marriage was great. I quit dancing, got pregnant two more times and enjoyed life. Somewhere along the way, he and I started doing drugs. I used to think pot was no big deal, but the problem is that once you start smoking pot, you will surely find it acceptable to try other drugs. The very best advice I can give anyone is NEVER try dope. You're not missing anything if you don't ever get high. Trust me on this

one! It starts out fun, but it will end up as pure misery. I got addicted like most people do. Being addicted to a drug is the most agonizing thing I've ever experienced. Addiction happens fast and it's sneaky. You don't even realize you're addicted at first. I started doing more and more drugs. Eventually, I went back to dancing because supporting a habit is very expensive. Being an addict is like being in your own prison...the addiction keeps you prisoner. Drugs did not kill me, but they surely took my life. Addiction and criminal activity are a package deal.

To make the story of my crime a short one, let me just say I ended up on probation several times (it's easier than you think to mess up) and I was in and out jail several times. Finally, I messed up for the last time and got sentenced to 3.5 years in prison. Custody of my first two children went to my first husband and his parents. My children from my second marriage are both now living with my parents. My second husband is still living the wrong kind of life and he can't take care of our children, but I continue to pray for him. My children are now growing up without their mother and I am missing out on more than you can imagine. The children all complain about missing me and not a single hour goes by that I don't ache to hold them.

Looking back, I realize that the choices I made at 14 affected the outcome of my entire life and the lives of my family. I didn't realize it then, but the choices I made as young as 14 were vital ones. I was selfish not to see ahead of time that getting pregnant so young would affect that child's life as well as mine. I was a good mother, but a lot of the time I felt as if I was just playing a role. Do you see what I mean? Until we're full blown adults, we're not equipped mentally or emotionally to handle having or raising a child. I think about all the babysitting and costs of the babies that were unfairly put on my parents, not to mention they are raising them altogether. Lesson: "The choices I make profoundly affect the lives of others."

(continued on page 9)

A REQUEST TO THE LOVERS OF A *COURSE IN MIRACLES*

Dear prisoner,

Write to everyone you can. All of your family and friends and even people you don't know. Tell them to buy a copy of *Letter To A Prisoner*. For every copy sold to the general public another copy is automatically delivered to a prisoner. Help this effort to continue to be able to help you. It can be bought at any good bookstore or online at LetterToAPrisoner.com

Letter to a Prisoner is a newly edited 370 page volume that contains all of the 365 daily lessons in *A Course in Miracles*. Also included are Carrie Triffet's The Crash Course from her book *Long Time No See* and Gary R. Renard's text transcription of *The End of Reincarnation*. Gary is the world renowned author of *The Disappearance of the Universe*.

The book begins with the personal account of an ex-prisoner's remarkable mystical experiences, his time in prison, escape attempts and years of solitary confinement. It blends an introduction to a practical spiritual discipline anyone can apply found in the teachings of the *Course*. It builds a bridge of camaraderie between all prisoners and one from their own ranks whose intention is to share a message that can change their lives forever. Practicing the lessons with dedication will lead anyone to the experience of Heaven right here and now, wherever you are!

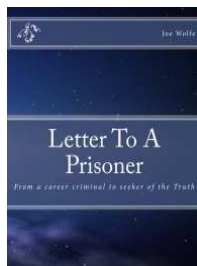
"I was hungry, and you gave me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; Naked, and you clothed me; I was in prison, and you came unto me." (Mathew 25:35, 36)

Letter to A Prisoner comes to where it can do the most good. Most "prison ministries" are largely fundamentalists and continue to instill the ego's flavor of fire and brimstone. This is a different message to prisoners. But not specifically for those bound by walls and bars. A prisoner can be anyone confined by their own beliefs, points of view and preconceived notions. A prisoner is anyone who has not yet replaced vindictiveness with compassion.

For every copy of *Letter To A Prisoner* sold, another is automatically delivered to one of the hundreds and hundreds of confined individuals who have expressed interest in help with applying the practical spiritual discipline of forgiveness as taught in *A Course in Miracles*. Please share this message with friends and help to be a part of changing the lives for the better, forever. Tell your friends about this. Have them purchase a copy of *Letter To A prisoner* so we can continue to send them: Buy at any good bookstore or Amazon online <http://LetterToAPrisoner.com> or <http://AcimAudio.com>

If You Are A Prisoner, we need you to help us continue to help you! Write to everyone you can; friends, family and even people you don't know. Tell them to buy a copy of *Letter To A Prisoner*. For every copy sold to the public another copy is delivered to a prisoner.

Love, Light and the Peace of God,
Joe Wolfe



Joe Wolfe, Spirit Light Outreach
c/o American Chiropractic & Wellness Center
8951 W. Cermak Road,
North Riverside, Illinois 60546

FREE BOOKS
FOR PRISONERS

Neale Donald Walsch along with Em Claire, whose poems are in the book, have generously offered to donate

- *When Everything Changes, Change Everything* (WECCE)

to any prisoner who is interested. This book can change your life. It was written to help those who are in bad places in their lives, who see no way out, who are ready for a real change. If this sounds good to you, this book may just be the answer to your prayers. Please write *Freedom Inside* for your copy of WECCE.

Make sure you let me know if you are allowed to receive hard cover books or not.

ALSO, you can still receive a free copy of the booklet,

- *ReCreating Your Self*

donated by the CWG Foundation

Plus, there is a download of the

- *WECCE Workbook*

that Neale has offered to donate to interested prisoners. This download is a 75 page book that can be copied and mailed to you. Please make sure you can receive so many copied pages as some prisons do not allow more than 15 copies or so in one mailing

*Thank you so much
Neale, Em Claire,
and the CWG Foundation!*

(continued from page 5)

love between husband and wife—particularly at the beginning, when each partner still may not know the other's deeper character very well, depends more on attachment than genuine love. Our desire can be so strong that the person to whom we are attached appears to be good, when in fact he or she is very negative. In addition, we have a tendency to exaggerate small positive qualities. Thus when one partner's attitude changes, the other partner is often disappointed and his or her attitude changes too. This is an indication that love has been motivated more by personal need than by genuine care for the other individual.

True compassion is not just an emotional response but a firm commitment founded on reason. Therefore, a truly compassionate attitude towards others does not change even if they behave negatively.

Of course, developing this kind of compassion is not at all easy! As a start, let us consider the following facts:

Whether people are beautiful and friendly or unattractive and disruptive, ultimately they are human beings, just like oneself. Like oneself, they want happiness and do

not want suffering. Furthermore, their right to overcome suffering and be happy is equal to one's own. Now, when you recognize that all beings are equal in both their desire for happiness and their right to obtain it, you automatically feel empathy and closeness for them. Through acustoming your mind to this sense of universal altruism, you develop a feeling of responsibility for others: the wish to help them actively overcome their problems. Nor is this wish selective; it applies equally to all. As long as they are human beings experiencing pleasure and pain just as you do, there is no logical basis to discriminate between them or to alter your concern for them if they behave negatively.

Let me emphasize that it is within your power, given patience and time, to develop this kind of compassion. Of course, our self-centeredness, our distinctive attachment to the feeling of an independent, self-existent I, works fundamentally to inhibit our compassion. Indeed, true compassion can be experienced only when this type of self-grasping is eliminated. But this does not mean that we cannot start and make progress now.

LETTER FROM GINA ...

(continued from page 7)

I didn't have to teach myself how to become a drug addict, but teaching myself how not to be one is a long, hard process, one I may always battle. I am attending Rio Salado classes that are offered here at the prison. That's the only good thing about this place. Most of the time I am locked in a small cell. There is no such thing as privacy. I wear the same uniform every day, eat the same nasty food, and the hours seem endless. My bed is a metal bunk with a worn out, skinny mattress. The guards are heartless, sometimes cruel, and so are most of the other female prisoners. I thank God for the few compassionate guards and for the few good friends I have.

I am isolated from the world and my family. I live life from behind a fence. The funny thing is, I feel free for the first time, free on the inside. Do you understand? I am one of the lucky ones who prison has affected in a positive way. I am stronger mentally, emotionally, and spiritually than I have ever been. This is rare though.

Most of the girls here get caught up in prison life and never learn differently. And by the way, strip searches are as degrading and humiliating as the first time you have one, no matter how many you have.

I want to become a high school guidance counselor. I will have to finish earning my degree once I'm released from prison. Once again, I'll be depending on my parents. My story and others like it don't just happen to the poor, the abused, or the bad. It can happen to anyone. It's all about choices. Please be careful to make the right ones, especially now at your young age.

I send this letter out with a prayer that touches you.

Sincerely,

Gina Panetta

HOW CAN WE START

We should begin by removing the greatest hindrances to compassion: anger and hatred. As we all know, these are extremely powerful emotions and they can overwhelm our entire mind. Nevertheless, they can be controlled. If, however, they are not, these negative emotions will plague us - with no extra effort on their part! - and impede our quest for the happiness of a loving mind.

So as a start, it is useful to investigate whether or not anger is of value. Sometimes, when we are discouraged by a difficult situation, anger does seem helpful, appearing to bring with it more energy, confidence and determination.

Here, though, we must examine our mental state carefully. While it is true that anger brings extra energy, if we explore the nature of this energy, we discover that it is blind: we cannot be sure whether its result will be positive or negative. This is because anger eclipses the best part of our brain: its rationality. So the energy of anger is almost always unreliable. It can cause an immense amount of destructive,

(continued on page 10)

Gina was 25 years old when she passed away on June 19, 2003, from acute leukemia, less than one year before being released from prison. Her one wish was that her family and friends would find the hope and peace she had found through her faith.

May God bless you on your life's journey.

Gina's former husband, JR, passed away on September 2, 2011, leaving their children without either parent. Thankfully, they are surrounded by loving grandparents and family.

We pray that this message causes young people to think deeply about their actions and the consequences that have a never ending impact on our loved ones.



Gina's Team,
P.O. Box 36,
Scottsdale,
AZ 85252

(continued from page 9)

unfortunate behavior. Moreover, if anger increases to the extreme, one becomes like a mad person, acting in ways that are as damaging to oneself as they are to others.

It is possible, however, to develop an equally forceful but far more controlled energy with which to handle difficult situations.

This controlled energy comes not only from a compassionate attitude, but also from reason and patience. These are the most powerful antidotes to anger. Unfortunately, many people misjudge these qualities as signs of weakness. I believe the opposite to be true: that they are the true signs of inner strength. Compassion is by nature gentle, peaceful and soft, but it is very powerful. It is those who easily lose their patience who are insecure and unstable. Thus, to me, the arousal of anger is a direct sign of weakness.

So, when a problem first arises, try to remain humble and maintain a sincere attitude and be concerned that the outcome is fair. Of course, others may try to take advantage of you, and if your remaining detached only encourages unjust aggression, adopt a strong stand. This, however, should be done with compassion, and if it is necessary to express your views and take strong countermeasures, do so without anger or ill-intent.

You should realize that even though your opponents appear to be harming you, in the end, their destructive activity will damage only themselves. In order to check your own selfish impulse to retaliate, you should recall your desire to practice compassion and assume responsibility for helping prevent the other person from suffering the consequences of his or her acts.

Thus, because the measures you employ have been calmly chosen, they will be more effective, more accurate and more forceful. Retaliation based on the blind energy of anger seldom hits the target.

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

I must emphasize again that merely thinking that compassion and reason and patience are good will not be enough to develop them. We must wait for difficulties to arise and then attempt to practice them.

And who creates such opportunities? Not our friends, of course, but our enemies. They are the ones who give us the

most trouble. So if we truly wish to learn, we should consider enemies to be our best teacher!

For a person who cherishes compassion and love, the practice of tolerance is essential, and for that, an enemy is indispensable. So we should feel grateful to our enemies, for it is they who can best help us develop a tranquil mind! Also, it is often the case in both personal and public life, that with a change in circumstances, enemies become friends.

So anger and hatred are always harmful, and unless we train our minds and work to reduce their negative force, they will continue to disturb us and disrupt our attempts to develop a calm mind. Anger and hatred are our real enemies. These are the forces we most need to confront and defeat, not the temporary enemies who appear intermittently throughout life.

Of course, it is natural and right that we all want friends. I often joke that if you really want to be selfish, you should be very altruistic! You should take good care of others, be concerned for their welfare, help them, serve them, make more friends, make more smiles. The result? When you yourself need help, you find plenty of helpers! If, on the other hand, you neglect the happiness of others, in the long term you will be the loser. And is friendship produced through quarrels and anger, jealousy and intense competitiveness? I do not think so. Only affection brings us genuine close friends.

In today's materialistic society, if you have money and power, you seem to have many friends. But they are not friends of yours; they are the friends of your money and power. When you lose your wealth and influence, you will find it very difficult to track these people down.

The trouble is that when things in the world go well for us, we become confident that we can manage by ourselves and feel we do not need friends, but as our status and health decline, we quickly realize how wrong we were. That is the moment when we learn who is really helpful and who is completely useless. So to prepare for that moment, to make genuine friends who will help us when the need arises, we ourselves must cultivate altruism!

Though sometimes people laugh when I say it, I myself always want more friends. I love smiles. Because of this I have the problem of knowing how to

make more friends and how to get more smiles, in particular, genuine smiles. For there are many kinds of smile, such as sarcastic, artificial or diplomatic smiles. Many smiles produce no feeling of satisfaction, and sometimes they can even create suspicion or fear, can't they? But a genuine smile really gives us a feeling of freshness and is, I believe, unique to human beings. If these are the smiles we want, then we ourselves must create the reasons for them to appear.

COMPASSION AND THE WORLD

In conclusion, I would like briefly to expand my thoughts beyond the topic of this short piece and make a wider point: individual happiness can contribute in a profound and effective way to the overall improvement of our entire human community.

Because we all share an identical need for love, it is possible to feel that anybody we meet, in whatever circumstances, is a brother or sister. No matter how new the face or how different the dress and behavior, there is no significant division between us and other people. It is foolish to dwell on external differences, because our basic natures are the same.

Ultimately, humanity is one and this small planet is our only home. If we are to protect this home of ours, each of us needs to experience a vivid sense of universal altruism. It is only this feeling that can remove the self-centered motives that cause people to deceive and misuse one another.

If you have a sincere and open heart, you naturally feel self-worth and confidence, and there is no need to be fearful of others.

I believe that at every level of society - familial, tribal, national and international - the key to a happier and more successful world is the growth of compassion. We do not need to become religious, nor do we need to believe in an ideology. All that is necessary is for each of us to develop our good human qualities.

I try to treat whoever I meet as an old friend. This gives me a genuine feeling of happiness. It is the practice of compassion.



A Letter to Joe Wolfe

Thank you for the materials you sent me. I enjoyed the articles very much. Thank you for the information about the study groups and thank you for your time and effort in getting the materials to me. I really appreciate it.

I just wanted you to know that I've been a seeker for many years, always searching for that secret, hidden knowledge. That one thing that would make my life more meaningful. I've always felt that I was missing something; I just didn't know what.

Books have been the main source for my quest. I thought that if I accumulated enough books about philosophy, psychology and various wisdom traditions I would eventually find what I was looking for. I figured that if I surrounded myself with the wisdom of the ages somehow that knowledge would come to me. I've read hundreds of these books and while many seemed to be pointing to the right path, nothing ever stuck.

After years of searching and collecting, I forgot the reason why I started in the first place. I found myself just accumulating obscure books, my quest being forgotten. I'm not sure if I would have ever even started looking again if it wasn't for this unlikely set of events.

Early one morning in March 2009 I received a phone call from my son that would change my life. He asked me to drive one of his friends home who had passed out at this house. I reluctantly agreed to help him just as I had done so many times before.

I should have known better. I should have called 911. I didn't realize that something was seriously wrong. I had a monumental lapse in judgment. I made a mistake that I felt could never be forgiven. As far as I was concerned my life was over.

On December 17, 2009 I was sentenced to

four years in the Wisconsin Correctional System. I was extremely depressed. I just didn't care anymore; I wanted it all to end. I entered the prison system a sixty year old first time felon. I was a completely humiliated and dejected man. This was the lowest point of my life... Little did I know then, that in a few weeks my life-long search would take an amazing twist. Instead of me doing the searching my "search" would seek me out.

[All new inmates are sent to a Maximum Security Prison to be processed.] After a few miserable weeks of being locked in a cell for 23 hours a day I was feeling extremely hopeless. One of the ways to get out of the cell was to attend one of the religious programs. I signed up for all of them. A couple of weeks later I was assigned to one called, "Miracles Recovery". the next day I was given a pass to go to the group. I walked down the hall to the room that was written on the pass. When I entered the room I was greeted by a large sign that read:

Nothing real can be threatened.

Nothing unreal exists.

Herein lies the peace of God.

I had just walked into a *Course in Miracles* Study Group hosted by *A Course in Miracles International* based in Wisconsin Dells, WI I couldn't understand what it was, but I felt like I was being welcomed home. It was a wonderful 45 minutes that changed everything. When it was time to leave I was handed a booklet entitled "A Course in Miracles Workbook Lesson 1-50". On the first page of the pamphlet was written "The purpose of these workbook lessons is to train your mind in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world". I immediately realized that this was exactly what I needed. I walked back to my cell with tears in my eyes and a feeling of hopefulness for the first time in almost a year.

After seven weeks and four *Course* meet-

ings I was transferred to a Medium Security Prison. I was equipped with my workbook lessons and the knowledge that things were not always as they seemed....

Now I had a great desire to live. This new Medium Security Prison was quite a bit different than the last one. I had a lot more freedom but there were no *Course* meetings. They did have a Buddhist group so I signed up for that. I started studying Buddhism but I also kept reading my workbook lessons. I noticed quite a lot of similarities between these two schools of thought.

Seven months later I was transferred once again. This time to a Minimum Security Prison with no *Course* or Buddhist groups. Six months later I was moved again to the prison I'm at now. The day I arrived here I noticed another inmate picking up a large blue book from the mail room. Upon closer inspection I read:

A Course in Miracles

Original Edition

Course in Miracles Society

My eyes nearly popped out of my head! I asked where the book was from and my fellow inmate told me to stop by his room after I was moved in. Later that day he handed me the name and address of Spirit Light Outreach. I asked my daughter to go online and see if Joe Wolfe would send me a copy of the *Course*.

A few days later my copy of *A Course in Miracles* arrived. I now feel that my search is over. The *Course* is all I need.

I can't wait to be reunited with my children and grandchildren.

I can't wait to start the next chapter of my life.

Thank you so very much.

RL

Wisconsin

Quotable Quotes

"I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened."

~Mark Twain~

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."

~Ambrose Redmoon~



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You are blessed and a blessing to all

Janine