

PRISONER EXPRESS NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2007

Hi, Friends. Welcome to another edition of the Prisoner Express News. It is always with great pleasure that I begin creating the newsletter. First and foremost it gives me and some of the other volunteers at Prisoner Express a chance to communicate with you. It is very difficult due to the financial constraints and time issues to answer your letters personally, and this newsletter gives me the opportunity to let you know what programs Prisoner Express is currently offering, display some of the essays and other writings you all have submitted to the program, to print useful reference information that you can utilize to your advantage, and to fill you in on the circumstances of my life.

As the Prisoner Express program continues to expand, we refine our mission, and figure out the best [read: most cost effective] practices for delivering programs and services to you our members. The premise behind our program is to help create situations that provide you with information, education and opportunities for creative self expression. In and of themselves these are worthy tasks, but even more we hope we step through the alienation and harshness of prison life to provide you with a sense of belonging. Membership in Prisoner Express is open to all, and it is my hope that the more an individual participates in our programs, the more personal gain they achieve in terms of personal growth, expanded knowledge, improved communication skills, creative inspiration and a sense of balance and self worth. I know these are lofty goals, but at least you know the intent underlying our efforts.

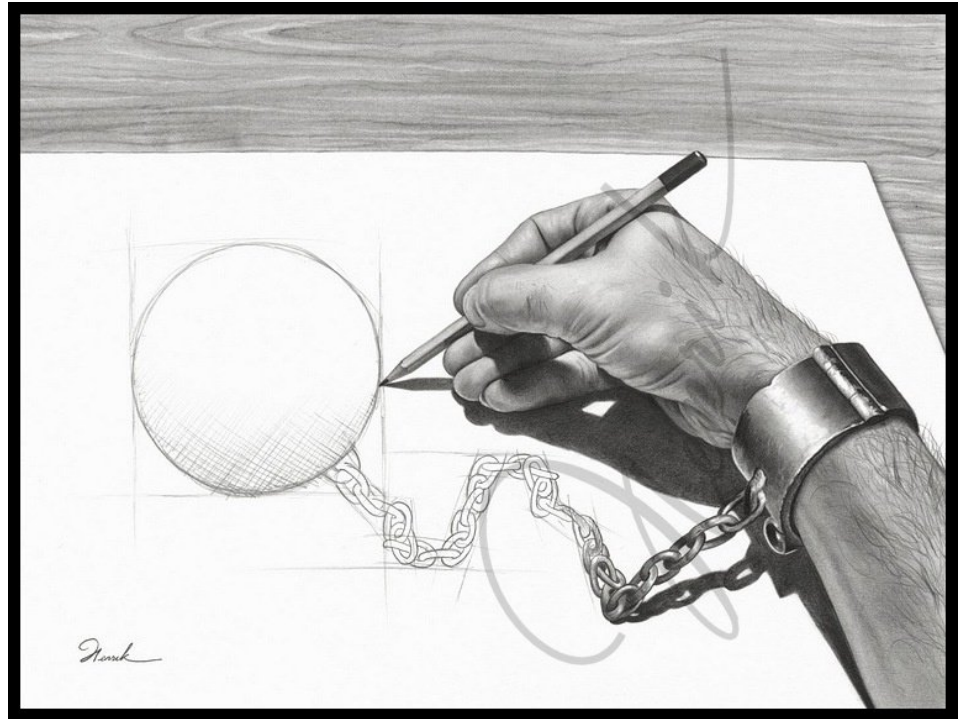
There is no one program or answer to the many different situations our members find themselves presently experiencing. We try to find a variety of projects to offer in each newsletter in the hope that some of them will resonate with what you think might be good for you. As many of you know we constantly search for the funds necessary to support our endeavors. Please consider this when signing up for any project. We want you to have the info, but we hope you will only sign up for the programs you intend to participate in. For example the difference in cost for printing and mailing a couple of hundred extra history packages determine what other services we can offer. This is not to discourage you from signing up for any program you are truly interested in. It's just more a reminder that we are all in this together and if any of us waste resources it is that much less for the group as a whole. Eventually more money will come our way, but for now in our early stages we must nurse this project along.

There are many ways to achieve balance. I like to use balance as a word to describe a mental state where I am present with myself and satisfied with who I am. It doesn't mean there are not aspects of my life I wish to change, but only that I recognize those traits and that even while I'm working on changing things I can still be okay with myself as I am. All of us no matter what our situation free or prisoner, rich or poor, sick or healthy have to find a place of balance in order to be more present in life. I also realize that the path to balance is different for individuals. In fact what can make one person strong can turn another person weak. I believe the first mistake many of us make in life is to believe there is only one path to truth, whether it is universal truth or personal truth. One reason why Prisoner Express creates diverse programming is that we hope to help each of you find a niche where you feel creatively engaged. I myself believe that is one of the key aspects of finding personal balance. We all need to

find activities that while we are doing them make us feel important and useful. It almost doesn't matter what the activity is as long as it is personally relevant to the person doing it. Conversely if we are just going through the motions in the work we do it often leads to emotional turmoil. From all that I read in your letters I know providing stimulating, creative programming is not the priority of the prisons most of you find yourselves inhabiting. To me it doesn't make sense not to educate and train you in a variety of skills and academic subjects while you are locked up. It seems common sense that the best way to treat you would be to help you gain the skills necessary to survive on the outside while living within confines of the legal system. While our programming does not exactly do that either [yet], we can provide opportunities for you to get new information, practice reading for content and communicating it by writing, explore personal and reflective self expression, study in various different academic disciplines and further your knowledge about the world. We hope as you are engaged in creative projects it can soften the hardness of the prison experience, and ease some of the personal pain that comes with the experience. As this newsletter takes shape I want to introduce the concept of mental hygiene. When we floss or brush our teeth it is called dental hygiene. The concept is that certain activities performed regularly keeps our teeth and gums healthy. Healthy is not a lack of anything. There are complex reactions going on in your mouth all the time and flossing and brushing keeps that action flowing in a way that encourages optimal performance.

Now let's look at your brain, and your mind. What practices can you adopt inside of a cell or confined area that keeps your neurons firing correctly, keeps your brain working optimally, and allows your mind to find a place of balance? Healthy brains do not necessarily make healthy minds. Great thinkers can also be crazed, but a healthy functioning brain combined with a balanced mind can reveal truths to an individual that can be a source of comfort even in troubled times.

Another function of this newsletter is to print some of the writings you all have submitted to us. As usual I have to invoke the financial woe of not enough funds to explain why I don't include more of the writings and art you have submitted. Every page increases postage and printing costs. Ideally I would like to send out a newsletter 4 times a year, and fill each of them with your thoughts. All of you writers who submit essays to the program can be powerful influences on some of your fellow prisoners. Many of you do not have someone to talk things over with, and I can imagine the relief to see someone kicking around in an essay ideas and thoughts that have been banging around in your own mind. Also your writings reveal that as a group you are smart and sensitive beings. By and large your writing helps



reveal to us in the free world your humanity. Your writing breaks through the cycle of out of sight out of mind that the prison industrial complex seems to encourage. While I do not put every essay in the newsletter, most are posted on our website www.prisonerexpress.org. There, folks in the free world can read essays, poetry and journals submitted by you. Hopefully one or more of the writings included in this newsletter will speak to you and help further a feeling of connectedness. Our intent is to encourage helpful communication among prisoners and also to make that information available to folks in the free world.

Please remember that we often wait till we have at least 200 people signed up for any project so that the mailing can be done using bulk postage rates. Sometimes we get those 200 quickly, and other times it can take awhile. Often an offering will only be good through the first or second bulk mailing. If it is no longer available, you will have to wait for the next newsletter to see what new projects you can join. Of course you can always write to ask, as sometimes it is many months after the newsletter is published that a program is mailed. An example would be our poetry anthology. I am just getting it ready for mailing now even though it was first offered 5 months ago, and someone writing in now for the first time can easily be added to that list, while on the other hand I have mailed out all the copies of the Viking material I had and someone writing for it might be waiting a long time until that packet is reprinted and we have 200 respondents who want it. I tell you all this to let you know each individual program runs on its own schedule and you contacting us about it may be a hit or miss depending on where in the production cycle we are. The good news is that everyone who writes will be enrolled to receive the next edition of the Prisoner Express News, which puts you into the driver's seat for enrolling in new programs.

So now that you are sitting back in that driver's seat, let me describe some of the programs that you can sign up for. Interspersed with these offerings we will try to post information for other resources that can benefit you as well. There will be a sign up sheet at the end of the newsletter that you can fill out and send back to us.

-Gary

Prisoner Express promotes rehabilitation by providing information, education and opportunities for creative self expression to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States. Subscriptions are free to prisoners. All others please contact Prisoner Express News for rates. All proceeds are used to fund programming.

The Durland Alternatives Library, which funds CRESP Center for Transformative Action, Additional support comes from the Cornell Public Service Center.

NEWSLETTER
Prisoner Express
Summer 2007

Non-Profit Organization
U.S Postage Paid
Permit 448
Ithaca, NY 14850

CRESP/Alternatives Library
Prisoner Express News
127 Anabel Taylor Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853
www.prisonerexpress.org

PROGRAMS

Book Mailings - This is probably our most popular service, and we have gotten quite good at mailing custom tailored packages of books. Basically include a list of the types of books you are most interested in receiving, and Steve, our book room magician, will search through our shelves of donated materials and find his best matches for you. The more choices you give us the better the chance of a good match. Also knowing about the restrictions imposed by your particular correctional facility helps ensure you get the package. In some places if we send more books than is allowed the whole package is disallowed. Usually there are 4 or 5 books to a package. As we depend on donated books for the majority of what we have to offer, the selection varies according to the flow of the donations. Steve is excellent at managing what books we have and is committed to sending out quality books that meet your interests. Many of you request dictionaries and Almanacs. We send them out as fast as we get them, but unless we find a great source for donated dictionaries we will never keep up with that demand. We send out about 150 packages a month and as we receive many requests it can often take many months (currently around 4) before your turn comes up. To be fair to all of you we loosely hold each participant to two shipments per year. Be sure to let everyone who is allowed to read each book we send, or donate it to your unit library as that really increases its value.

Poetry Project - We just sent out our first Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology. We plan on putting out a second volume this coming winter. Volunteers Dave and Toby have put in a lot of effort reading and selecting poems for this anthology. We will put the first anthology on our website so that folks in the free world can see what you are writing. Toby is excited to keep reading your poems and coordinating the next anthology. To receive the 2nd anthology we ask that you sign up for it as well as submit at least 1 poem for the project. I am including a few of the poems from the anthology so all of you can know a bit more about the power of poetry. Using poetry as a way to communicate your thoughts, emotions, and circumstances is both a powerful way to process internally what is going on for you, and a way to share with others your present reality. The poetry project was really thought up by all of you. I wasn't intending for this project to happen but it was impossible to ignore all of the moving poetry you all sent in to the program. Please keep writing, and sharing yourself. **If you would like a copy of the second anthology please submit a poem for possible inclusion.** What follows is a sampling from our first anthology:

The Refuge City of Life by Armando O. Solis

The road to somewhere
Becomes miles and miles,
Separating me apart
From the city that refuges
Part of me – my love, my life
And soul.
The road, long and lonely
to somewhere – a place
where love is denied, unwanted
and not cherished
where the wait is unbearable
and the longing is a nightmare.
The cries and pain of heartaches
Of men are echoes in the night
Of endless dreams to come
Yet the memories find their place
Where the tears fall like
A drizzle, and the cries
Are silent in the night.
Memories taking me back
Yet separating me from the
City that refuges
Part of me –my love—my life
And soul.
The road to somewhere
Becomes miles and miles
Where the vision of you
Is vivid in my mind and heart
Yet a part of you-and-us

Is slowly fading away –separating me from
the city that refuges
part of me –my life—my love
and soul.

Festival by Derrick Corley

How strange to look
out a prison cell window
to see children running—playing
on a prison field: THE YARD,
and hear their voices, laughter
sights and sounds so alien in this
forbidding, bleak, hostile environment
as is seeing affection—love
given, taken, and shared freely:
lovers holding hands, kissing
a mother hugging her child
kids hugging, touching, playing with
an imprisoned father, brother, uncle
unaware of their surroundings, for awhile
the magic of love has transformed
this place of dry grass and pain
that holds the years, and bloody tears
shed by caged flesh and souls
into a field of hopes and dreams.
And as I watched it came to me
the sum total of my life, and loss
a deadness within, something missing
from my life and what I was
what I am and am supposed to be
and, whether stolen by life or prison
robbed of healthy human contact, I am
yet able to find comfort in knowing
that something still lived within me
for I FELT the pain of my loss
and while my flesh was not upon that field
my soul was, and I
found hope that I would love
and be loved yet again, and so
later, when the festival was over
the field cleared and empty of all
my eyes saw again the magic
my ears heard the echo of laughter
and my spirit danced upon that field
that wasn't empty at all.

-Tion by S.N. Houston

As I sit in the midst of incarceration:
Feeling the sensations of my body's fermentation.
I try to practice meditation: searching for some
relaxation.
If only I could return to gestation, and start over
with present education: I could experience the
intoxication of a mother's close relation. But since
I'm trapped in this awful fixation, I've come to the
realization: that I must use the situation for the
elevation of my imagination while trying to resist
the temptation of succumbing to the degradation of
the location. To achieve this I must put a limitation
on my affliction and protect myself from bad
association whose instigation causes retaliation and
depreciation of the black nations, which goes all the
way back to the plantation and arouses lamentation
and the damnation of my vexation. Remembering
the mutilation, I sit in frustration, praying in
desperation for the cessation of this awful vacation.
Then I sit in fascination and enjoy the radiation of
the constellation. Without the subordination, I will
experience rejuvenation: and be able to show
appreciation for the awesome creation. This is a
dedication to the victims of incarceration. So
remember to use your rationalization, seek your
sanctification: Endure with me as we wait on the
manifestation of the revelation.

Television by Tauheed Lloyd

Television or tel-lie-vision?
The projection vision is telling lies
Disguised to resemble truth.
Advertiser exec's using methods that are high-tech.
Keeping beneath the radar so the masses won't
detect
That they're the by-product of a govern-mental
Experiment project.

The television is a weapon of mass destruction
In the oppressor's grasp,
Planting sex, money and murder. Demon seeds
In fertile minds and watching them hatch.
Those glued to the tube
Become the Devil's son in law
Advocating the Devil's worldview, keeping it up to
par.
Unsuspecting children at play in his sandbox,
Looking lesser than human and more like a fox.

The tel-lie-vision and other media outlets
Got 85% of the masses blind, deaf, and dumb.
The trumpet of truth is ignored
And so is the beating of the war drum.
The masses walk around in a robotic daze
And the world is a matrix-like maze.
Subliminal seduced thoughts not their own.
Art-ificial people with art-ificial intelligence
Are nothing but govern-mental clones.

Art Contest/Exhibit - Artists, please take note, we have scheduled a show of your work on the Cornell Campus. We will use the show to publicize the work of Prisoner Express and again to share you and your humanity with those in the free world. We hope you will send in some of the art you do for this show. We hope to sell some of it to raise funds for our programs. Most of those attending the show are poor students so we really don't expect to make a lot of money, but one never knows. It also is a great way to expose students to this program and recruit people to help type your writing, write letters or create other useful programs.

The exciting news is that we have gotten the Graduate Student group at Cornell to sponsor an art contest. They are putting up money for prizes and scholarships. Your art work will be judged by a panel of Cornell University faculty and students. First prize is \$100, second prize is \$75 and third prize is \$50. There will also be 10 scholarships for \$20 given to buy art supplies. To be eligible for the scholarship you don't have to be the best artist, but you must be committed to developing your art skills. Just send in a sample of your work, and include a note asking for the scholarship. Please tell us something about yourself and how you could use the \$20 to further your art endeavors. I know it is not much money but at least it can get you some supplies. The art show on Campus will be up from 11/1/07 to 12/1/07. Please submit any work for the show or for the scholarship by 10/15/07.

I will try to acknowledge the art you send. I know in the past many of you have sent pieces and I have not responded. As I've said it is hard to find the time and the funds for that, but as part of the art show project, we will keep track of all submissions and will send out a letter in October letting you know that your work has been received. Many of you are amazing artists and I hope my inability to respond directly has not turned you off to the program. Hannah, a graduate student at Cornell, will be putting this show together and is now coordinating the Prisoner Express Art Project. If I can find the funds I will duplicate all of the work selected for the show and mail every artist who submits art this exciting compilation. I have heard that perhaps the Dean of the Art School will be a judge in the contest. If we could get the Art School at Cornell interested in your work it might open up many doors. If you have any questions write to Hannah at our Prisoner Express address.

History Project - In the past few months we have mailed out 2 distinct history lessons. We sent out a unit on Greek history, which mainly dealt with the time period of 2000BC to 300BC. We had intended on sending a Greek/Rome packet, but it got too large, so we separated out the Ancient Rome Unit and will be offering that this time.

We are also offering a second history unit entitled History of African Civilizations to 1500 AD. You can ask for one or both on the signup sheet. As with our other projects there will be a number of thought provoking questions and creative projects that come with these units. If you submit answers to the questions or submit a project we will send you a compilation of the most interesting responses we receive. It is a great way for you all to teach one another. We mostly take the information for the lessons from the internet, and they are

intended as a way of familiarizing you with the history of civilization. Ideally we would like to create a series of pamphlets that follow a historical time sequence, but for now we create packets based on our interests and your requests.

Let us know what areas and time periods you would like to know more about. Because printing and mailing these packets take a lot of money we are limited in the size and number of packets we can create so if you are interested please sign up for them.

Math Project - This is an ongoing effort. To date we sent out a placement exam to about 400 individuals. The placement exam was created by NY State to measure a minimum of competency. We are asking folks to score an 80% to be moved to the next level of instruction. If you score below 80% we will be sending you a study guide with all the info you need to answer the questions on the placement exam. After you study the guide you can retest to get a certificate of completion. For those of you who score 80% we will send you a certificate of completion as well as are a packet of more advanced math. We have another placement exam to send. It is given to all incoming freshman at a local college to see what they know. It looks difficult and we will include that in your next packet. The hold up is that we are waiting for the 200 responses we need to send this material out by bulk mail. Instituting the math program last year was a big wake up call to the necessity of bulk mail rates. When I responded individually I burned through my available funds for postage. Now I wait till the numbers are reached. I'm sorry for the delay that you as students have to endure, but until we have the funds I'd rather go slow than go broke. Anyone who would like to join the math program please feel free to sign up. If you already have received the placement exam please do not sign up again. Please send it in. We have received back 135 tests from the 400 we sent out. I am waiting for the number to reach 200 as the difference in postage rates between first class and bulk is more than \$150. For those who have sent in a test, we have you recorded and will be sending out your corrected tests in September. (Hopefully we will have 200.) Earl, a student volunteer, returns to school then and can help me in getting all this information to you.

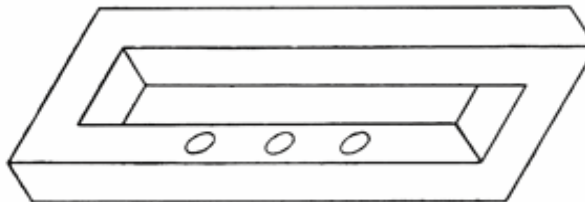
Journal Project - As with many of our projects, the underlying intent is to expand awareness and creativity. Journaling accomplishes both of those outcomes. We post many of your journals online on our website.

(www.prisonerexpress.org) I have had a number of relatives contact me from reading your entries on line, and I can tell you that they appreciate reading your words, and in fact reading the journals of others as well. It helps us on the outside to better understand the life you are living. It is a great way for some of you to connect with the outside world. A journal can be about anything you want. I just sent out an intro letter to folks who signed up in 2007, and if you have already received the letter you do not need to resign up for the project. If you want to know more, sign up and we will send a longer piece about the joys and reward of keeping a journal. If you are inspired and want to get on it right away, just start sending in entries. We will keep them for you, and some of you will have your writings put online. Our Book Club selection, *Lost and Found*, was created using some of the author's childhood journals. If you sign up for the book club project you can see how one author used journals to create a memoir.

Brain Games - Here's a new project for those of you who wish to get your brain activity ramped up a bit. Volunteers are scouring the world of brain games to find activities for you that require focused

mind power. Let's wake up some of those sleepy brain cells and give them a bit of exercise. We will compile this plethora of puzzles, and send them to you. I'm not sure if we should include the answers with them as I know it is easy to give up if you have the answers to refer to. Perhaps we could send the answers at a later date so you have to really work at finding the answer. These puzzles will be varied and interesting and at various levels of difficulty. Keeping your mind creatively engaged is a goal that we believe can be furthered by playing with puzzles. Below are a sample of the types of games and puzzles you will find in the packet. If any of you puzzle masters have a brain game or two that you'd like to share with the rest of us please send them in and maybe they'll be included in the packet.

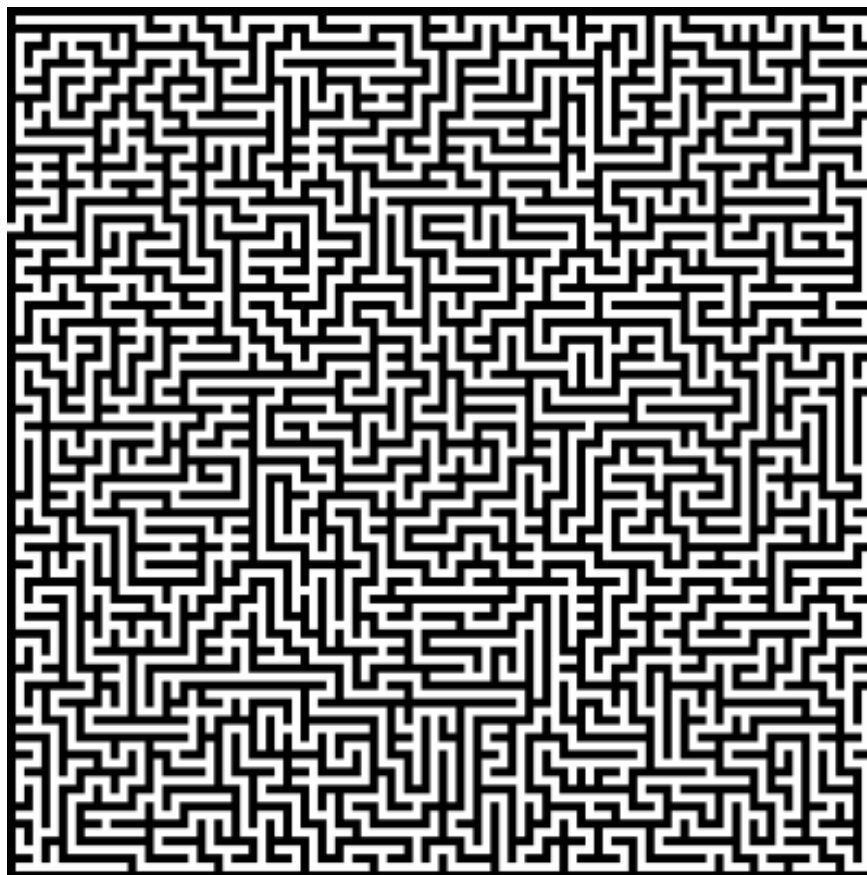
- 1) The maker doesn't want it, the buyer doesn't use it, and the user doesn't see it. What is it?
- 2) Of those numbers whose English representation in capital letters consists only of straight lines, only one number has a value equal to the number of straight line segments required to write it out. What number is this?
- 3) What word is pronounced differently when the first letter is capitalized?
- 4) What word begins with 'h', ends with 'n', contains six letters, and contains eight words besides itself without transposing a single letter?
- 5) Are the holes on the inside or the outside of the rectangle?



- 6) Divide a paper into 8 sections and write numbers on it according to the picture. Your job is to fold it where the lines are so that the numbers are sorted (number 1 will be on the top, 2 under it, ..., and the last one will be 8). Hint: it helps to write the numbers on both sides of the paper.

1	8	7	4
2	3	6	5

- 7) Maze (no solution to this one!).



Answers on back page.

Book Club - You can be a member of the PE Book Club. I search for multiple copies of the same books that I can mail out to you as a group. Along with the book comes a series of questions. The questions usually do not have a wrong or right answer but generally ask about your experiences, feelings or opinions regarding what you have read. Currently those of you in the club are digesting and writing on *The Great Gatsby*, a novel set in the 1920's by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Along with the book was a series of questions given to all incoming students here at Cornell University. We are compiling your responses as they come in.

Our next book is *Lost and Found*. It was written by Jemma Macera, an Ithaca resident who chronicles how she overcame Alzheimer's. While she focuses on her struggle to gain control of her mind from this debilitating illness she created this handy list covering "Suggested Behaviors and Qualities Necessary for Wellness."

1. Self-awareness
2. Willingness to change
3. Burning desire to succeed
4. Perseverance
5. Forgiveness—the most selfish act one can do
6. Compassion
7. Gratitude
8. Belief in the impossible
9. Flexibility
10. Self-awareness
11. Joyful nature
12. Genius code: do what the gifted can't do
- 13/ Eliminate stress/worry
14. Defy our culture, our tribal beliefs
15. Visualize the state of wellness desired
16. Pray in thanksgiving, not in want
17. Pretend
18. Take control, be responsible
19. Ask for help
20. Self-awareness
21. Give up belief in failure
22. Remain active
23. Be generous
24. Walk barefoot in the grass
25. Sobriety
26. Unquestionable honesty
27. Love of music, dancing, storytelling and silence
28. Passion
29. Self-hypnosis (autogenesis)
30. Self-awareness, emotional maturity

Jemma created her book using journals she had kept from an earlier time and wove those entries around what was happening in her life when she actually wrote the book. Those of you interested in creating health and well being in your life will find this an informative read. We will create some interesting and open ended questions for you to answer, as well as provide you with an opportunity to ask questions to Jemma, especially about some of the alternative health practices she writes about. I hope to mail the book out in early November so please sign up by then. We will compile your response to the book and share them with Jemma as well as create a packet for you.

Theme Writing - As many of you may already know this is my favorite project. This project started as Prisoner Express began to grow. In my first days coordinating the program there were only a few of you writing and I could send personal letters back to each of you. As the program grew it became harder to maintain the personal quality that I believe is an important component of this endeavor. To help maintain a personal connection with you we started the theme writing project. Every month we offer a theme for you to write on. If you send in a submission you will receive a complete copy of every submission received on that topic. Usually we send out theme packets every two months, so one essay by you can generate you receiving a packet with 2 topics of interesting writing done by prisoners who are dealing with many of the same realities you are facing daily. Along with the packet we will include a letter from me or one of the other Prisoner Express folk who are coordinating that month's themes. We will also choose a few themes to put in the next newsletter. This newsletter will have some of the previous themes that participants have written. I hope you enjoy reading them and that many of you are inspired to write on one or more of the themes or topics suggested at the end of this section.

Courage

Courage

There's no awards, medals or prizes if you devote your time to the many of us who are lucky enough to read this newsletter and all it's contents. You rock. I'm the only guilty convict here at this prison. No seriously. All you have to do is ask. Bad choices and an entanglement of drugs and

selfishness have me behind these bars. A body full of tattoos, scars and 1000 stories. I was a high school drop out in the 9th grade. My book knowledge was extremely limited. I was a leader in a white prison gang, Aryan Circle of Texas. Macho, tough-ass who wouldn't listen to nobody. Here I am 15 years in prison. I've served 4 years of this 15 year sentence. Someone kind of caring like you showed me there is so much more to life than what I knew. A very beneficial person who volunteered a bit of time stood up to me and changed my life forever. Courage? I was a coward. A coward uses a physical strength to accomplish things. Using my fears to create hate and misunderstandings for other races of people. People different than me. I thought I was courageous because I had all these tattoos and people respected that I was in a gang. Wrong. A cowardly act. I am no longer in a gang. My life has changed 180 degrees. I love myself. I embrace education. I embrace all people. I speak against gangs, racists and bullies. It all started by realizing I can be myself and not prove anything to anyone. I can have emotions. Yes, can you believe it. I can care about people. I had to make a choice...stay in a gang and live that way, which was not me, or step away and begin a life of change. It's dangerous. You all know the way they say you can get out of a gang. So be it. That's the courage I want to be known by. I'm not courageous. I am a proud father of a 9 year old son. He is full of courage. Having to live without me takes a lot of courage. Being a man in a boy's body speaks courage. Making all A's on his report cards. Playing football, basketball and racing little motorcycles takes courage. Being a big brother to two siblings takes courage. Being able to love me through all my failures...he is courage. I'm a coward next to him. His name is Jonathan and I hope all of you experience courage in such a pure way. Life isn't always just about you. Sometimes it has to be about someone else. Use courage to make good choices for yourself.

—Thomas Kirkpatrick

Courage

It's courage that matters. Not the kind you hear about in prison, not the courage to fight, or even "keeping your head up." No, that's not courage.

It's courage when I can keep a quiet dignity about myself. It takes courage to observe the world around you. It takes courage to stand up for a matter of honor and principle. It takes courage to see even when everyone else around you is blind.

It takes a special kind of courage to be a prisoner with a long-term sentence. To see my family suffering and not be able to do anything about it. To let them see that I'm hurting all the more because I made the mistake that separated us. And to let them see that I've changed, that I'm no longer someone willing to throw away everything for nothing: all of this takes courage.

And it takes courage to pray. Not the loud "O God, forgive me this and this, help me with this and this." No, not even the quiet "God help me though this" that we would all hear is we could listen to the hearts of others. Instead, it takes courage to pray "I will make a difference today" or "I will change myself today." This kind of prayer is not to any extra cosmic deity, but to the Divine Spark within us all.

So let us lift up our courage in both hands and let us pray!

—John Wilson

Courage

Some say that to know the exact date and time of one's death and yet still be able to walk calmly to it, with head held high, takes an extraordinary amount of courage.

In a state where the assembly line of death has sped up while other states have slowed down or put there's on hold, where the legislature and judicial system and where the majority of its citizens are so rabidly pro-death penalty, most of us know deep down that the chances of a reprieve are very, very slim. That we too will eventually take that final short walk to the gurney and face what everyone in this world will one day face in the end.

The constant specter of death hovers over us all here on death row, day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. Yet

the men and woman on death row continue to fight, continue to hope, continue to live for another day.

Some say that courage is the ability to face death calmly, or without fear. But to me, it takes more courage to live. Courage to wake up each day with the certainty of knowing that nothing has changed, that your future holds nothing but more pain and heartache, more loneliness. Courage to wake each day knowing that even though you are surrounded by life, by hundreds of other human beings, you are still alone with yourself, alone with your past. To me, death would be a welcome relief from the daily gut-wrenching pain of despair and hopelessness. A simple step. But do I have the courage to take that step? No.

—Perry Allen Austin

Revere the Children

Of all that there is to be courageous for, I feel that what should be recognized as also courageous is all the boys and girls who have no family, who then are cared for by the state. They enter into a world unknown with no one to lean on, going through foster homes or boys and girls homes all around the state. And the only ones they can familiarize themselves with are the other kids around them, for they all have that one thing in common: they're all alone in the world without any family.

I've known kids as young as 6 years old going through boys and girls homes. What are known as RTC in Texas (residential treatment centers). I was one of those kids. And it's an unfortunate surprise to find out that they have problems that lay deeper than the reality of not having family. Some have attempted suicide. Ran away, only to be caught and brought back. Then there are those who cling to each other. They form an unbreakable bond, but when it's time for one of them to move on to another RTC for whatever reason, then that's the hardest part. The holidays come and its nothing like the real thing. The staff and the coordinators try to make it as real as possible (although that is probably the only time that some of the staff are ever considerate to the kids). But nothing will ever take away the reality of their lives and the biggest fear is "what's gonna happen to me when I turn 18? Where am I going to go and to who?" The future is always uncertain. Some kids will say "I'm going back to this person or that relative." But it never happens.

These kids can easily give up on life. But for some reason they keep holding on. Maybe because their hope or faith of going back home is a constant reminder, a reassuring hand that is there pushing them along. Or maybe its that they just want to walk away from their past and start a future of their own to show those who took their first life away and say "look at me now, I did this without you so I never needed you." Whatever it is, it's alive inside of their hearts and that's the one thing that no one can kill or take away, hope.

Courage belongs to the kids who are not yet old enough but are already fighting the fight of life's tribulations

—Johnathan Hooper



Courage

"Courage" can mean different things to different people. Some people (especially in prison) think of courage as being willing to fight and "stay down for yours." I'm not denying that there is courage involved in those cases, but courage is so much more than a show of fierceness. A lot of inmates fight more out of fear from what will

happen to them if they don't. The consequences of showing hesitation and weakness can be dire, we all know that. A lot of times though it takes a stronger form of courage to stand up for what you believe to be right even if you are in the minority or standing alone. A lot of people conform with the majority in order to be agreeable and not appear "freakish." I don't speak solely about prison environments; the same applies to society in general. It starts at a young age when we're in school and a certain style of clothes, shoes, hair styles is the norm. It doesn't stop after high school as we've come to realize. We see this lack of courage in bandwagon voters in political stances, religious institutions, organizational structures, etc, etc. Society in general will label you a freak or outcast if you go against the grain. This is basic sociology and its not new to our generation this is something as old as man (human kind) itself. I won't attempt to argue whether it's human nature or a learned behavior but real courage is required to stand alone and be an island in a sea of opposition for something you know or believe to be right. Whether one is actually right or wrong is another issue but I believe that society as a whole would be so much different (not necessarily better) if people had the courage to stand their ground instead of going with the flow out of fear of being looked at as weird or labeled.

I don't know if I write this for the reader or more for myself, because I'm certainly as guilty as the next man and maybe it's because of this lack of courage to stand for what I believe to be right that I find myself in the position I'm in now? It seems likely. How many of you are too?...

—Richard Nieto

Courage

"Courage—the quality of mind that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, etc without fear, bravery."

Sitting here today 5/25/2007 in prison, I acquaint myself with the knowledge that I have a serious problem which deserves immediate attention. There are a lot of you in prison, and even on the outside world who will have no problem relating to me. Some of you face this similar problem and if you will, let's first acknowledge that it takes a lot of courage to even admit that you have a problem that's become way too much for you to handle. My problem is, maybe it's yours too, my problem seems to be that I can't say no to drugs. Even at the cost of my freedom to live in society. Coming back to prison has not been a deterrent for me, or else I would leave drugs alone. Even after coming back and forth to prison more than six different times. I'm still not sure whether or not I am going to be able to just say no to drugs. Failure to say no could result in my imprisonment once again. But what little deterrent that is. I've come to find that I am not afraid of coming back to prison, all because I refuse to abstain from the use of drugs. Today, I have to courage to admit that I have a problem. There is something wrong with me. Why can't I feel good about myself without having to use drugs? Just what exactly is it that drugs do for me? Why do I have to use? Why can't I say no to drugs? Where is my courage when I need it? I've been incarcerated now for a total time of five years this time around, but altogether its been almost 17 years that I have invested, being incarcerated in the penitentiary. Today I have the courage to say that using drugs was my downfall. You would probably ask yourself, what's the harm in using drugs, how can using drugs get you in trouble? First of all I am on parole. There are conditions that are always placed on me, once that I'm released. There are rules and guidelines that I must abide by. Drugs are against the law, you know? Marijuana is not legal, crack cocaine is not legal. So it's illegal for me to use them. Are you relating to me so far? Are you faced with this similar problem? Do you think that you have the courage to say no to using drugs? Maybe you have some other weakness in your life that's standing in your way that's causing you much pain and frustration? You're really not sure whether or not you have the courage to just say no. Every time you say you're not going to do it, you end up doing it? You know that it's bad for you and causing you problems, but you don't have what it takes to abstain. How can something so bad be so good? Yes sure, I like to smoke crack cocaine, I like

drinking beer, but it's against the law. It keeps getting me in trouble. It makes me do things I really don't want to do. It makes me irresponsible and it lowers my self esteem.

Today I have the courage to say that I am going to do everything I can to remain drug free. Today I'm mixing hope with my courage. I can't afford to come back here, but that's what's most definitely going to happen if I get out and use again. August 8, 2007 is my release date and so I ask you all, my theme writing fans, to keep me in your prayers when you pray to your God. But only if you believe in Jesus as being God's son. I wonder what your present state of mind is right now, are you afraid of something? Maybe you are waiting on the outcome of some situation and you are afraid that it might not work out to your benefit? If that's the case, then be encouraged, be courageous. God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

—**Joseph Alvin Parrish**

Courage to Survive

One prerequisite for long term survival in prison is courage. Not the courage to face violence, though that could certainly help, but the gentler courage it takes to get up each morning and go on doing the hours that become days, weeks, months, years and decades when all the future holds more of the same.

"It'll get greater later" is a term you hear in prison when someone is in a bad spot. Maybe their family has given up on them, friends might have drifted away, or a bit of both. One day you might be in the elite with constant mail and money to spend. The next it's all gone without warning. It takes courage to hold on until the later comes that is greater than the present. For some, incarceration is a downward spiral where darker degrees of desperation await.

No one can keep facing the empty handed mailman without courage. You can feel so alone and uncared for that life seems unworthy of the effort it takes to live it. A kind letter now and then can go a long way toward giving a prisoner a reason to go on. If we cling and seem desperate it's because our need is so great. We sometimes overwhelm the good intentions of the best people.

It takes courage to survive when you are destitute. In Texas there are no paid jobs, only forced labor. To not have money is to live without shampoo, lotion, a radio, maybe a moon pie or a bag of chips, a tee shirt or thermals, decent shoes to wear, a typewriter. If a prisoner seems financially needy, it may well be because he is.

One thing all prisoners have in common is a bit of courage. We all seem to overlook that and put down those that don't have anyone left to provide for them. Blaming the poor for their plight is common. Let's try not to forget the special form of courage it takes to go on getting up in the morning when all you have to look forward to is more of the same. More being lonely. More being broke. More desperate, destitute hours without hope.

One day we all might be walking in their ragged shoes. Let's have the courage to reach out a helping hand to those less fortunate than ourselves in the hope that if we are ever driven down to that desperate level, someone might show us the same mercy.

—**Daniel H. Harris**

Overcoming Depression

Overcoming Depression

"Be true to thine own self."

We are all individuals. We are all unique. We are all special. Even the good can have bad; bad can have good.

It's what choices you make more than others do for you. Depression is normal. Everyone will have it at some point. The question is will you let it beat you or you beat it?

What makes you happy, comforted?

How does it?

When does it?

Why does it?

Where does it?

Mine are several: writing reading, an endless well of desire to learn and volunteerism. Of course,

throw in my hobbies: coin and stamp collecting, book and magazine collecting, strategic games (e.g. Risk, Stratego, the Command and Conquer PlayStation games, and above all, collectible card games or CCGs). So, what if I'm told some of this is kid stuff? I'm 36 and an '80's product but I like classic country music like Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Johnny Horton and Paycheck, Patsy Cline, C.W. McCall. I like New Age (aka easy listening) and some classical.

I'm old and I'm young. Inside I'm still a bit of a kid at heart. Overcoming depression, above all, is be yourself and not some molded or built robot someone else wants you to be. Advice is fine. But it's advice not command. Remember, the actual choice is yours.

If it makes you smile or feel good then do it, just end up charged with a crime, okay? Follow the old maxim: "Take time to smell the roses." Have regrets about the past if possible. You really want to beat depression? Look inside. Look inside and look at yourself. Do not let others beat you down! Think of how good you'll feel when you leave in a huff because they didn't?

At times depression is necessary and, ironically, helps. When a death comes? Cry. Whether seen or not, do it! I held in everything for almost 4 months when my dad died. When I cried it was almost an hour straight. Guess what? I felt better! All those months family and friends were scared. I would not talk, barely out and about, barely ate. I even drove into a snow bank at one point. Didn't faze me. All I did was shrug.

Don't avoid and run from depression. Face it. Look it in the eye. Say you won't win. Spit at it. Laugh at it! I can tell you with all honesty if you keep things bottled up it will tear you apart on every level. And, it will hurt like all of hell has been unleashed.

The best advice I can give is talk to someone you trust. Spill all the pain, heartache, guilt or whatever you're holding. It does work and far more than you might think. Most of the time a simple talk, maybe more than once if you have to, and you'll be surprised!

—**David Snyder**

Change...

I've never met a person, I don't care what his condition, in whom I could not see possibilities.

I don't care how much a man may consider himself a failure. I believe in him, for he can change the thing that is wrong in his life anytime he is ready and prepared to do it. Whenever he develops the desire, he can take away from his life the thing that is defeating it. The capacity for reformation and change lies within.

"The power of words inspires the power for change."

We empower ourselves when we follow the road to freedom instead of getting caught in the revolving door of our past. Listening to people who believe in our abilities helps us find the power within ourselves to do better. Modeling positive people helps us create good choices and decisions, and changes negative consequences into positive outcomes.

—**James Rowley**

Overcoming Depression

I am a peaceful person but I have a lot to deal with. I'm stuck in the system and so many times I've given up and started over. The only thing I have is my health. I'm in really good physical condition. I live and breathe fitness 'cause its all I have. I'm sitting in solitary lock-up right now but I've been through so much that there really isn't any fear just depression.

I am so fed up with everything. I am fed up with myself. Sometimes I believe death is the only way out, but I keep finding things that get me by. And God and writing are the two ways I am "overcoming depression." It's inspirational to me to get things off my mind, 'cause I have no one to talk to. But I do believe in God and I have faith. And each day is a struggle for me because sometimes I wish I wouldn't wake up. But I tend to keep a smile on my face and hope for the best. I can make it even if it's on my own. I am a strong person.

—**Shawn Montgomery**

Overcoming Depression

To overcome means to conquer. Depression means sadness. I look at both these words as a part of life. Us people live a life of ups and downs. You must have sadness to have happiness. You must conquer and have the ability to lose in order to be a true winner. As we grow up in our lives we learn these basic skills in life daily in all aspects. And I even once heard some lyrics in a song that says it all: "The world is a mystery and the road may be a bumpy ugly path, but it's a wonderful ride." To overcome depression we must look at the entire picture of our scene in life. When we see the whole, we learn that the sadness isn't as strong as the happiness. We all have the strength to conquer our difficulties in our lives. And to begin to conquer we must go all the way back to our beginning, People sometimes cannot remember what we first did in our beginning. And it's very simple. We took our first breath. And when I'm sad and feel depressed, I stop and take deep breaths and look at the entire scene I'm confronted with. Then I'm able to conquer any obstacle of life. What a wonderful ride.

—**Paul Tovar**

Overcoming Depression

Many of you live life, while others let life live them. It is our growing nature to compete. Some are over-achievers and others do not fit in so well. We each have a place in life and life is not always fair. But we live life and can take the time to be fair.

You ever heard "misery loves company?" Depression is a cause of negative thoughts in life. We need to live to try to break the cycle of negative thought patterns. You can do it...break the pattern by trying to take the time to be nice. Say hello to others and smile. Say at the start of each day, you are a positive person and are going to stay positive.

I certainly feel better about myself by looking at the good I can do to help others. I struggle from time to time to keep positive. When I go back to my old negative thought pattern, I quickly think and try to find good works out of the situation. Once you start looking at the good works you do, you will start feeling your old self turned into a new happier person.

—**Earl Parrie**

Overcoming Depression

I think 'depression' gets too much hype...is it not a state of sadness? Have/has such a strong race (human race) become so psychologically weakened we can't control, to a degree, our own moods? Do we have to spend money on medications and counseling and still not be cured?

It's not a virus, but yet it is a sickness? I've heard and read it termed as a sickness. That's sure giving it more strength than it deserves. Science has proved it is a chemical imbalance but has any pill they created actually worked? Or just pacified?

I can speak on all this because I've been treated for all of it...only one treatment worked, and it has nothing to do with drugs, prescribed or self-medicated.

Does someone really need a pill to recover from sadness? Wake up mature America, we are just handing away our money to the big drug dealers in the world—the pharmacies and pharmaceutical manufacturers.

After someone gets counseling they feel a relief usually...why? Communication, the chance to vent and express. Yes, communication does help. And plays a major role in beating depression, but so does self-awareness and spirituality.

A lot of us want to wallow in sadness, some don't. Some have had bad experiences and it's caused sadness. Okay—pick yourself up and move on...find hobbies and become active. Then there are the people who use depression for pity and attention.

We can beat it when we realize there's more to life than the limits we set and barriers we build when we surrender to depression/sadness. We can beat it when we welcome the great balancer into our lives...happiness. We beat it when we become spiritually grounded.

I think being able to sit in a tiny cell all day everyday has been a cursed blessing or a blessed curse—let me explain. The first year or so of it I spent days depressed, weeks even...one day I got on medication...the half dozen medications I was

prescribed did nothing—that simple. Then one day I took myself off them and decided I'm not going to spend every day miserable in here. That was when the battle began.

When someone decides to go into battle a plan must be made. Mine was a sincere step towards a spiritual life—also an open line of communication with those I loved and trusted. And last but not least—self-awareness.

You have to ask yourself, “Why do I feel this way?” Something is causing it. A bad experience, an emptiness or lonely spot in your life. Maybe an insecurity or lack of esteem. When you find the areas causing it then you can attack and deal with it on your own, or by sharing with another.

I think the bio-chemical imbalances don't just appear out of nowhere. Your body is more than just chemicals, fluids and such, there's a spirit or soul, and its that which can govern if it's allowed. It is what tells your body to produce or not produce these chemicals, the ones that sciences says are responsible for moods.

If I, a prisoner, can lift myself out of all depths of sadness, so can anyone else. The ‘want’ has to be there. If the ‘want’ isn't there or can't be found, then life's lost its purpose. Up's and downs are apart of life –staying down isn't.

A cure will never come in pill form unless someday someone makes one that contains spiritual and self-awareness. Once again though, a clinical name has been given to something and has turned it into something its not. Depression is sadness, that's all so cheer the fuck up!

—Robert Moser

Overcoming Depression

Depression is a very real, very dangerous, and a very common destroyer here in prison. I have been treated for depression four different times in my life. Three times in prison and once at home.

When it comes it is like a heavy weight that pushes you down. You feel like you are made out of lead. It is hard to get out of bed and get active and you just don't care. The worst thing though is what it does to your mind.

The mental damage can sometimes be permanent. The thoughts that are created in your mind by depression are like the tires of a race car just spinning and smoking. A whirlwind of worry, anger, and shame cause a very real self-doubt that causes you to question life itself. The treatment of depression is sometimes worse than the disease: dis-ease.

Doxapin, Sennaquan and Elavil are common medications. I have been prescribed all three. I took them about a year and became addicted to the medication and had to quit it because I don't want to be addicted when my mind cleared from the medication. I was completely O.K.

I wonder when the depression left. I don't know cause I was too high. I overcame depression in the long run.

I recognize the symptoms now as they come. I focus on positive things. Sometimes I even enjoy the depressed feeling. I know that is completely natural and is triggered by some regret, fear or anger in my life. I identify the source of my depression and do not focus on the depression itself. I meditate in a manner recently taught to me by a Druid priestess in Britain. I spend my time in study of my ancestors and our culture and heritage. I fellowship with the Heathen population and I revel in my Christian family and background. Who has time to be depressed?

Knowing that my depression was a natural part of my life changed the way I view it. I call it my ‘blues phase’ and accept it for what it is...temporary. I even do my best poetry and writing in that phase.

This type of meditation and healing known as grove or circle is not for everyone. Medication is best for some but for me its meditation not medication!

I do know that if your depression is as bad as mine was, you will try anything to overcome it, so I would suggest you try meditation as well. If you are reading this then you are probably in prison like me and have plenty of time to perfect a technique.

Here is an address for prison ministry writers who will be your guide if you would like to try it. They have ministers in all faiths like Odinic,

Heathen, Pagan, Asatru, Wiccan, Druid and yes, there are Christian Druids and Christian Pagans. It's up to you. You can medicate it, live with it, or fight it.

Write to: S. Glad Prison Ministry P.O. Box 202 New Castle, NE12 7WF U.K [Note: a letter to England typically costs 90 cents.]

Tell them where you are at spiritually and if you prefer a certain faith and/or path and what you hope to accomplish by being guided. Good luck!

—Bryan Page

Overcoming Depression

We all suffer a certain level of depression at one time or another in life. And we must strive to overcome depression. Here I will share some information that may enlighten our minds to help us find peace within us. Through meditation and positive thoughts we can begin a healing process. Add to it the following knowledge, and we can overcome any level of depression.

It takes very careful fine-tuning to stabilize the correct dosage of any psychotropic drugs; the horror stories abound of depressed patients who reacted really badly to the meds and that committed suicide.

For every chemical breakthrough there is also a chemical barrier. The good news is about neurotransmitters, and that is that they are material.

A thought, whether sane or mad, is hard to grasp because it is so intangible; it is not something you can feel or touch. The neurotransmitters, however, are certainly tangible, although they are extremely tiny and often short-lived. It is the neurotransmitter's role to match up with a thought. To do that, it's molecules must be just as flexible as thoughts, just as fleeting, elusive, faint and changeable. Such flexibility is a sort of miracle but also a curse, in that it throws up a barrier that is almost impossible to pass.

No man made drug can duplicate this flexibility, either now nor in the foreseeable future. No drug actually pairs up with a thought. This is apparent just by looking at the structure of the receptor.

Receptors are not fixed; they have been accurately described as looking like lily pads that have floated up from the depth of the cell like lily pads, their roots sink downward reaching the cell nucleus where the DNA sits.

DNA deals in many kinds of messages, and potentially an infinite number. Therefore, it makes new receptors and floats them up to the cell wall constantly. There is no fixed number of receptors, no fixed arrangement on the cell walls, and no limit to what they are tuned into. A cell wall can be barren of lily pads, as a pond in winter or crammed full as one in full flower in June or July.

The only thing constant about a receptor is its unpredictability. Researchers recently discovered that a neurotransmitter called imipramine is produced abnormally in the brains of depressed people. While looking for the distribution of imipramine receptors, they were startled to find them not just on the brain cells but on skin cells.

Why should the skin receptors for a mental molecule be created? What do skin receptors have to do with depression?

One plausible answer is that a depressed person is depressed everywhere—he has a sad brain, sad skin, sad liver and so on...

A human brain that changes its thoughts into thousands of chemicals every second is, after all, not so much complicated as inconceivable. In ancient India, it was supposed that intelligence existed everywhere; it is called Brahman, from the Sanskrit words for ‘big’ and was just like an invisible field.

Our whole physiology can be transformed as quickly as a neuro-peptide which is an integral part of the quantum mechanical body, because we can change like quick silver, the flowing quality of life is natural to us.

The material body is a river of atoms, the mind is a river of thought and what holds them together is a river of intelligence.

It may seem that the quantum mechanical body is involved only in life or death situations, but that is not so. We live in it, casually and without thinking, just as we live in the body as a whole.

But, once you give in to the helplessness and fear, this chain breaks apart. You start sending out the neuro-peptides associated with negative emotions, these catch onto the immune cells and the immune response loses its efficiency. Exactly how this happens is not known, but the decreased immune status of depressed patients are well documented.

If you reacted to cancer as you react to the fly, you'd have a great chance for recovery; yet diagnosis itself sets up every patient on the vicious cycle, or circle like a snake biting its own tail until there is no more snake.

How beautiful is the immune system, and how terribly vulnerable at the same time. It forges our link with life and yet can break it at any moment. The immune system knows all our secrets, all our sorrows.

It knows why a mother who has lost a child can die of grief, because the immune system has died of grief first.

It knows every moment the depressed (or those ill with cancer) spent in the light of life or the shadow of death, because it turns those moments into the body's physical reality.

Depression, cancer or any other disease is nothing more than the sequence of these fleeting moments, each with its own emotions, its own mind-body chemistry.

If I find a green meadow splashed with daisies and sit down beside clear running brook, I have found medicine and healing. Meditate on positive things; this will help overcome depression.

—Jesse M. Govea

Overcoming Depression

Depression is just one more of those little side effects of this thing called life. Not wishing to cause a state of depression, I won't elaborate with details. I will say this, there are very few that have the battle scars I have. The difference between me and others is, I faced all the oppressive memories, theories and events and overcame those many hurdles that instilled a character flaw upon me. Some call it soul searching, but really it has little to do with the soul. Oppressive factors are those miniature cellular resistors which short circuit the most efficient electronically organic computer created, the brain.

Oppressive memories can be as insignificant as parents ignoring or taking for granted those things we deemed as major advancements and achievements. I spent my whole life trying to win approval and please parents whom could care less. My ex-wife taught me many lessons, the single most important was “actions speak louder than words.” With that in mind, I can now accept their loss and record those things as my gain, from success to success they looked the other way or made excuses. Most of the time, their attention focused on the TV. I couldn't compete, but I tried.

Oppressive memories of life altering capabilities can be anything, from witnessing taboo interracial relationships to the lack of any lasting home base. I never knew my family was dysfunctional until I began to look back at the way things really were. People as a basic trait see their little world through rose colored glasses. It isn't until we remove the glasses that the roots of our trouble can be recognized. Alcohol, drugs, physical, mental and sexual abuse often share the same root causes. One parent's defeatist attitude toward life is often accepted by the child so the depression keeps going on. I personally believe, ninety percent of human ills are curable by simply forcing one to see the glass is half full. From an ill offense to a tragedy, a person's life is altered like so much sand on an eroding beach.

Oppressive theories; love, joy, happiness, peace and prosperity opens even more doors to depression. In realizing that love is the single greatest social illusion. I was able to recognize my own desire to love and to be loved as being a weakness; joy and happiness are mere bouts of euphoric thoughtlessness to the world in which we love. Becoming content with everything alleviates the uncontrollable surges that topple us off the peak of our imaginative happiness into the valley of realization which is depression. Peace and prosperity are oppressive in that we become discontent with what we do have. Contentment is

living life without the material or social world's influence.

Finally, oppressive events, every one of them are significant in our tomorrows because it reminds us, we don't have control over anything in this world. All humans will themselves to maintain control of every facet of our life. This self-will for control can be violated by anyone and anything; leaving us feeling bewildered, powerless and deprived. We are taught to live a life of control. Yet we fail to recognize one thing, control of anything is nothing more than hopeful expectations on somewhat consistent elements. The sad fact is, nothing is controllable. In accepting that fact, we gain resolve which allows our mind to build safe guards against fear and anxiety. In the words of a great man I quote "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

Overcoming depression is as simple as facing the skeletons of our life, eliminating the potential abuse of others and accepting one fact "no one ever has control." The only certainty in life is, we are born to die. So—let us live as Janis Joplin believed when she sang: "Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose." For if we live, let us free ourselves of those things that have robbed us in the past and accept that we have control over nothing but letting our ghost fade away into the abyss of forgetfulness.

—J.R Sollars

Overcoming Depression

Overcome depression—no way. Half the world is too depressed to come up with a cure. The other half are too busy getting rich on it. I read a book called "How to Conquer Negative Emotions." They never did say how. Turns out, it was a question not an answer.

I also read a book called "How to Serve Humans." These scientists spent the whole book trying to decipher this alien book. At the end, while aliens are loading the scientists onboard their ship, an alien explained the best way to serve humans is to stick an apple in their mouth and a cucumber up their ass and cook for 90 minutes at 400 degrees. I think that was it, I'm real bad with cooking instructions.

Roy Masters has a promotional tape called "Depression: There is a Cure." It's well worth \$15 bucks, but it won't cure depression. I don't believe there is a one for all cure for depression because there are numerous causes. There is a thousand reasons why people limp, but what works for a broken toe won't work on hemorrhoids. Although athlete's foot cream works good for jock itch and less embarrassing to get from the infirmary.

Now we have strayed from the subject.

I know this is serious and so I don't dare say much, because I am such an idiot at being serious. The truth is I suffer from depression and I find laughter the best placebo on the market today. I lost my twin brother years ago. I know, you think if I can laugh about it there was not much trauma, but those who knew us sometimes said we love each other more than brothers should and your imagination can not go far enough. Still I found a way to laugh and therefore live: we were identical. No one could tell us apart—they still can't. He has two names on his tombstone and I have two names on my I.D., both legal and no one can take it away. It was and is our joke.

No, it doesn't cure depression, and my depression goes deeper. Maybe we should all compare traumatic experiences and see whose is worst. Still it would not cure it and trauma isn't the only reason for depression. I have no answers and that is in itself depressing.

I think knowing honestly and consciously why you are depressed is a good start, and please remember it is contagious.

—Michael A. Pace

Favorite Trips

Favorite Trip Ever

"Page 20T18...Page 20T18...Page 20T18..."

"You got a visit!"

"Turn out for visit."

A visit? Oh crap. I didn't know they were coming; I'm not ready. I run up the stairs and my

flip-flop breaks, sending me crashing. The whole dorm is laughing.

"You think that is funny? Where is your visit?"

Crap, crap, I don't have any tight whites. I run to the next cell.

"Jason, I need a 2X tight white set."

"Three dollars!!! For Chrissake you're robbing me!"

"O.K, O.K, I need 'em."

I'm wiping my boots down, running back down the stairs to the bathroom and bam! I go crashing again.

"Ha, ha, ha..."

Assholes.

"Damn Page, cool down man, it's just a visit."

"Yeah!! Shut your trap! And Pay Jasso that three dollars you owe me."

Brushing my teeth and putting grease in my hair, I try to make out my image in the scuffed stainless steel mirror. What is that smell?

"Jasso!! You asshole!"

I run back up the stairs, careful this time, and as I pass Jasso's cell I say

"Stop keeping the tight whites on top of your hooch, they smell like shit."

I continue down six more cells and knock.

"Harbin, what magazines do you have?"

"You got a visit?"

"Yea, I got a visit, what magazines do you have?"

"Blender has a Polo and an Eternity Cologne sample, and Mens' Journal has an Armani and a Sunset for Men"

"How much for the Polo?"

"A dollar."

"For Chrissake, what do you have for 50 cents?"

"Alright, give me the Sunset for Men, but don't come asking me to write your letters later."

I run down the stairs out the door. The butterflies turn into full blown dragons.

Who is it? Mom? Wife and kids? Is it bad news? Does she still love me? Is she having an affair? What will my boys look like? How much have they grown? How long has it been since...

There they are, it's them. God she is still beautiful. Please let this be a good visit, God please.

"Daaaaadd, Daaaad, Daaaaaddd!"

"Hey guys, man look at you! How tall you've gotten! You need a haircut."

I turn and look into my wife's eyes. The moment of truth. I look deeply. I smile.

"Are you still my girl?"

"Yes, of course, I wish you would stop worrying. We're gonna be O.K."

I look deeper. Does she mean it...yes. Thank God.

"You look beautiful, kiss me, we only have two hours.

"So tell me boys, what is going on in your lives?"

"Dad...football team...the train...touchdown...window seat...girlfriend...my teacher...all A's—"

"Whoa, whoa! One at a time, I can barely keep up with y'all!"

"PlayStation...tree house...best friend...kissed her...fake tattoos...flat tire...school play..."

2 hours later...

"I love you babe, and you boys make me so proud."

"We love you too, and you'll come home soon. Don't give up."

"I won't."

They get up and start walking to the gate. My youngest turns around and runs back, grabs leg and hugs tight.

"Dad, this was my favorite trip ever!"

"Mine too son, mine too."

—Bryan Page

Favorite Trip

Enduring conditions, economic hard times, forced race assimilating, proverbial inequality, territorial exploitation, legacies of injustice are only a few ingredients that prevent many humans from visiting the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, Smithsonian Institute, the Great Pyramids, taking a pleasure cruise, etc.

Maneuver to cause someone to fall is an explicit definition of trip; travel from one place to

another is a more generally understood definition; defining trip as a hallucinatory experience induced by a psychedelic drug is a state of emergency we find ourselves facing this present day and age. There is one fact we all know, i.e. our final trip is of a divine nature that no one can escape.

I have personally experienced all three of the above definitions of trip. My most favorite trip was the 'one year tour of duty in southeast Asia' (Republic of Vietnam). The devastation and human suffering is something my mind will never allow me to forget. Over thirty years later we are still tripping as if there is no necessity to maintain a stable, efficient economic base for all ethnic groups.

To intentionally agonize the progressive thinking of another individual; and for whatever reasons invading their homelands resulting in massive deaths of women and children is cruel, dishonest representation of leadership.

We as Americans customarily plan a vacation once a year intended to give us a chance to unwind and get away from the stressful side of life. Many of us can't afford a vacation. Trip can mean many different things to many people. I suppose it depends on many factors. A co-writer in this program in a past essay stated "a strong economy doesn't determine a great nation. Prosperity of the people does."

I always wonder about the places I've never been and never will visit. It's not so much as wanting to go everywhere, see everything, especially knowing everything. More or less we all should trip on life positively, propagating harmony, tranquility, love, peace and joy in the lives of all mankind. The word 'trip' today is most widely used to express individual acts of emotion, ambiguous and erroneous decisions of elected officials, etc.

I really hope one day the oneness of creation starts returning to modern day civilization. Wouldn't that be a trip, when there is no more budget deficit, public assistance, subsidized housing and food programs, nuclear proliferation, a correct gun control law enacted and properly enforced, a worldwide school system universally organized to educate everyone about each other's culture, a yearly summit at government expense to promote spiritual unity, and most of all, to eliminate poverty. Then maybe everyone will be tripping on the same level of consciousness.

I have a couple of memorable trips and it's difficult to pick one. I started to write about the 1st time I saw the Rocky Mountains standing there touching the sky in a majestic salute to their greatness and the profound effect they had on me. I was 16 with a 1971 Hemi Road Runner under my ass, a Ruger 357 under my arm, and a string of hold-ups behind me that were soon to catch up. I thought I was an old west outlaw and lived accordingly...Standing in the middle of those mountains had a humbling effect on me and made me realize that I was a small actor of the stage of life and was screwing up my part...But this is "favorite trip" and that trip, even though it was one hell of a ride, wasn't my favorite due to how it ended. So lets move ahead more than 15 years...

The Federal Government killed Tim McVeigh in the death house at Terre Haute Indiana and I was released a week later. The prison van took me a few miles down the road and dropped me off at a little hole in the wall store that sold tickets and where the bus from Chicago would stop once a day on its way to St. Louis. I bought a ticket to Dallas and walked outside and waited for the bus. Whenever I have read in a book or seen on TV the fictional account of someone being released from prison after many years of incarceration, it's always depicted as jubilant with an out burst of emotion. In reality that release doesn't come until days later. The 1st day out you taking too much "normal activity" around you and are worried that all eyes are on you because you feel that you stand out due to not feeling like you fit in. After a half hour of pacing in the parking lot and enjoying how the air smelled better on this side, the bus pulled up. I glanced at the windows as it slowly rolled past me and came to a stop. Each window had a face and all eyes were on me...When I look back now I sometimes wonder what those faces thought as they seen me standing there in boots, faded Levi's, wife beater, sleeved with ink and looking like just what I was...fresh outta prison. I gave the driver my ticket

and got on. It was a packed bus and I was starting to wonder where I would sit when I noticed a slender white arm held up and a hand waving at me. It was nearly at the back of the bus which is what I wanted. As I got to the seat a young girl was emptying the seat beside her, stuffing sacks and bags everywhere. She was listening to a CD player so I mouthed a silent thank you and sat down. The short trip from Terre Haute to St. Louis, where I would catch another bus, was spent trying to absorb everything/one around me. I would catch a little piece of conversations and learn things about people that I didn't know or would ever know. It was watching beautiful freedom fly by the window and trying not to miss anything. As things wound down and I relaxed a little I became more aware of the girl beside me. I could smell the fruity gum she was chewing and the scent of fresh laundered clothes, two things that I had not smelled in years. I didn't realize how much I had missed them until I sat there and realized how much I enjoyed them. I stole a glance at the CD cover in her lap and was surprised to see that it was "Rumors" by Fleetwood Mac, a CD that was originally on vinyl and older than her, I felt sure. Before long we were crossing a long bridge over the Mississippi river that connects St. Louis Illinois to St. Louis Missouri, then the arch came into view, and soon after we were at the bus station. I got off the bus and made my way thought the crowd to the pay phones. I wasn't calling anyone, only pretending to so I could checkout everything going on around me while doing something to "fit in". The more I looked at people doing their own thing I came to realize that I was flattering myself to think that my presence would draw anymore attention than any of these other people were receiving.

Shortly my bus number was called and I got in line to board. I was close to being the last to get on and when I did I realized I was facing the same limited seating as before...and as before I saw a slim white arm in the air and a hand waving at me. It was the same girl. This time she smiled at me and said that I needed to be quicker in order to get the good seats. From that moment until we reached Dallas that girl never shut up...and still today I'm thankful. She was the most refreshing breath of fresh air that I've ever heard. I learned that she was 18, fresh outta high school, on her way to Taylor, Texas to spend the summer with her friends and then on to college. She was the youngest of a large farming family in Illinois and this was her first trip away from home by herself...I learned nearly everything about her and her family, high school sweetheart, dog named Goober and cat named Jerry. She liked vanilla ice cream over chocolate, grilled cheese with pickles, and thought that peas were about the nastiest tastin' thing in the world unless they had a lotta butter and a scoop of miracle whip on, then they were okay. She talked and talked and I just sat there with a half smile absorbing every wonderful word. Every so often she would check her watch and then get out her cell phone and call home. She would promise her mom that everything was fine, tell her where she was, and baby talk Goober before she hung up. I realized that she had a justification for being nervous...this was her 1st experience being on her own and being away from her family. My reason seemed trivial compared to hers and I almost felt guilty.

When we got to Memphis we had a 2 hour lay over so we took a short walk around the area, checkin' out the lights of down town. We stopped in a little rib shack and she ordered some jumbo onion rigs and I ordered a big ass BBQ sandwich that she ended up sharing with me...but only if I would eat some of her onion rings. From Memphis we had an all night ride to Dallas where we parted ways. She rattled on for nearly the whole trip and when it seemed like she was slowing down I would ask a question and she would be off and running again. I thought that someday she would drive her husband crazy...but a good crazy.

That was my favorite trip for two reasons. 1st, I had just left a deranged alienated world where loneliness was the soup of the day and madness was lurking near by searching for a companion. 2nd, the girl was riding shotgun with me. Everything about her was in total contrast with the life I had known and the world I had just left. Where I spend part of my day making the wrong decisions and the other

part trying to rebound from them, she was just starting out in life and determined to make all the right ones, and in her words, "maybe making things better". She took me in and made me comfortable on a day when I needed it most. Thank you Ashley...for me, you made things a lot better...

—John Hobbs

Celebrations

Celebrations: The Small Stuff

My celebrations come one day at a time. The three meals I receive a day are more than more worthy people in the world get a week. The clothes on my back although prison garb, cheap and gaudy, and a constant reminder of oppression, are free and I need not worry about washing them. I have a roof over my head, it isn't my choice but again, there are more worthy people in the world who don't even have a bed much less a roof. I celebrate the end of each day, for it is a day done, one day closer to a new life I will have. These are just the small, seemingly insignificant things, but to someone who can't count how many celebrations he can recall on two fingers after forty years, it is better than being continually in a state of simplicity.

I also celebrate my education, the knowledge amassed after seventeen years. Knowledge acquired through experience and observation. Knowledge, like blood, isn't thicker than water. The last ones to ever let you down in any situation will be strangers (to include the undertaker.) There are no such things as a friend or soul mate, love, peace, and hope are illusions, devices people use to use you. The fact that I am in prison doesn't make me any less righteous than TV evangelists or self-righteous Baptists. Prison only means that all my evil acts have been exposed, I have been judged and society in their farce civility has accomplished condemnation on me in order to hide their own dirty laundry. The fact that my life has and is exposed gives me a greater level of self-independence because now I can point fingers without guilt. At last, I am able to celebrate every day for I have changed. The life I will soon begin will be of independence, free of social threats and schemes. A new life without hidden faults can't be covered by shadows.

Jack Kerouac states; "Prison is the place you promise yourself to live." All of these seemingly insignificant events and factors are mortar in the bricks of a new life not yet built. When we are able to celebrate the small things, the precious Kodak moments are suddenly filled with words of Kodak's ancient theme, "The Times of your Life". For if I choose to marry, again, have children and lead an openly public social life, then everyday will have an abundance of small "celebrations" that I neglected in my previous life.

Every day I wake up to regrets, moments and memories forever lost, the should've could've and would've possibilities hauntingly real. But the potential for greater celebrations rise like mountains on the plains, celebrations of what will be. And that is a reason to celebrate in itself.

—Jackey R. Sollars

Celebration

Many dates on the calendar are meant for celebration. Some are of religious significance and some are secular. Birthdays are more personal until you have so many you tire of them. None are really that important in the scheme of things.

Since the day I was diagnosed with HIV I have been well aware of how precious life is. That is the gift we are given when we must face our frailty and realize we are not immortal beings, but only weak constructs of flesh and bone. In some ways it makes having a fatal illness not seem so bad.

Once my days were numbered and I faced the grim reaper head on, each day became special. No matter what you have to get up and make the best of it. It might be your last and you wouldn't want to waste it. You learn to set aside anger and hostility because you don't want to die angry. You just want to live as happy as possible and each day becomes a celebration of life. No longer do I have to look at the calendar to see if it's a holiday. I know it is without even looking. I'm alive and I intend to make the best of it.

—Daniel Harris

Celebration

A celebration is a commemoration of an occurrence or event in the past. This has always seemed to be a subtle reminder that we are decreasing as a people. It is a way of saying, "Back when that happened, I was the man. Now, because I am diminished, all I can do is remember my glory days."

There are many examples of this in history. Take Independence Day, for example. Many people celebrate the U.S throwing off the yoke of oppression. To me, it just seems as if we are saying, "Yeah, 231 years ago, we had the guts to fight oppression and show the world we are a force to be reckoned with. Now days, one madman hiding in a cave has the entire nation in a panic." We had guts back then; now we are decadent and weaker than we were then.

The same goes for Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. "A great man was born who will do great things for civil rights." Once again, it showed me that we are lesser sons of greater fathers. There are people right now who have as much charisma and even more education than MLK Jr., who could be speaking out and taking action to make civil rights and liberties a reality instead of a dream. However, these folks are too worried about the next movie deal or sports event to worry about silly things like "discrimination" and "common people."

We are in a decline. Holidays and celebrations just point out where we were and how far we have fallen. Unless we wake up and start being the great nation we once were, pretty soon, the president will be fiddling away as American burns.

—David Goza

Breakdowns

Breakdowns

I am 25 years old, but it still feels like it was yesterday when I was sitting in court, 15 years old, watching my mom take the stand. Family court. She played the perfect role for her situation. She cried, pretended she had a fractured arm, the sympathy she was looking for, she wasn't getting it. Even I, sitting there as I watched her, was disgusted with her performance. And so the judge asked her "Is this what you want?" He asked her three times if she really wanted to give up her parental rights, completely, over me. And she said yes. But you'd think that it would have bothered me deep down but it didn't. Not that I could notice. But as I look back on it now, I suppose it did. I was at the time glad. Cause I felt like I never knew her anyway. At the time I was already in the custody of Child Protective Services. It was just me, my case worker and my lawyer, and they both disliked my mother. So it felt good to have a few people on my side. After court, I was taken back to the children's group home I was staying at. It was a relief to be back. The only people I could connect with were there. We were all "throw-aways" by our parents, but there were a few who had family that cared, but their family didn't have what it took to support them, or the child was a major delinquent that C.P.S took away from their family. And it was them that I subtly despised and unconsciously envied. I say that because at the time I didn't realize it, but it was there within me. But it called to realization when I turned 18. I had plans of releasing myself from C.P.S custody. That's a right we have when we're 18. I didn't even realize where I was gonna go and what I was gonna do. All I knew was I wanted to get away from the last of my past. And on my 18th birthday I was in boot camp, still in custody of C.P.S and my mom called to the facility. I didn't even know what to say. I prepared myself for the defensive, tried to sound like I was in control of my life, but really I wasn't. I had no clue of how my life would begin upon my release. It was Dec. 19th, 1999— my birthday. 19 years old and I'm talking with my mom on the phone. She asked me to come back home and I gave up the fight and agreed to. When I went home, it was a new house and my brother and sister were grown. And my mom was totally different. She wasn't always yelling and losing her cool like she always would and of course she wasn't abusive, like she was with me, only me. That's where it all started. As I sat back watching my mom, how she was with the kids, she was just

too different, too nice. I missed something. After being gone for 4 years, I came back a stranger to this house. I felt like I didn't know these people anymore and so I felt like I didn't belong there. Something inside of me was begging for me to get away from there. I remember crying in the shower cause it was my only solitude. I had no one to talk to. I wanted to go back to the group home where I was among people of the same situation. I just had to get away, even if it meant sleeping on the streets. It was like my whole 4 years away I was in a coma. I went looking for a job first then I went and told my mom, "I'm leaving, I can't stay here, cause I don't belong here. I don't know you anymore," and I left. And as I walked out, I died completely on the inside. Whatever was left of me of the past, died. Who ever I was, who ever I used to be wasn't me anymore. I needed a new place of my own, that I could inhabit with my own thoughts, my own pain, my own happiness, my own life. And I never wanted to go back to that house again and never see that family again, cause it hurt. When I realized that my spirit, and that spirit of the hellish past I used to know, drifted away. I knew I had to find a dark corner to haunt. Where I could break down over and over. Where I could finally feel that pain of being alone in the world.

—**Johnathan Hooper**

Last of a Dying Breed

Sitting in a closet with my gun to my head, I tried to think of another way to erase the memory of 1983. That was the year my mother was killed by her ex-boyfriend. I was 11 years old. My mother and I were very, very close. She was a strong woman and an influence on my life, and I loved her so much that, when she was taken away, I would not let myself feel the loss. I couldn't allow myself to break down or hurt that much; I couldn't miss her that much and still live. I thought, if I continue to feel this way it's gonna kill me. That was my first symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. Anyway, at first I continued on as if nothing had happened. I was numb. I went about my life as if Johnnyrose had never existed. If it meant saying to myself, I never had a mother, then that's what I did to survive. I was in this state of psychic numbness for 17 years, just refusing to believe what had occurred.

Then, in 1999, recollections began to intrude on my life. These thoughts occurred anywhere, anytime. If the sky looked the way it did that year and day in 1983. If the lighting in a room looked remotely similar to that of my mother's room on that particular morning, it would make me relive the moment.

I no longer had that emotional anesthesia. My mind broke down; it would replay every detail of that day: I heard somebody fall in my mother's room, but when I went to see what was going on, the door was locked. Just as I finally got the door open, at first I didn't see her. Then I saw her body slumped against the wall, her head hanging low. I knew that my mother was gone.

After years of numbness, my mind broke down, I didn't know how to make the flashbacks go away. One night the scene was on constant replay in my head. I couldn't take it. I got up, shaking all over, and went into the closet. Picking up my gun, I thought about my daughters. What were Monique and Ardrana going to do without a father? I cried out to God to please help me. When I put my finger on the trigger, there was this still voice that said, "I love you, Dad" and I remember more than anything, "I love my daughters." I woke my children's mother up and told her that I needed help. But every day I get up and thank God for waking me up and giving me strength to get through. I find reason to go on.

—**Shawn Montgomery**

Breakdowns

Everyone eventually breaks down. Everything breaks down. But in the mental stance and with humans, a breakdown is caused by the nerves coming to a halt. Most of the time when I hear about someone having a nervous breakdown, it is usually a female. But men have them more. The male just hides it more out of shame. We live our lives every day and at times it's hard. Life is not easy. At times so many negative issues will come at a person at one time. If that person cannot deal with

these issues at once, he or she will shut down. This causes a breakdown in the mind. Eventually it happens over and over. And more and more unsolved issues get backed up into the mind. And when it cannot store anymore, the person breaks down. Some people are more strong minded than others. Some people are extremely weaker. And to not have any breakdowns at all is to deal with the issues as they come one by one, little by little. A problem or issue need not have to be dealt in full, just not forgotten. This is the same with objects not human. An automobile for instance: if a car starts heating up, you must let it cool. Maybe put a little water after it cools. Then you may drive on. Some would do this and others would immediately take it go get it fixed altogether. But there are some that would just drive on. The car breaks down.

Deal with each problem or issue that comes into your life and you'll never break down.

—**Paul Tovar**

Breakdowns

Breakdowns manifest themselves in many different ways in here, just as they do out there. Most times, people in here just start to do whatever they want to, as the result of being oppressed. The rationale here is "This is going to mess me over anyway, so I may as well do as I please." This is when a person's spirit has been broken. Another aspect is when those in here actually deteriorate mentally, usually evolutionary regression. They begin to act like savages: not bathing, raging at the staff, not keeping their living space clean, etc. This is also usually accompanied by actual mental problems, with paranoia, O.C.D and maniac/depressive symptoms being the most common. They couldn't handle the oppression of this environment, so their minds found a way to cope: by having a breakdown.

The worst of all are those who take their own lives as the result of a breakdown. When family dies, parole is denied, even when a person doesn't get mail—all of this contributes to mental stress, and if a person is especially prone to depression, these things can send him or her over the edge. It happens all the time in here. Most of the staff doesn't care either. A person will ask to talk to a counselor because they're having problems right then, and they will be told to write a request. Or they'll tell the officers they are thinking of hurting themselves, and most say "go ahead." (In the officer's defense, they are subjected to many people playing games of this sort that they have become "numb" to it in a lot of cases. It still does not excuse their unprofessionalism).

The "system" is designed to make us fail, and many of us do, spectacularly. It is the nature of this beast to oppress us, and this oppression leads to breakdowns. The key to avoiding this is to find a positive focus, and don't play their game. Decide what you can do to keep yourself mentally occupied, because a person who is mentally occupied in something worthwhile and of interest to themselves is at a lower risk for a breakdown. Only you can decide how you will maintain your mental state, strive for the positive!

—**Joseph Fritz**

Gimme a Break!

Breakdowns? How about break-ups? Breaking? Break-out? How about the latest breakthrough? Breakneck? Break a leg? Break a heart? Break the news? Break even? Break bread? Break wind? {Giggle} How about breaking and entering? You know, breakup is not the opposite of breakdown. A breakup could cause a breakdown.

When I was a child, we had an old Ford Falcon. It was a 196?, maybe a '62, and it was still running great in the mid 1980's. My twin brother and I loved 'that car.' I think Dad loved it too, but our older siblings didn't like it and mom hated it.

Mom always told Dad he should get rid of 'that car.' It was beat up, scratched up, and old. It was Grandpa's last car. Dad used to tell a story about him and Mom in the back seat of Old Falcon, at the old drive-in, and it had something to do with JR, our oldest brother. Dad always left bits out of that story and we couldn't figure it out. But he also said Daniel and I were born in the backseat and that it wasn't the first time Mom had been half naked in the backseat of 'that old car.'

There were a lot of stories about the 'Old Falcon.' Number one was how the Falcon would start on those cold Northern Illinois winter mornings when nothing else would. Then there's spring thaw, when all the country roads turn to mud. Cars, trucks, even 4 wheel drive would get stuck in that mud. The 'Falcon' never got stuck. Dad always had a big smile on his face when he drove around some 4 wheel drive pickup Ford stuck in the mud. Family pride, you know.

For Daniel and I, every scratch and dent had some mysterious tale. We were just little boys and to us the Falcon was better than the Bat Mobile; better than a tank, a bomber, a submarine, or the Enterprise.

If you sat in the back seat you had to keep your feet up in the seat, 'cause the floor was rusted out. We would put on our seatbelts and lean over, and watch the road go by. You could drop dirt bombs or rotten fruit or Sis's doll right out on the road.

"What are you boys doin' to your sister?!"

"She keeps droppin' her doll on the floor, Dad."

"One of these days I'm gonna tie a rope onto that doll...and the other end around somebody's neck!"

Course he never did and he always went back for the doll.

One summer day Daniel and I rode with Dad into town—the hardware store I think. Dad always had a truck of some kind and Mom's car or the family car, which was a big station wagon. But 9 times out of 10, Dad would grab 'the Falcon' to go to town and back. On the way home, and above the country music Dad loved to share with everyone along the way, we heard a loud SNAP. Daniel and I were born with severe hearing problems. A loud SNAP is as close as I can come to the sound. It seemed we felt it more than heard it. In truth, it felt like my skull cracked.

It also felt like 'the Falcon' was dead. There was no vibration from the motor, it was just coasting and Dad steered it off the road. Daniel and I looked down through the holes in the floorboard. 'The Falcon' had been wounded and was leaking a stream of black blood.

Dad slammed the gear shift into park and silenced the with radio with his bare fist, then sat for a minute with his head on the steering wheel. With dad it was always best to give him a minute. Daniel and I never had any trouble with that. We were out of the car in a flash and followed the trail of oil up the highway. We kept expecting to encounter some evil being who had shot 'the Falcon'

We all know about how much oil a car will hold, but in my memory and to two little adventuresome boys—well, Exxon never spilt this much oil. Breakdown? Dad showed us a big hole in the side of the motor But 'this car; was one of our heroes and a local legend. We just saw it as one more story.

Dad called Mom from a house down the highway and she was there a few minutes later, but something was wrong. Mom sometimes wore Dad's clothes—working with the cows or bailing hay, she'd wear his hat out in the rain or grab his coat to run out in the cold. She even wore his long johns for PJ's. But Mom never drove Dad's truck. That scared us.

Dad went to the truck and grabbed his 20 gauge from the gun rack. He walked up the 'the Falcon' and unloaded both barrels into the radiator and windshield. Breakdown is what Daniel and I did next. It took awhile to get over that. I never remember visiting my grandparent's graves but Dad used to take us to the junk yard to visit 'the Falcon.' It was the perfect graveyard for the 'old car'—the junk yard was the old drive-in movie theater.

—**Michael "Kyle" Pace**

In My Dream...

A cool wind blows across the mountain. In the early hours, long before dawn, the yapping of dogs disrupts the quiet. But the mystery of the eternal forest is the same as it was millennia ago. The sudden sound of an automobile on the distant road reminds me that our world is forever changed...I venture into the night. A carpet of damp grass gives way to sharp stones against my naked feet. A black cat rouses from her nocturnal watch from the top of

a nearby boulder, her tapetum lucidum causing her mesmerizing eyes to glow a fiery yellow. Where is the moon tonight?

Looking south across the valley, where the lights strung in the pattern of a sparkling diamond bracelet seem to add glitter to the otherwise overcast sky. But these bright orbs on the horizon are man made productions and alien intruders to the natural starry world around me, like the paste of cheap cut glass mingled with diamonds in a lady's jewelry box. These are the flood lights illuminating the perimeter of the maximum security prison that houses my body. Sadly I remind myself, as I take in the natural wonders of the night, that even mankind outside of that human cage is spiritually no more free than my body that lies sleeping within. Somewhere along the journey of learning what it is to be human and the responsibility that comes with that there has been a break down...a disconnection with the very source that gave us life and provides for us still today...

—John Hobbs

Upcoming Theme Topics

“Fresh Air” due Sept 1, 2007

“Gratitude” due Oct 1, 2007

“Bullies” due Nov 1, 2007

“Temptation” due Dec 1, 2007”

“Information” due Jan 1, 2008”

“Animal Companions” due Feb 1, 2008

“Self Help” due March 1, 2008

“Lost and Found” Due April 1, 2008



SEARCHING FOR SANITY

The Awareness Trap

Dave, a committed and valued community member who has been instrumental in creating our history and poetry programs, as well as coordinating some of our fundraising events such as art shows, poetry readings and concerts has long advocated that we use the newsletter to address the psychological hardship prisoners must manage. I have asked to him to do some research on what we might offer and the following section bears the fruit of his endeavor. He searched for information he thought might be relevant. Please give us feedback on the information he has provided.

A number of years back, I read a book called *The Awareness Trap*, an expose of the growing self-help movement in this country. The author pointed out how a growing number of personal growth gurus, purveyors of pop psychology and assorted would-be experts were claiming to have discovered the keys to happiness and success. If you followed the author's assertions, you came away with a sense that Americans were consuming these panaceas at the same rate as Happy Meals and were at risk of becoming more self-absorbed rather than bringing about change in their lives.

I've always had misgivings about self help manuals and quick fixes for dealing with life's hardships. Emerson's "Self Reliance" is still one of

my favorite essays with its call to "trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string."

In Emerson's century, however, educated Americans were just becoming aware of and making use of the main currents in Eastern thinking that flowed from the great traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism. Now, of course, every chain bookstore in America has entire bins filled with the great spiritual classics of the East as well as books about them.

Being somewhat skeptical by nature, it took a book titled *Finding Freedom* by Jarvis Masters, a Buddhist doing life in California, to help me appreciate how useful the Eastern way of looking at the self and life could be to men faced with long years in prison. In the book Jarvis distills what he learned from his teacher, Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche:

"Understanding impermanence, that things are here today and gone tomorrow, really helps. No matter how bad something is, you can remind yourself, 'Damn, this won't last long.' Then when it doesn't last, you can laugh and say, 'I knew it!' What goes around, comes around, and what comes around doesn't last."

Jarvis went into prison in 1981 at the age of 19. He bounced back and forth between Ad. Seg. and lock down for years before he learned not to get sucked into the violence, brutality, and the sense of hopelessness engendered by prison life. That wasn't something he would have necessarily learned on his own. It took a fortunate encounter with a group of volunteers from the Buddhist community to convince him to change the way he looked at himself.

The Dharma may have saved Jarvis' life but may not prove to be the path for everyone. Before we can apply the insights learned from practices like yoga and meditation, or the great spiritual traditions, or, for that matter, what can be gleaned from the vast self-help literature available to us today, we must still subject them to Emerson's test. How can we integrate these approaches into our own experience? Do they allow us to be true to ourselves? And, do they offer us the possibility for real change and personal growth?

Gary and I have been talking for a while about how we could provide you with some of these resources. It's not hard to read between the lines of your letters, your poems, the journal entries you send in, that depression and alienation are a constant companion in prison. We don't make any claim that any of these approaches is more successful than another in developing an ecology of mind and spirit you might define as wellness. Nor do we pretend that what follows is a complete sampling. We've also solicited your contributions by way of posing questions related to stress, mental health etc. and, all in all, we hope you find this section of the newsletter helpful, interesting or informative.

-Dave

Stillness Speaks

Eckert Tolle is one of the most influential inspirational authors and speakers on the scene today. His classic, The Power of Now, has spawned a whole new interest in what is essentially the very ancient Eastern idea of mindfulness or living in the present. Excerpted below are quotes from a sequel to The Power of Now:

"To have your attention in the Now is not a denial of what is needed in your life. It is recognizing what is primary. Then you can deal with what is secondary with great ease. It is not saying, 'I'm not dealing with things anymore because there is only the Now.' No. Find what is primary first, and make the Now into your friend, not your enemy. Acknowledge it, honour it. When the Now is the foundation and primary focus of your life, then your life unfolds with ease.

"Ultimately you are not taking responsibility for life until you take responsibility for this moment - Now. This is because Now is the only place where life can be found. Taking responsibility for this moment means not to oppose internally the "suchness" of Now, not to argue with what is. It means to be in alignment with life.

"The Now is as it is because it cannot be otherwise. What Buddhists have always known,

physicists now confirm: there are no isolated things or events. Underneath the surface appearance, all things are interconnected, are part of the totality of the cosmos that has brought about the form that this moment takes.

"When you say "yes" to what is, you become aligned with the power and intelligence of Life itself. Only then can you become an agent for positive change in the world. A simple but radical spiritual practice is to accept whatever arises in the Now - within and without.

"When your attention moves into the Now, there is an alertness. It is as if you were waking up from a dream, the dream of thought, the dream of past and future. Such clarity, such simplicity. No room for problem making. Just this moment as it is.

"The moment you enter the Now with your attention, you realize that life is sacred. There is a sacredness to everything you perceive when you are present. The more you live in the Now, the more you sense the simple yet profound joy of Being and the sacredness of all life. Most people confuse the Now with what happens in the Now, but that's not what it is. The Now is deeper than what happens in it. It is the space in which it happens. So do not confuse the content of this moment with the Now. The Now is deeper than any content that arises in it.

"When you step into the Now, you step out of the content of your mind. The incessant stream of thinking slows down. Thoughts don't absorb all your attention anymore, don't draw you in totally. Gaps arise in between thoughts - spaciousness, stillness. You begin to realize how much vaster and deeper you are than your thoughts.

"Thoughts, emotions, sense perceptions, and whatever you experience make up the content of your life. "My life" is what you derive your sense of self from and "my life" is content, or so you believe.

"You continuously overlook the most obvious fact: your innermost sense of I Am has nothing to do with what happens in your life, nothing to do with content. That sense of I Am is one with the Now. It always remains the same. In childhood and old age, in health or sickness, in success or failure, the I Am - the space of Now - remains unchanged at its deepest level. It usually gets confused with content, and so you experience I Am or the Now only faintly and indirectly, through the content of your life. In other words: your sense of Being becomes obscured by circumstances, your stream of thinking, and the many things of this world. The Now becomes obscured by time.

"And so you forget your rootedness in Being, your divine reality, and lose yourself in the world. Confusion, anger, depression, violence, and conflict arise when humans forget who they are. Yet how easy it is to remember the truth and thus return home: I am not my thoughts, emotions, sense perceptions, and experiences. I am not the content of my life. I am Life. I am the space in which all things happen. I am consciousness. I am the Now. I Am."

Excerpted from *Stillness Speaks*, by Eckhart Tolle, \$17, hardcover.

If you are interested in further learning about Buddhist practices, write to:

Buddhist Peace Fellowship Prison Program

P.O. Box 3470

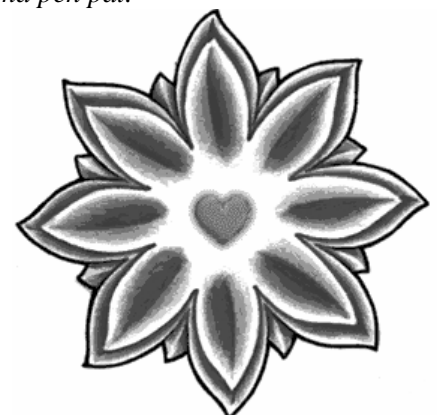
Berkeley, CA 94703

510-655-6169 ext. 306

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www.bpf.org

This project sends free dharma books to prisoners, and connects prisoners interested in Buddhism with a dharma pen pal.



Introduction to Yoga

We have recruited a most wonderful yoga instructor in Ithaca to help us merge the practice of yoga with the efforts of Prisoner Express. Here is a short introduction and a few postures for you to practice. We will develop a more complete unit on this subject. If you are interested please sign up for the yoga packet we will be compiling.

Welcome to this introduction to Yoga, and to this opportunity to harmonize and balance the body, breath, and mind!

No prior experience with Yoga, nor any particular religious affiliation, is necessary to explore the following program. It does not matter how flexible or strong your body is or is not. The great thing about Yoga is that you can begin just as you are!

Just be sure to do only what feels right for your body; if anything hurts, then stop or ease up some. You do not want any pain at all; rather, try to move into the poses so you feel a good stretch. This stretch might feel really intense at times, but stay discerning and make sure it's not a strain.

Sometimes it's easy to strain in a pose (and in Life) and hurt ourselves out of some effort to prove something, or to attain something. From the yogic perspective, that is considered approaching our body, our Self, with violence. When we strain, the body tightens up and creates more tension as a self-protective maneuver. In Yoga, we are looking to let GO of tension and stress. When we put our body into a position where we feel a good stretch, we can then breathe into the intensity of the stretch. That place of stretch is a place where tension has been stored up. When we breathe into it, we send oxygen to that tension, and then when we consciously breathe out, we allow that tension to be released on the breath. Then we can feel better, because we have let go of stress and tension in a healthy and empowered way!

Practicing Yoga has many benefits, including (but not limited to) helping the body to get stronger and more flexible, balancing the nervous system (decreasing depression and anxiety), increasing a sense of vitality and wellness, increasing self-awareness, and helping create a sense of inner calm and ability to more easily flow with the challenges of life.

You can create your experience of Yoga to be whatever you want it to be. Some people just want the physical workout; they take it purely as a form of fitness. Others utilize it for the fitness benefits, plus as a self-reflective practice. Others take it further and use the time of practicing the poses to strengthen their tools of Yoga so they can more easily use those same tools in Life, as a way of framing their lives with conscious mindfulness and balance. However you choose to approach practicing Yoga is just fine; no way is better than another. Just practice YOUR way; make it yours. Trust your intuition and let your experience guide you.

To set the stage for your practice, consider the following guidelines:

- Try to practice Yoga on an empty stomach. Wait two hours after eating, if possible. (You can create your own scientific experiment and see how the practice differs when there is food in the stomach)
- Wear loose and comfortable clothes. It's hard to breathe and stretch deeply when wearing tight clothing.
- Bare feet will allow your toes to grip the floor well. If you feel you must wear socks, be aware not to slip. NO shoes!
- If you have any health conditions that make moving in certain ways inappropriate, be wise and listen to your body and allow yourself to modify the pose in any way so it can be safe for you.
- Try to drink plenty of water after practicing Yoga. This will help your body to release the tension and toxins that you accessed.

Centering - To begin, come into a comfortable seated position. This could be on the floor, or if that isn't possible, then on the edge of a chair/bed. If on the floor, sit cross-legged. If the knees are much higher than the hips, and/or if the back is very

rounded, then the body is asking for a change in order to benefit from this sitting pose. In that case, sit on top of a pillow, folded blanket, or something like that. If you sit on the front edge of it, the pelvis will tilt forward a bit, and it will be easier for the back to be upright with greater ease. You can always sit with the back up against the wall, too, which is a nice support. The point here is to be COMFORTABLE. When you can figure out how to adjust the sitting pose and get comfortable, the spine will be tall and the belly will relax. You can then actually use the entire capacity of the lungs when breathing (rather than just the upper third, which is common when we don't consider the breath), and thus will begin the process of experiencing Yoga.

This says "experiencing" Yoga, rather than "doing" Yoga, because Yoga comes from the word "to yoke; to bring into union". So in this moment, as you settle your body into a position as comfortable as possible that also allows your breath to access the entire lungs, you have begun the experience of Yoga, the union of body, breath, and mind.

So now notice the mind. Notice what thoughts or conversations are present. There is nothing to do with these thoughts, for they are just Mind. In this moment, there is nothing to resolve, nothing to judge, and nothing to change. Just notice. WITNESS the mind, without running with it, and without running from it. Witness.

And now notice the breath. Where do you feel the breath? Invite the breath to gently lengthen and deepen, in & out through the nose (if possible, today). Breathe in. Breathe out. Full breath in, and full breath out; with each exhalation feel yourself settling down into your space. There is nowhere to go, and nothing to do right now, except to breathe, feel, and relax. You are exactly where, and who, you need to be.

(Challenge yourself to not give in to any temptation to skip this Centering part of the practice. How can we know ourselves if we do not take the time to slow down and listen? If we don't, we most likely are being driven and guided by the mind. Mind is good, obviously, yet if we want to be balanced, we also need to be guided by the breath and body; from our intuition. This is an important step in re-discovering that we are human BE-ings, rather than human DO-ings.)



3 Part Breath - Come into the conscious breathing technique called the 3 Part Breath. This breath expands the capacity of the lungs, and allows us to breathe with the entire capacity of the lungs. In this way we thoroughly oxygenate the body, and completely release toxins and waste products. This can help us feel calm physically and emotionally.

Imagine when you fill a glass with water. First the bottom of the glass fills, then the middle, then the top. When you empty the glass, first the top empties, then the middle, then the bottom. You will fill and empty the lungs in a similar way, yet with the breath.

Let the breath be long, slow and relaxed. If it feels too full of effort, then let go of some of the effort. It can be a conscious breath, yet also relaxed. You may find it easier to teach yourself the 3 Part Breath while lying on your back. On your back, you can place one hand on the belly, and another on the ribs. The lower hand can move up to the chest when breathing there. Sometimes it's easier to feel the breath moving in and out of the lungs when lying on the back.

- Inhaling, allow the belly to bellow forward. Exhaling, draw the belly button toward the spine and the space behind you. REALLY exhale ALL of the breath!

- Now for the 3 Parts: Inhaling, bellow belly forward, then expand in the ribs, then expand in the chest.
- Exhaling, release the breath from the chest, then the ribs, then the belly (by bringing the belly toward the spine).
- Breathe not only into the front of the body, but also into the sides and back of the body.
- Continue at your own pace. Not too slow and not too fast.
- You can do this for 3 minutes, or for 30+ minutes. You can do this when you begin to feel some strong/difficult emotion while talking to someone/reading something/thinking something, as a way of helping yourself return to your center. Remember that this is a tool. The more familiar you become with the tool (the more you practice it), the easier it will be to use the tool in Life in moments of need. After all, it's always easiest to dig our well when the house is not on fire!

Half Moon - This is a standing pose, where your arms are overhead, and you arch to one side at a time. Not only does this pose stretch, tone and strengthen the side of the body, it also strengthens most everything from the ankles up to the neck. It is also useful in stimulating digestion, and is overall energizing. The Half Moon also helps us to develop concentration, balance, poise, and groundedness.

Create modifications (i.e. hands onto hips and/or slightly bend the knees), or don't hold this for long, or avoid it altogether if injuries with the shoulders, arms, or knees feel bothered by the movements, or if you have high blood pressure.

- Stand with the feet hip width apart and the feet pointing forward.
- Unlock the knees (so they are not locked, but not in a deep knee bend, either).
- Lengthen the tailbone down toward the floor.
- Inhaling, lift the arms out to the sides of the body and overhead.
- Straighten the arms. Arms can be in a wide V, or if it's comfortable, then interlace the hands together with the pointer fingers pointing toward the ceiling. Arm options = Hands interlaced, arms in wide V, holding something between the hands like a sock, one arm reaching up toward the ceiling with the other hand on a hip, or both hands on the hips.
- Relax the shoulders away from the ears. Shoulder blades relax down the back.
- Inhaling again, lengthen the body up toward the sky.
- Exhaling, arch your torso up and over to the right. Rather than just compressing to the side, imagine you are arching up and over a big barrel. Keep the tailbone lengthened down, and gently bring the lower ribs back (so they don't float forward, and make the spine arch). Feel the connection of the feet to the floor.
- Keep the upper left hip and shoulder rolled open and back (instead of rolling forward), so you stay in one side-plane.
- Breathe! In AND out.
- It's not about how FAR you arch over. It's not a contest with your Self or with your neighbor. It's all about being present with yourself and your experience, just as you are. At that edge of stretch, there is nothing to do but breathe.
- To release, actively press down into the feet and inhale the torso up to standing again.
- You can take a break before repeating this to the other side by releasing the arms. If you wish to move immediately over to the other side, then inhale and lengthen up again. Exhaling, arch up and over to the left. Go through all of the same points of alignment and reminders as with the first side.
- After stretching to both sides, release the arms along side your body and take 3 full breaths, in and out. REALLY breathe. Notice how you feel.

Warrior I (one) - This pose is a standing pose where the legs are in a large front-to-back lunge, and the arms are stretched overhead. This is another pose that strengthens everything from the ankles up to the neck, aids digestion, and builds confidence. Approach gently and with caution if you are managing high blood pressure or knee issues.

- Stand with the feet hip width apart and the toes pointing forward.
- Step the right foot forward and the left foot back a large distance, with the back toes tucked under and the heel OFF of the floor. Make sure the feet remain hip distance apart so you have greater stability.
- Bend the front right knee so it lands directly over the right ankle. Adjust the distance between the feet so you are feeling a good level of stretch, especially along the front of the left leg.
- Shift your weight forward and down (re-adjust the knee over the ankle again, as necessary). Also relax into gravity, with the weight of the pelvis sinking down toward the ground, while the crown of the head (not the eyes!.... the neck stays long and the TOP of the head lifts upward, to give a sense of extension) lifts up toward the sky.
- Press the left hip forward, and the left heel away from the body (straightening the leg, but if this isn't OK for the knee, then keep the knee bent as much as necessary)
- Arms: interlace the hands overhead with the pointer finger pointing up toward the sky, or arms in a wide V, or hands resting on the hips.
- Breathe. In AND out.
- You are obviously strong here. Now also find the softness. With each exhalation, allow yourself to relax and let go, to surrender. The point here is not to be a statue, but to be an alive being. Breathe! Be strong AND soft.
- To release, press into the feet and inhale the torso back into an upright position, stepping the feet together, and releasing the arms to your sides. Repeat on other side.
- When complete to both sides, take 3 full breaths in AND out. Notice what you feel.

Warrior II (two) - This pose is a standing side lunge, with similar benefits and cautions as Warrior I (see above).

- Stand with the feet hip width apart and the toes facing forward.
- Step the right foot out to the right side, about as far away from the left foot as one leg is long.
- Turn the right foot to point to the right, and the left foot inward (also toward the right) to about a 60 degree angle. The heel of the front foot is about even with the instep or heel of the back foot for balance.
- Bend the right knee until it is over the right ankle (NOT over the toes or before the heel). Also align the knee in line with the second and third toes of the foot (as opposed to falling inward to the side of the big toe). These points are key for knee joint safety.
- Invite the hips to turn forward. Forward is not toward the right foot and knee; rather it's pointing the direction that you began when standing in the beginning. You may notice the sensation of stretch in the hips and/or groin already. Be sure when you do this that the bent right knee remains in line with the second and third toes. Keep the tailbone lengthened down toward the ground.
- Inhale the arms up to a T position: shoulder height, parallel to the floor. Exhale and roll and relax the shoulders back and down. (If this is ever too much, then place the hands onto the hips). Draw the lower ribs back some to prevent them from floating forward.
- Lengthen the back of the neck, then turn the head so you can focus the eyes on the middle right fingertip. Notice how focused eyes = focused mind. If you let the eyes wander, the mind will easily wander. Focus the eyes on one spot.
- Breathe. In AND out. Each exhalation is the opportunity to let go of tension, and to let

go of what does not serve you anymore. Notice the challenge, the sensations, the work. Remember that there is no need for competition, ego, judgment, or commentary. Just be present with your experience (witness), and breathe.

- To release, turn the head forward. Actively press down into the feet to straighten the leg. Release the arms to your sides. Step the feet together. Notice how one side feels compared to the other.
- Repeat to the other side. When complete, take 3 full breaths in AND out. When you take these integrating breaths after each pose (asana), what happens for you? Do you feel anxious and itchy to get on to the next active thing? Does the mind kick into overdrive? Are the breaths all complete, or do they get shorter and less conscious as you stay there? Do you feel quiet, calm and aware? Take it all as information, without commentary. Try to do this in your day outside of your Yoga practice: when completing an activity or aspect of your day, take 3 FULL breaths and notice. That's it! Just breathe and notice. You may find that you increase your self awareness when you do this exercise. Rather than pushing on out of habit and automatic-mode, when we take a brief moment to check in with ourselves, we move into the next activity with a greater centeredness, poise, and awareness.



Standing Angle - This pose is where you are standing with the straight legs far apart from each other, out to the sides, then you hinge the torso forward so you hang toward the floor. This is a great pose to stretch the muscles in the back of the legs (hamstrings) and the inner thighs, as well as along the spine and hips. It can be very calming and relaxing to the emotions.

Since the head might be hanging lower than the head, don't do this if you have high blood pressure, heart burn, dizziness, or eye inflammation. In those cases, keep the head level with, or above the level of the heart.

- Stand with the feet hip distance apart, with the toes facing forward.
- Step the feet wide apart from one another, from side-to-side. Let them be a nice distance apart; you may need to adjust this distance once you get into it. Have the toes either facing forward or slightly inward (pigeon toed); NOT out to the sides!
- Press down into the feet, especially the outside edge of the feet. Lengthen the torso up toward the sky.
- Before you do anything more, remind yourself that this pose is done with a long, lengthened spine, NOT a rounded spine. Picture when a door moves on its hinge: it doesn't round. Similarly, don't round the spine, but hinge on the hips and LENGTHEN forward. It's also not about how FAR you hang down toward the floor. That is not the goal! It's about being present with yourself just where you are, at that natural edge of stretch. Radical self-acceptance.
- Inhale and lengthen the torso up out of the waist. Exhaling, hinge forward on the hips and begin to lengthen the torso forward and down, as if it could come in-between the legs. Stop where you feel a good stretch in the inner thigh and back of the body.
- If the hands naturally reach the floor with the torso remaining long, place the palms flat

on the floor under the shoulders. If you want to increase the stretch, bend the elbows so they point back, in-between the legs (not out to the sides like a chicken). Or, you can rest the hands onto the outside of the legs.

- If the hands don't touch the floor, or if the back wants to round, then find that edge of stretch with a long spine, wherever in space that is, and then rest the hands somewhere: on the seat of a chair, the bed, on the thighs.
- Make sure the back of the neck remains long; so if the eyes are looking forward, notice the compression in the back of the neck. Instead, let the nose stay pointing toward the floor in-between the hands, with the neck long.
- Lift the tailbone up toward the ceiling. Breathe! Let go of what you no longer need. Be willing to let go! So often we hang on to stuff out of habit, out of fear of the unknown, out of feeling righteous anger. But the only person that hurts is ourselves. What is the cost in our bodies, in our emotions, in our mind, of holding on to that anger and resentment? We cannot relax into something that we are resisting. What are you resisting in this moment? Breathe into that resistance (in the body, emotions, or mind), and with the exhalation be willing to let it GO. No judgment, no commentary, no need to know what will happen next. Take the courageous step and use the breath to let go of whatever does not serve you any more. Imagine how our life could change if we used EVERY breath in this conscious way!
- Release as carefully and slowly as you got into it. Actively press down into the Earth with the feet. Soften the knees, tuck the tailbone under, and roll the spine to standing (you can press the hands into the thighs if that helps you to release without strain). Step the feet together.
- Breathe 3 full breaths in and out. Notice, allow, watch, feel.

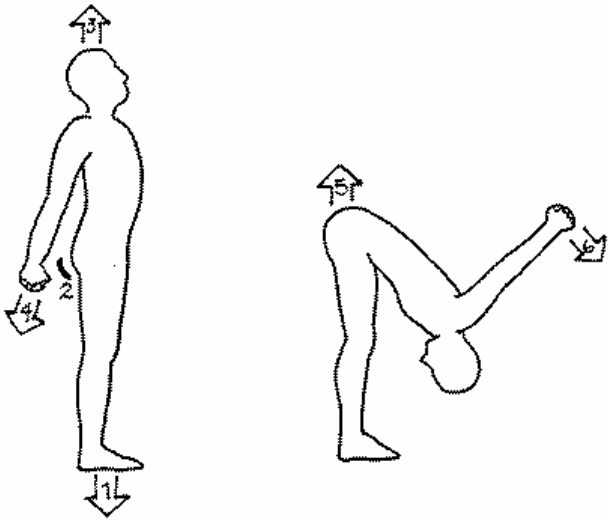


Standing Yoga Mudra - In this standing pose, you have the straight legs together and hang the torso forward toward the floor (like in the old gym classes where you tried to touch the toes with the legs straight). Yet instead, the hands are interlaced BEHIND the back, and when you are hanging forward, the arms are lifting up and away from the buttocks. This provides an excellent stretch in the arms, shoulders, upper chest and spine. Since it is an inversion (head below the heart), it helps improve concentration, memory, and some headaches.

Don't do this if you have high blood pressure, heart burn or eye inflammation, or an injured back. In those cases, keep the head level with, or above the level of the heart. If the hands don't interlace behind the back, hold onto something like a sock between the hands instead. If pregnant, spread the legs a bit wider apart to allow room for the belly.

- Stand with the feet hip distance apart, with the toes facing forward.
- Interlace the hands together behind you (or hold onto a long sock). Squeeze the elbows and shoulder blades together, and press the knuckles down toward the floor. Roll the shoulders back and down. Expand the chest.
- Inhale, lengthen the spine up. Exhale and begin to hinge forward on the hips, hanging the torso as far forward as is comfortable/appropriate for you today.
- Lift the arms up and away from the buttocks.
- Lift the tailbone up toward the ceiling. Unlock the knees.

- Breathe. In AND out. Notice how the breath affects your experience as you hold the pose. Let each breath carry tension away.
- “Yoga Mudra” means “Symbol of Yoga”. This pose is called the Symbol of Yoga because it places the head below the heart. We need the head, the mind, in Life, yet we also need to listen to the heart and to allow ourselves to be guided by the heart. In this moment, how can you encourage yourself to let go of the head, and to be guided by your heart?
- To release, SLOWLY press down into the feet, soften the knees, tuck the tailbone under, and roll yourself up to standing. Keep the arms away from the body until you are standing, then allow them to lower down toward the buttocks. Release the hands and bring the arms to your sides.
- Take 3 full breaths in and out. Notice and feel.



Sphinx - In this pose you are lying on your belly on the floor. The elbows are directly under the shoulders, so the chest is lifted off of the floor. It's a great back and abdominal strengthener. It also strengthens the lungs by opening in the chest, which helps encourage deep breathing.

Do not practice this pose if you have any back or abdominal inflammation and/or injury, or if you are pregnant.



- Come to a position lying on your belly on the floor. Let the legs and feet rest along side each other, tops of feet along the floor (not tucked under).
- Bring the arms forward so the elbows are directly under the shoulders. The forearms are on the floor parallel to each other, with the palms of the hands flat to the floor. You will notice that bringing the arms into this position will make it so the upper body is no longer resting on the floor.
- This is it. Now you can make a few micro-adjustments to enhance and intensify the experience: Press the pelvic triangle down into the floor. Press the elbows, forearms, and palms of the hands down into the floor. Lift the chest up toward the sky, and at the same time gently press it forward. Roll the shoulders back and down. Feel the shoulder blades melting down the back. Lift the crown of the head (not the nose) up toward the sky.
- Breathe in AND out. Notice the effect of the breath, especially in the opening of the chest.
- You can really control the level of sensation depending on how much you focus on the above press points. If it begins to feel like a strain, then ease up some so you can still breathe into it and relax with the exhalations. If you want to intensify it a bit more, then pretend your hands and forearms are on Velcro. Then gently pull them back toward the body without actually moving their location on

the floor. Notice how this action encourages the chest to press forward through the upper arms.

- Breathe, feel, notice. Dissolve all tension, all worry. Release all armor, all need to protect.
- To release, relax the spine, move the arms out to the sides, and bring the chest and one side of the face to the floor. Take 3 full breaths in and out. Allow the experience to be whatever it is, and breathe with it.

Spinal Twist - Twists are wonderful. They lubricate the spine, increase the circulation of blood and oxygen to the spine, massage many of the organs, and help with digestion and constipation. Twists help keep the spine flexible, which is so important if we are sedentary and as we age. Twists also help balance the nervous system, so if you feel raw, frayed, or easily angered, see how a twist can affect the moment.

If you have any back injury or inflammation, avoid this or practice with utmost caution. If you are pregnant, rather than the bent knee pointing toward the sky lay the bent knee off to the side on the floor with the sole of that foot along the inner thigh of the straight leg.

- Sit on the floor with both legs straight out in front of you and the spine long and tall. If this is extremely challenging, sit on the front edge of a rolled up blanket, pillow, or shirt to bring some ease to the spine.
- Bend the right knee up toward the sky. Place the right foot on the floor on the OUTSIDE of the straight left leg/knee/thigh. If this is not possible, then place the foot on the inside of the left leg. Aim to flatten the foot to the floor.
- Hug that bent right knee in toward the chest with the left hand or elbow. As you do so, make sure the right buttock stays planted to the floor, rather than floating up.
- Lift the chest bones and crown of the head (not the nose) up toward the sky.
- Activate the straight left leg that is flat on the floor: foot is pointing up toward the sky, rather than tipping to one side. Press away with the heel of that foot and gently draw the toes back toward the head (pinkie toe just as much as the big toe).
- Before you move into the twist, keep in mind that you want to twist beginning from the lower back, then the middle back, then the upper back, then with the neck and head. It's like a corkscrew beginning from the bottom.
- Inhale and lengthen the spine again. Exhaling, twist to the right with the lower back, then the middle back. Place the right hand to the floor behind you, right up behind the buttocks. Then continue the twist with the upper back, gently pressing the right shoulder back. Notice how straightening the right arm will help support the spine in remaining long and tall. Now, at the very end, allow the head to turn by just going along for the ride. DO NOT willfully twist with the neck or try to deepen the twist by turning the head back more. Just let the head go along for the ride and stop where it naturally stops.
- Allow the eyes to be involved in the twist, resting in the corners of their sockets. The eyes can be closed, if desired. If they are open, then focus them on one spot behind you. Wandering eyes = wandering mind. Focused eyes = focused mind.
- Breathe. With each breath in, lengthen the spine. With each breath out relax into the twist.
- To release, inhale and lengthen the spine. Exhaling, first release the head and shoulders, turning them forward. Then unwind the rest of the spine, bringing the arm forward too. Release the right leg to the floor next to the left leg. Notice how one side of the body feels compared to the other side.
- To repeat on the other side, keep the right leg straight and bend the left knee. Place it on the outside of the right leg. Hug the left knee in with the right arm. Go through all the points of alignment as with the first side. You will be twisting to the left on this side.

- Once you have completed the second side and both legs are on the floor in front of you, breathe, feel and notice. Take 3 full breaths in and out.

Closing - Listen to your body and intuition. Feel free to explore any movements that the body may be asking for, no matter what they look like. There is no right or wrong, just be present with yourself.

Once you feel complete with the physical movements, take at least 5 minutes (preferably more, perhaps closer to 15), and lie on the floor on your back for a time of conscious Relaxation. When we allow the body to rest in stillness after the active part of a Yoga practice, it has the chance to integrate the experience, to deeply receive the benefits, and to fully rejuvenate and restore your energy. The more we practice conscious relaxation in our Yoga practice, the easier it becomes to relax ourselves in tough moments in Life. Relaxation can be some people's favorite part of the practice! Let the back of the head be lengthened along the floor. If the back isn't comfortable, roll a blanket under the knees. Arms alongside the body at a 45 degree angle, palms facing up. Let the mind be passively alert and the breath effortless. There is nothing to do here but to breathe, feel, and relax.

Prison-Ashram Project

*Some of you have probably heard of Bo Lozoff and the Prison Ashram Project. We were fortunate that Bo stopped in Ithaca on his way to visit some prisons in upstate NY. Below is a description of the Prison Ashram Project taken from his website. Following the description is an account of his visit to Ithaca. Dave wrote up his experience of Bo's visit. **If any of you have ever been in a prison workshop with Bo please write and describe it to us. Let us know how it affected you.***

Ashram is a Sanskrit word meaning "House of God." In the East, an ashram is a place where people live for some period of time in order to strengthen their spiritual practice and self-discipline. Many ashrams are very strict. Residents, or *ashramites*, abide by an exhaustive schedule and live very simply, without many comforts or luxuries.



In 1973, Bo Lozoff and Ram Dass came up with the idea to help prisoners to use their prisons as ashrams if they were tired enough of seeing themselves as convicts just biding their time until they were released. Ram Dass funded the work, and Bo began corresponding with prisoners and, with their feedback, developing spiritual materials especially suited to that environment.

Neither Bo nor Ram Dass ever imagined that hundreds of thousands of hard-core convicts would be interested in such an idea. But within the first couple of years, the letters began pouring in and have not stopped to this day. By 1975, the Prison-Ashram Project had become Bo's full time job, and that same year Sita committed herself to the work as well. Bo & Sita have visited over 500 prisons, leading thousands of workshops. Bo's books, in particular the well-known *We're All Doing Time*, have become "the convicts' Bible" in institutions around the world. **All of these books, as well as many of our tapes, are sent free of charge to any prison inmate who requests them.**

The primary purpose of the Prison-Ashram Project is to inspire and encourage prisoners and prison staff to recognize their depth as human beings, and to behave accordingly. Our inmost nature is divine. The nature of our lives is an incomprehensibly wonderful mystery which each human being can experience only in solitude and silence. Prisoners have the opportunity to dedicate themselves to this inward journey without the distractions and luxuries which occupy many people in the "free world."

Bo teaches a balance between "Communion," which is an entirely inward, transcendent experience, and "Community," which includes everything else -- our behavior toward others, our worldly goals, our

treatment of the planet and its resources, etc. His writings and talks, therefore, center both on personal spiritual practice, and committed social activism. The Prison-Ashram Project encourages prisoners to take responsibility for changing their prisons, their communities, and the world.

Contact the Prison Ashram Project/Human Kindness Foundation
PO Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715
(919) 383-5160

Bo Lozoff Visits Ithaca - Bo Lozoff has met the Dalai Lama, received an honorary Doctor of Law, and written an enduring bestseller that has gone into 13 printings as well as producing along the way several well-reviewed music albums. He talks and performs for audiences all over the country, and likes to tell how he once had a chance to strum on Johnny Cash's Gibson. That's not surprising since Bo sings his own music in a clear, resonant voice that echoes the iconic baritone of the Man in Black. Also, like Johnny Cash, he has played for small intimate gatherings of several thousands in correctional facilities. But the book and music publishing is, as Bo describes, merely 'a cottage industry' to support what has been his mission since the early 1970's - spreading the messages that 'we're all doing time,' incidentally the title of his bestseller, and that every human being is worthy of love and kindness.

When Bo landed in Ithaca in June, he had been on the road since February, giving dozens of prison workshops and addressing small church groups like this one in the local Unitarian Church. Bo's reputation as a prison activist and a spiritual teacher brought out a mixed crowd but, on this particular evening, the people that appeared most curious about Bo's message hailed from a local drug rehabilitation center.

Bo described how our society, focused on consumerism, narrow egotism, and personal gratification, has left many Americans lost in a wasteland of drug and alcohol abuse, bereft of spiritual underpinning. Reaction to rising crime rates subsequently has helped to create a vast prison-industrial complex, badly in need of reform. In his audience remarks as well as articles on his website, Bo calls for a return to religious values and spiritual discipline, not only to deal with the challenges of prison, but, in larger sense, to counter the malaise of modern life. Time and again, Bo reiterated that the recovery of a sense of purpose is possible with hard work and diligence. Learn to be a strong, confident and calm person, Bo advised, and you will be comfortable in any surroundings even in prison.

On the Sunday following his talk, Ithacans were treated to over an hour long concert by Bo Lozoff, the songsmith. Several dozen locals gathered on the Ithaca Commons under warm, somewhat cloudy skies, listened to Bo, himself clad in black, doing many of his own songs interspersed with Johnny Cash favorites and work by contemporaries. A few times, especially when he performed Folsom Prison Blues, you could close your eyes and imagine you were listening to someone else, the man who had immortalized that song and this particular style of dressing in black. But, it would have been harder, especially with the warm sun on your face that day, the sound of children on the street, to close your eyes and imagine yourself in the audience at Bo's next gig after Ithaca. Because, after Bo signed a few autographs and packed his gear, he would be heading for a place upstate that few in the crowd had ever visited or would want to visit for that matter. Next stop. Auburn Correctional Facility, spreading the word.

- Dave

"The Black People's Prison Survival Guide"

What follows is a powerful no nonsense piece of advice on many levels to new fish, much of which may be old hat to many of our readers. While addressed specifically to fellow Black Muslims, we feel that the advice the author has to offer can be universalized. This was written by Abdullah Ibraheem, a 41-year-old writer still serving time. He has written many other things including books, short stories, and plays. We have edited this piece due to space constraints.

Inside - Entering prison for the first time can be a frightening experience. The noise level is what strikes you and it is unlike any noise that you have ever heard before. It's human noise and clamor. That, coupled with the sight of those dreary bars, made me think, "Man, what have I gotten myself into here?!" When you have entered prison, you have entered a world all its own. Each prison is different. What applies to one prison certainly will not apply to another. Prisons are classified by security levels (Maximum, Close, Medium, Minimum). You will have different rules and types of people according to what kind of prison you find yourself in.

Although each prison is different, there exists three basic groupings in all prisons. This social strata consists of the administration, guards, and the prisoners themselves. Each group operates according to its own set of rules and values, while there exists an interplay between the three, and none being totally independent of the others. The administrators of prisoners are usually people with years of devoted service in the penal system. Some are educated in the science of penology, but for the most part they are persons who came up through the ranks as guards. After taking a number of college courses, or gaining a degree in some social science, they were granted their positions and titles. At the higher levels of penal administration can be found a bit more educated persons who are more devoted to the penal system. These are the wardens and people who help make policy decisions. In this modern day, they are usually Black people. For those who understand the negative consequences of incarceration, their appointments to those positions can be recognized for what it is, a divisive tactic. Normally, they are no more than mere figureheads who do the system's bidding in oppressing other Black people.

Rules in prison are formulated to either antagonize or placate prisoners, but their main purpose is to control. The guards are the people who enforce the rules. They act as middlemen between administrators and prisoners. As prisons and people in them differ, so do guards. Some are real professionals. They respect other human beings. They spend eight hours at their jobs and go home. Others are the worst types of people. Dirt poor and barely literate, they exist in a no man's land between welfare or prison for themselves. They deal in contraband and are capable of brutal acts (including murder) against prisoners. Most are former military people, ex-cops, or people who couldn't qualify for police departments. They thrive on having authority. Some hold memberships in racist organizations and Masonic orders whose roles are to suppress non White people. Suffering psychological problems, their world view is negative, and that is how they generally view most prisoners.

The most difficult part about having contact with prison administrators and guards is that they usually operate from a set of preconceived notions about all prisoners. For them a textbook example of a prisoner is dumb, petty, passively or aggressively homosexual, scheming, and manipulative. Their manuals generally describe all prisoners this way. They tend to lump all prisoners into these categories. Accordingly, it would be safe to lump them all into one category as well. Expect them to be indifferent, authoritative, brutal and racist toward you. When you encounter an administrator or guard who is different, consider it a rarity. Prisoners come from a variety of backgrounds. Prison is a confined place, packed with living bodies of every shape, color and size. You will find yourself closer to other human beings than you have ever been before, many of whom you won't like. When conditions are crowded, there is a natural tendency for people to band together for mutual protection as well as friendship. Most prisons are divided by groups. These divisions occur along racial, religious, and ideological lines, as well as gang affiliations. The administrators and guards usually know who's who, because they are kept abreast of the inside goings on by their inmate informants.

There exists a class of people who are "at home" inside prison. They were conditioned for prison life from childhood. Starting out in juvenile correctional facilities they later made the transition to youth reformatories and adult prisons. They are totally inept as criminals and have been incarcerated any number of times. They are institutionalized and would rather be in prison than out. By conditioning,

prison's safe, controlled environment is best suited to them, a place where they are clothed, fed, and told what to do. Outside life is too difficult to grapple with for these individuals.

For another class of people, prison is a kind of homeless shelter. They don't necessarily want to be in prison, but in a sense they are forced to be. Unskilled, homeless and destitute, they enter jails and prisons for an array of minor crimes to be fed and rested up. Prison gives them a needed break from homelessness and crack addiction. For them a six month to a year sentence is a heavenly blessing. They aren't criminals in the real sense but men and women who have been forced by economic and social conditions to take the easy way out time and time again. For yet another class of people coming to prison is an occupational hazard. Crime is their vocation and they take coming to prison all in stride. It would be incorrect to type them as institutionalized, because they long for the free world. They make no excuses for what they did and openly discuss what they will do once back out on the streets. They intend to gang bang, rob and peddle dope. Their time inside prison is just an extension of their criminal lives on the outside. Many continue to profit from vices while in prison.

It has been difficult characterizing people in prisons. As previously stated, prisons differ and so people confined in them differ as well. No description of prison has ever been positive because it is a negative place filled with negative personalities who exhibit some abnormal behavior patterns. The variety of criminal offenses that you will find inside prisons are too numerous to list. One thing that usually all prisoners have in common is that they have suffered some kind of abuse in their lives whether it be physical, mental, drug or alcohol related. Penal facilities are in the same class as mental institutions, therefore, you will find persons with mental histories who are prescribed various types of powerful psychotropic medications. The one general rule is to never attempt to apply reason and logic to people or the situations you may encounter. If you look for logic and reason you'll find that you're in the wrong place.

Associations - In everyday life, whether we find ourselves in jail or out, associations are important. We are often judged by who we associate ourselves with. The old saying, "Birds of a feather flock together" holds true. Because of the close proximity, you will be judged more harshly by your associations by others in prison. We are assumed to be of a particular character or to engage in certain activities by whom we associate ourselves with. Associations are of two types, positive and negative. If we reflect on our pasts, it will usually be seen that our lives took a turn for the worst when we began to "hang with the wrong crowd", and it was in that group that we smoked our first reefers, hooked school and began to steal. All behavior is learned, and so was our criminal behavior. As easily as going along with the wrong crowd, we could have sat in the front row of the class with those "A" students who went on to college and later became professionals. Had we made the decision to have positive associations we would not have fallen prey to the negativity that eventually led us to being where we are.

The same choice continues to hold itself out to us daily. One of the first steps toward change and self improvement is to begin to choose positive associations in our prison environment whose influences will benefit us in the long run. One good look around will tell you that there is very little actual thinking going on in our prison environments. The real thinkers are few, and that is what makes them noticeable. You will find these persons taking full advantage of the educational and vocational opportunities made available to them. They use their time wisely preparing themselves for their lives in the free world. These are the best associates, and we can usually benefit from their insights and accept their advice. A word to the wise. There exists another set of thinkers as well. Because we see someone carrying an armful of books does not mean that their association can always be beneficial. There are individuals who are extremely intelligent but they utilize their energies foolishly in creating friction. Having had problems with authority all their lives, they love to antagonize authority with frivolous grievances and baseless legal claims. They will make

themselves (and you by association) targets of official reprisals. The thing to recognize about prison is our vulnerability and so it is best to remain distant from smart people doing stupid things.

Family - The importance of the family bond can not be over emphasized. The connections between us and our families needs to be strengthened. No matter what the given set of circumstances, family is what we are linked to, not only in name but spiritually as well. After our Creator, family should be our primary source of strength to draw from. If you look around all you see are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers. We are all linked to a family system, no matter how good or bad. America's slave system was responsible for the destruction of the Black family. The destruction of our families was the first thing that the oppressors did to our people. They sold us off from one another. The same thing is done by the American penal system in this day and age. Prison sells us off from those that we love.

Time and distance plays havoc upon what ties of family that we may have. The reason why most prisons are located in rural areas is not only to provide jobs to impoverished people, but because they isolate (in most cases totally) inner-city Blacks locked-up in them from their loved ones. When a person is isolated, they are easier to control. No one is there to question what happens to that person. Always show your appreciation and love for family, because they need that too. A strong support system can carry you a long way.

Time Utilization - In doing time in prison, time is the essential factor. Our physical lives are measured by seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years. Time measures our physical lives; therefore, we should begin to measure time and become time conscious. In this way we can utilize our time in prison and work it to our best advantage.

If you look around the prison you are in, you will see a lot of time being squandered. Valuable hours of each day are being wasted senselessly in useless pursuits. There is no harm in recreation, but when entire days are spent playing board games, cards, basketball, and watching television, then priorities have to be questioned.

An objective evaluation must be made of each and every activity that we engage in. We can determine if the activity is beneficial to us by its end results (what we actually benefit from it) and how much of our time is devoted to it. An hour game of cards or chess can be enjoyable and relaxing, but when these games last up to four or five hours, then it has become a waste of time. The same stands true of basketball. (Don't dribble your life away.) None of these recreational pursuits can change our lives or prepare us to be stronger men and women who can go out into the world to face life's challenges.

Here are some suggestions for successful time management: develop the habit of getting up early. This can be a plus. All that is needed is an alarm clock and a little will power. Think of getting up early as getting a jump on the competition. When the rest of the world is just waking, you'll be up, cleaned, groomed, dressed and already in full motion. Begin to make daily schedules. Think of yourself as someone with a lot to do but limited time. At night before going to bed, list all you want to do the next day. Keep this list with you and check off things off as you do them during the day. Review the list at night to see what you didn't get done. Put what you didn't do on the list for the next day.

Set short-term and long-term goals. Goals are objectives and life doesn't have much purpose without them. In order to attain your goal, you must formulate a plan. For instance, your short-term goal may be to get a G.E.D. in six months. Your plan to obtain that goal would be to study for a couple of hours a day. Beyond this, your long term goal could be to earn an Associates Degree in two years. As your plan, you would set a pace for your classes in that two year period of time.

Our time in prison should not be wasted. It is time in our lives. This is the best time that we can possibly have to develop ourselves in all ways. We're being fed, clothed and housed (in my case "warehoused"). There are no bills to pay, no job to go to. To gain as much knowledge, awareness and

skills as we can should be our primary objective. If the racist system has given you a lot of time, then you should leave prison with a college degree or several good skills. Get the best out of the situation and don't let the situation get the best out of you. This is how to "beat the system" and walk away ahead of things. You can do all of this by learning how to use time effectively.

Your Mental Health - Prison will destroy you mentally if you allow it to. Being in prison can be one of the most degrading experiences in life. It seems that degradation is the main purpose of prison. Dress codes, serial numbers, buzzers and bells, strip searches, inadequate privacy and lists of rules too long to remember are used as means to humiliate, tear you down and annihilate you psychologically.

Having a strong mind helps one to survive the rigors of prison. This calls for having a positive mental outlook in spite of the circumstances. Prison is a negative place. Probably some of the most negative thinking on the planet takes place inside of prisons. There are many broken people in prison who suffer from defeatism. They have failed in life because they never really try. When they see others attempting to make positive strides, they often criticize but never encourage.

Never count yourself amongst the losers. By keeping a positive outlook you will have the advantage in any situation. It can be quite difficult, but at some point all things face opposition. As prison can be one of the worst possible situations there will be many obstructions to your progress. In developing and keeping a positive mental outlook, you will remove your first and greatest obstacle – yourself.

How you see yourself determines how you see the world and others. Having a strong and clear mental image plays an important part in self-development. How do you see yourself? What is your self-concept? If your conception of yourself isn't strong, do you at least have some notion of the kind of individual you wish to become? Consider these things.

Thoughts are powerful. They create and give new life and can cause death. Never allow fear, anxiety, anger and doubt to run riot in your life and exert rulership over you. Negative thinking will defeat you. Be filled with confidence and optimism that problems will be resolved to your benefit. Have thoughts of patience and fortitude. Clear thinking is the best thinking there is.

Worry is the most senseless use of mental energy. I have seen others worry themselves until they become so overwhelmed that they give up all hope. We should not worry over things we have no control over. A pending appeal, a woman, unruly children at home, are things we shouldn't worry about. We have to realize that what is to be will be. You don't want to end-up dependent on some drug like Thorazine for your peace of mind or having some medical problem due to worry. Save yourself a lot of grief. Place focus on the improvement of your mind.

Education without culture will only make an educated slave. Find the truth of history contained in books. Historical reading is the most rewarding and has a profound effect upon the psyche. I recall that when I learned from reading that medicine, mathematics, building and the arts and sciences had their origins in Africa (Egypt), it increased my thirst for knowledge. After reading about it, I was able to relate it to myself. When I finally entered college, I wasn't fooled when the White professor claimed those advances for the Greeks.

Do a great deal of reading to cultivate your mind. Developing a reading program will help. If you're not a good reader, then keep reading and you will surely improve. Never be intimidated by the number of pages in a book. Start with short books and work your way up. A steady diet of two books a week can't help but improve you.

Your Physical Health - Prison will destroy you physically if you allow it to. It would seem that is its purpose, to make you grow old, run you down, and cause you to suffer from ill-health. Knowing some steps to take to protect your physical being will help you get through prison.

Physical cleanliness is essential. Always be clean and groomed. This is the first step in keeping yourself healthy while in prison. Personal cleanliness enhances self-esteem; plus, it makes a positive statement to others about you.

Concentrate on the total cleanliness of your immediate living environment (bed area, cell, etc.) Always keep dirt and dust to a minimum. Now I'm sure at some point in our lives most of us have had some contact with those "brown cousins" and prisons are full of them. But, learn to be intolerant of roaches. If you roll over and see one crawling up the wall at three in the morning, then get up and kill it! Along with rodents, they carry all kinds of diseases.

Physical contact is nearly impossible to avoid because of the close proximity of others. Probably one of the first things you will realize in prison is that everyone isn't clean. Some people are just downright funky. Besides filthy habits and bad personal odors, common diseases carried by others could range from TB to A.I.D.S. Watch what you touch and never drink or smoke after anyone. If you're in a cell with someone else, then keep a window cracked at all times to maintain an air flow. Avoid constant coughers.

Fresh air and sunlight is essential to life. If you have access to movement outdoors then stay outside as much as possible, even during the winter months. Get lots of sunshine and breath in as much fresh air as you can. Also, it has been proven that the sun has a positive effect on human emotions and physical health. Physical exercise each day will keep you in good condition and help to relieve stress. One of the best things that we can do is stretch. Stretching keeps the body flexible. Some form of martial art would be beneficial. Prison can be an unpredictable place. Anything could happen, so it's best to keep yourself at ready. Getting proper rest at night is important. Prison can preserve your youthful features, because you aren't constantly on the go as free persons are. You can walk out of prison not having aged much physically. Proper rest with regular exercise and a good diet will carry you through. Always get a good night's sleep.

Your Spiritual Health - Prison will destroy you spiritually if you allow it to. The experience of being locked-up can make you bitter beyond compassionate feelings for other human beings. You can easily lose what moral values you have in prison. The prevalence of evil and vice inside prison can rob you of your spiritual life if you are unaware. Man is composed of mind, body and spirit (or soul). The three are connected and form life as we know it. We know that mind exists because we think most of the time. We are certain of our bodies because we see it and have the sense of touch. But what about the spirit or soul? When we become better attuned to ourselves we know of its existence, because we "feel" it.

A focal point in African life was the belief in one divine Creator of all things. In fact, the first known purely monotheistic religion had its origins in Egypt, that which today is known as Judaism. Some African nations worshipped many deities, but even then there was always one supreme god who stood head and shoulders above all the rest. Belief was the essential theme of our forefathers' lives and should remain as the main theme of ours as well. When we became so "logical" (or embittered) that we deny the existence of our Creator and our own souls, then we have lost touch with our natural selves and our humanity. A strong sense of belief in the Creator will help us face life's challenges.

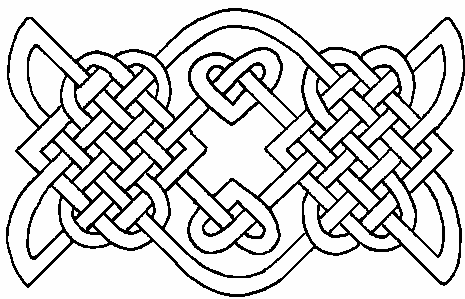
Constant prayer is the essence of spiritual life. It is man's way of calling upon and giving praise to the one great force of all the worlds. Whatever name we choose to call Him, be it "Allah~ or "Yahweh" or "Jehovah", we must know that He is even above names. He is the Most High and He is One. Being consistent in supplication acts as a reminder and keeps us within the bounds of upright conduct. Prayer helps us to understand our relationship to our Creator and to other human beings. Prayer is the spiritual food that nourishes the human spirit.

Charity is a means of fulfilling our duties to our fellow human beings. If our Creator is one, then His creation is one as well; therefore, it becomes our duty to act in the welfare of others, to want for

others what we wish for ourselves. If we desire peace, security and happiness, then we should always extend those things to others. It is better to give than to receive. There are blessings in giving and, when we give, we will always find that we still always have enough for ourselves. A smile, a kind word, encouragement and a helping hand are all forms of charity.

Fasting is a way of purifying ourselves. By short periods of fasting, we can rid our systems of toxins, develop inner-discipline and focus our attention toward our spiritual selves. Fasting not only places us in contact with our spiritual essence but grants us at least a momentary mastery over the desire for food. It will also grant us an exact understanding of the deprivation that others in the world now suffer daily and evoke feelings of empathy within us.

Each one of us has the right to believe as we choose. Let there be no compulsion in matters of religion. Religion is social. Its purpose is to bring people together before the Creator, but most often it divides them. On the other hand, spirituality is personal. It is how we relate to our Creator and how we live. Spirituality lies deep within.



Meditation

What follows below are some very basic, and I mean basic, steps that would help a beginner to start meditating.

Meditation may help alleviate:

- Hypertension
- Back pain
- Diabetes
- Anxiety
- Sleep disorders
- Immune dysfunction

Passive Meditation is when you are able to sit quietly and observe the movement of your breath and repeat meaningful chants, mantras or prayers. Other forms of passive meditation include focusing on a single object such as a religious icon, candle or something that holds some meaning for you, or looking out at vastness, such as the sky.

Openness Meditation requires that you listen without an agenda. This practice requires that you sit quietly while opening up to the sounds that surround you. When fully released, place your attention on yourself and begin to feel or listen to the sensations of your body. You may begin by following the pattern of sensations of your hand and then continuing to feel them in the rest of your body. In time, you will be able to direct your energy to specific parts of your body.

Creative/Active Meditation encourages you to organize the way we relate to our own minds. One way of performing creative meditation is to relax physically, close your eyes, and take a walk down the hallway of your mind. Now create an image for whatever need you have, or whatever you want help with. For example, if you are tired and in need of rejuvenation, create a spa door. Open the door, go inside, and become refreshed in whatever way you desire – by getting a massage, sitting in a whirlpool or sauna, and so forth. This type of meditation helps to develop a deliberate and creative part of your mind. You should not try to force the images, but rather let your psyche come up with the results for you. One simple technique is as follows:

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable chair with your hands in your lap and your feet square on the floor.
2. Relax and allow your belly to become soft.

3. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. When inhaling, think 'soft'; when exhaling 'belly.' Soon there be less muscular tension and deeper breathing.
4. Begin meditating for five minutes and work up to 20 minutes over several weeks.

"The Victorious Personality"

When I first starting thinking about mental health issues in prison, I asked myself, how could someone possibly come out of prison a whole person? How do some men emerge even stronger, more integrated, ready to take on as Nelson Mandela did, a leadership role in healing society? What qualities contribute to survival in places like prison or concentration camps or war torn societies? Those questions led me to seek answers in a book I remembered that had been written about a young Cambodian girl's survival in Pol Pot's Kampuchea (as Cambodia was known under the Communist Khmer Rouge.) Over a million Cambodians are known to have been exterminated during an intense period of political and social upheaval between 1976-1979 when the Khmer Rouge ruled

The author Gail Sheehy, then a journalist on assignment, interviewed an 11 year old refugee named Mohm, who told the almost unbelievable story of her harrowing survival during these four years. Sheehy later turned this account into a thought provoking study of the human will under extreme conditions: The Spirit of Survival.

I have excerpted a number of passages from Sheehy's essay, "The Victorious Personality," that was published in the NY Times shortly before the publication of the book.

-Dave

"The winner against adversity emerges with what I call the victorious personality.

"One may be born with a naturally resilient temperament, but one develops a victorious personality. Those who do often come to believe they are special, perhaps meant to serve a purpose beyond themselves. Among the elements that contribute to a victorious personality are the ability to bend according to circumstance, self-trust, social ease (and the facility to put others at ease), and the understanding that one's plight is not unique. A strong relationship with a polestar, an older person who serves as a proxy parent or a mentor, appears to be essential. But the clue to a young person with a potentially victorious personality is the ability to reach out and connect with whatever polestars are available.

"One HALL-mark of the victorious personality is "plasticity" – the ability to bend according to circumstance, but without forfeiting the inner conviction of a reason for being.

"Self-trust is another canon of the victorious personality. Survivors must rely on their own nature, acting and moving much of the time by instinct. Because moments of choice present themselves seldom and abruptly, the survivor must rely on intuition to make quick character judgments and snap decisions.

"These elements of the victorious personality apply equally to Americans who face more common life accidents: an absent or alcoholic parent, a bitter divorce, a problem child, crushing debt, a career crash, serious illness. Indeed, the resources used by ordinary people in periods of personal upheaval resemble the resources drawn upon by the classic extraordinary survivor.

"Highly self-directed, they have the capacity to set goals without depending on, or sometimes in spite of, the push and pull of others. But their own effort was not enough. To overcome the odds, a strong relationship with someone acting as a model, a provider or a mentor was essential. For the people in this study, this role was filled by surrogate parents, teachers, guidance counselors or ministers.

"But for all the importance of polestars, those with a victorious personality do not lean on others any longer than necessary."

Spiritual Practices

Many sources we checked constantly refer back to the importance of a spiritual practice as the centerpiece of a disciplined approach to finding personal balance. A practice is obviously something that you weave into the fabric of everyday life as a focal point.. I have just borrowed these summaries wholesale from a website.

-Dave

The world's religions all recommend living in the moment with full awareness. Zen Buddhism especially is known for its emphasis on "nowness." Hindu, Taoist, Jewish, Moslem, Christian, and other teachers urge us to make the most of every day as an opportunity that will not come to us again.

Also under the rubric of being present is the traditional spiritual exercise called practicing the presence of God. This means recognizing that God is here now moving through our everyday activities, no matter how trivial they might seem.

The contrasts to being present are living in the past and living in the future. We do the former when we hold on to regrets. We constantly review things that have already happened, trying to explain them in terms of our own or someone else's actions. Often this kind of thinking leads to guilt or blaming.

We live in the future when we make assumptions or fantasize about what could happen and then become attached to those expected outcomes. This habit usually results in disappointment. Whether we are consumed with positive expectations (optimism) or negative projections (pessimism), we are not living in the moment.

When you find yourself constantly reacting to your experiences in one of these ways, when you always want to be otherwise and elsewhere, it is time to be present. The companion of this practice is contentment.

Compassion is a feeling deep within ourselves—a "quivering of the heart"—and it is also a way of acting—being affected by the suffering of others and moving on their behalf. Buddha and Jesus are the most well known exemplars of compassion, and it is the central ethical virtue in the two religions that developed from their teachings.

The spiritual practice of compassion is often likened to opening the heart. First, allow yourself to feel the suffering in the world, including your own. Don't turn away from pain; move toward it with caring. Go into situations where people are hurting. Identify with your neighbors in their distress. Then expand the circle of your compassion to include other creatures, nature, and the inanimate world.

The practice of compassion increases our capacity to care. It reinforces charity, empathy, and sympathy. It is very good exercise for your heart muscle.

On a personal level, your compassion is sabotaged by feelings of ill will toward others: spite and malice. These feelings, and others arising out of emotional wounds and personal pain, are actually symptoms indicating that you need to have compassion for yourself.

Separateness is an illusion. That's what we learn through the spiritual practice of connections. Everything is interrelated—in time, space, and our very being. Both religion and science reveal this truth—Hinduism's image of Indra's net, Buddhism's understanding of interbeing, the experiences of the mystics, the teachings of ecology and physics, even the Internet.

One definition of spirituality is "the art of making connections." There are certain givens: The one is made up of many. One thing always leads to another. Everything is related to everything else. You practice connections, then, by consciously tracing the links connecting you with other beings. Any point is a good starting place—your family line, your work, your back yard. Watch for the moments when the separations disappear. And don't be shy about naming mystical experiences as such when you experience them.

The practice of connections reinforces holistic thinking and our awareness of how the spiritual, emotional, and mental aspects of our being interpenetrate and nourish each other. It enables us to see the big picture.

We need to engage in this practice when we have a tendency to compartmentalize our

experiences, to put them in neat little boxes instead of seeing them as parts of a whole. This is a cultural as well as a personal habit. The history of the world is plagued by dueling dualisms: mind vs. body, humans vs. nature, God vs. the world, science vs. religion, country vs. city, male vs. female. The spiritual practice of connections erases such arbitrary and unnecessary distinctions.

Kindness is the first of the three great treasures advocated by Lao Tzu. The Buddha taught that generosity is a primary quality of an awakened mind. Muhammad regarded kindness as an essential sign of faith. Jewish and Christian ethics are built upon deeds of kindness, as are the daily interactions of people of primal traditions.

The spiritual practice of kindness encompasses a range of small acts and habits that we know as old-fashioned good manners — saying "please" and "thank you," waiting your turn, lending a helping hand, or cheering someone up with a smile. It applies not just to your relationships with other people. Etiquette in the spiritual life extends to things, animals, plants, and the Earth.

This practice also means being generous with your presence, your time, and your money. Give freely without expecting anything in return. Just do it. Kindness is not a quid pro quo endeavor.



One spiritual practice is often associated with others. Listening involves attention, being present, and hospitality, and it is a component of devotion, nurturing, and wonder.

Listening is our bridge to the wisdom of sacred texts and spiritual teachers. It is an essential part of the discernment process whereby we identify God's messages for us. Listening enables us to tune in to others and our inner voices of intuition and conscience. It is how we know we are part of the natural, technological, and media worlds all around us.

But it takes practice to be a really good listener. Start by listening like a baby does upon encountering a sound for the first time. Then listen like a child, noticing music, rhythm, and the variety of noises. Next, tune in to the messages coming to you from all directions and multiple levels of experience. And remember the advice of Native American seers: speak only half as much as you listen.

There is perhaps no greater way to show our regard for our friends, family, and associates than to truly listen to them. The "listening heart," as this attitude is called, leads to a deepening of relationships and a greater sense of self for all parties. And this kind of communication isn't limited to human interactions. Listen to an animal, the waves on the beach, or the roar of a city neighborhood, and you will come to a greater appreciation of your place in the universe.

Conversely, an inability or unwillingness to listen is a symptom of self-centeredness. It signals that we are shut up in ourselves, not interested in participating in what is going on around us. It can also indicate an obliviousness to our own best interests which may be trying to make themselves known through our inner voices. In a universe where so many things are speaking to us on so many levels, it is not wise to ignore the voices.

Peace is built on the foundations of other spiritual practices: connections, compassion, justice, unity. It is a goal of all spiritual people. Peace is an inner

state of well-being and calm. It is also an outer project of promoting nonviolence, conflict resolution, and cooperation in the world. The root of the Hebrew word for peace, "shalom," means "whole" and points to this twofold meaning: peace within oneself and peace between people.

Feeling worried, upset, or "crazed" can also get you started doing peace. These states often signify that your emotions have gotten the best of you, and a practice to restore your equanimity is needed. Being even-tempered creates a feeling of serenity. And whereas being agitated can drain your energy, inner calm increases your stamina so that you can sustain your efforts to make the world a more peaceful place. This time the inner supports the outer.

Whether they are called sages, masters, elders, cronies, rabbis, gurus, sheikhs, ministers, or priests, teachers play an important part in our spiritual unfolding. They instruct directly and indirectly through stories, parables, koans, sermons, lectures, and personal example. They recommend readings in sacred texts, assign exercises and tasks to be accomplished, demonstrate devotional acts, and challenge us to reach the sacred fullness of our potential.

Of course, eventually in the spiritual life, there comes a point when we realize that everything we encounter and everyone we meet is a teacher. The first step in this practice, then, is to choose to see all of life as a classroom filled with spiritual lessons. Be a lifelong learner who walks in humility and with receptivity.

We hate to admit it, but we keep making the same mistakes over and over again. That is why the practice of teachers is so important and so insistent. These recurrent issues mean we still have something to learn. A major obstacle to this practice, then, is pride — thinking you already know it all, that you (and perhaps you alone) have it figured out.

The shadow side of teachers is surrendering your soul to a leader or cult and giving up personal responsibility for your spiritual growth. A subtle symptom of this tendency is doubting your own judgment and needing the constant affirmation of others. A far better approach is to rejoice in the abundance of teachers, to seek their wisdom everywhere, and to have confidence that it is available and accessible to you.

Transformation usually involves the shedding of old ways, especially those that have become burdens. This practice proclaims that no matter who you are, no matter what has already happened to you, no matter what you have done, it is still possible to be and do something new.

Transformation implies a marked change in your life, but you can practice it by making simple changes. Start by doing something different — walk to work by a new route, answer the telephone with your other than usual hand. Break a habit, any habit. Signal Spirit that you are willing to accept change in your life and to be an agent of change in the world.

With transformation comes healing and wholeness. It's as if they had been waiting in the wings all along, until you made room for them on stage.

Unity refers to living in harmony with other people. It means working for a common cause with those around the globe who know that when one person gains, all gain, and when one fails, all fail. We are crafting unity when we build communities.

The spiritual practice of hospitality helps us learn to respect differences and celebrate diversity in the Creation. Unity is about affirming commonalities. This can be as simple as acknowledging how you are like another person. It can lead to actions demonstrating your solidarity with others. Without unity, there is little hope for compassion, justice, or peace.

Feeling lonely and isolated from other people are symptoms of a lack of unity in your life. Extreme manifestations are alienation and estrangement. Sometimes we deliberately cut ourselves off from others by our tyrannical and arrogant behavior. We may be very protective of our turf and highly individualistic, only interested in having our own way.

Often these same tendencies lead us to build or support the walls that separate groups in our

societies along economic, racial, ethnic, sexual, religious, or other lines. Gated, insular communities, where people show little interest in the outside world, are sure signs that unity needs to be practiced.

All the world's religions refer to the civil war that rages inside us when self-absorption meets self-regard and selfishness clashes with selflessness. The spiritual life requires that we think enough of ourselves to believe we can serve others without putting ourselves above them. It's sometimes a tricky balance to maintain.

Begin with what is right in front of you. Have both pride and humility. Be assertive and yielding. You are much more and much less than you probably think you are. Relax. This, the Creator reminds us, is good.

The ideal is to live with both our strengths and our weaknesses. The spiritual practice of you is the prescription to help you find and express your authentic self.

PRISONER EXPRESS MEMBERS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND CONFINEMENT

In a previous newsletter we solicited from you our readers what strategies have helped you in serving your sentence. Dave has selected some responses to print in this newsletter that he felt could be useful. Let us know what you think, and a tip of my hat to all of you who cared enough to send in suggestions. By working together and offering support you become agents for change

Mental Health and Confinement

1. What coping strategies have helped you personally to survive confinement?

For myself, I try to keep as busy as I possibly can. I do this by engaging in a variety of activities to keep my mind occupied and away from dwelling on where I am. When I'm idle, I begin to think, to dwell on my past, on where I'm at, and what little the future holds for me. That leads me down a road that I'd rather not travel. So, I try to not give my mind a chance to go down that road.

While I was in general population it was quite easy to keep myself occupied from the time I got up in the morning until I laid down to sleep at night. I went to work, I went to college classes, recreation. I was constantly busy. Being back here on Death Row, it is much more difficult to keep oneself occupied with the level of confinement we're subject to. We are confined in our cells at all times except for two hours of recreation, five days out of the week showers, or visitation. We don't work, we don't have televisions, we aren't allowed to participate in educational programs on the unit. If you've got money on your books, or if you've got friends and loved ones who will do things for you, you can get books and newspapers and magazine subscriptions. I'm one of the fortunate ones that have both funds on my books and friends and loved ones that will do everything they can for me while I'm back here. So, I spend my time reading my books, my newspapers and magazines. I write my many friends and pen-pals, I do several Bible correspondence courses, artwork, and listen to my radio. I go to the dayroom and exercise and talk to the guys in their cells or in other dayrooms. I even play D & D if there are guys in the surrounding cells that also play. Even all of that sometimes isn't enough and I look for other things to do. I've just recently ordered foreign language text learning books on Greek, Latin, German and Hebrew so I can learn to read and write in those languages. The important thing for me, and I think for most other guys is to keep busy. It is when they're idle with nothing to do, when they get to thinking too much, or get bored, and then get in trouble and go into depression.

2. What advice would you give a new 'fish' just starting out a long sentence?

Stay out of the gangs. Do your own time. Don't let others do your time for you. You're going to be in prison for a long time and while you might not think it matters now, staying out of trouble will benefit you in the long run when you finally do come up for parole. Everything you do while in the prison system is on record.. Everything you do in

here will affect your future. Enroll in school, take a vocational trade, enroll in college. Participate in any programs that are required such as AA or sex offenders programs, psychiatric counseling, etc. All this will look good on your record and help you make that parole. Getting back to the gangs, while it might look enticing and beneficial from the beginning, remember that once you join, you're obligated to follow orders of whoever the ranking gang member is on that unit. You've got to ask yourself, is that what you really want? What if he tells you to kill another inmate? Will you be willing to do something like that? Time you get in prison is stacked on top of your original sentence. Also, once you've been confirmed as a gang member, the chances are likely that you'll be put in ad-seg. Once you're in ad-seg and an active gang member, you'll remain in ad-seg for the remainder of your sentence. Even if you renounce your membership, you'll still spend many years locked in a little bitty cell.

So stay away from the gangs, do your own time and show the next man the respect you expect him to give you.

3. Has prayer or religious faith been a factor in facing the challenges of prison life?

No. Although I mentioned that I did Bible correspondence courses as one of the things I did to keep busy, I don't consider myself a Christian. There's too much hate and intolerance, too much hypocrisy in the Christian community these days. Instead of hate the sin and love the sinners, its all about hate the sin, persecute the sinner. That's not what I've read in the Bible and I've been studying it for the past 12 years. So, I cannot utilize faith or prayer to a religion that preaches hate. I believe in showing everyone the same respect and consideration regardless of their race, gender, religious beliefs or sexual orientation.

4. Do you currently use meditation and what kind?

No. There was a time back in 1995 when I was in ad-seg that I used it to a certain point. As for what kind of meditation I used then, I have no idea. I just tried to clear my mind of all thoughts except for the body parts I was working on to relax. I would start from my feet and work my way up, until I was completely relaxed. This was pretty difficult as the noise level in seg, and even back here on Death Row is like being at a rock concert for hours and hours at a time. I finally just gave up on it. It's extremely hard to relax when everyone is screaming at the top of their lungs, steel doors are slamming every five to ten minutes, the intercom is blaring...it never ends. Even at night here the noise never stops. A lot of guys buy ear plugs. I've learned to sleep in snatches here and there. If it gets too bad for me then I'll put my headphones on and turn the volume up on my radio believe it or not! I can sleep with music blaring in my ears.

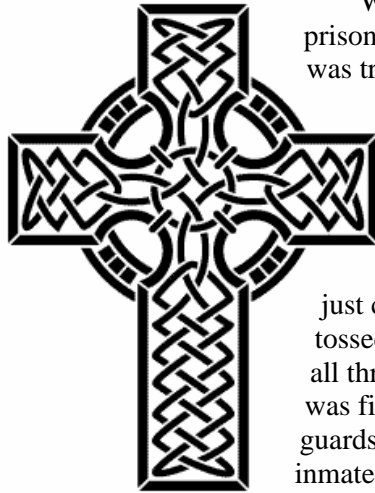
5. What is the importance of finding a mentor or role model?

That is kind of difficult to answer. I think the better question would be what is the importance of finding the right mentor or role model. Otherwise, I don't really think it is that important. I think it really depends on the type of person you are. I was pretty much a loner when I first arrived. I had friends of course, sort of, but I listened and learned. I didn't learn from any one inmate or try to emulate any of them. I took a little from all of them. Unfortunately, not all of it was good. If you're the type of person that needs a mentor or someone you can emulate, then you should find the old con who has been here a while and knows all the ins and outs, all of the various cons and mind games you tend to run into in here. You want someone that knows how to do his time, mind his own business, show everyone respect and consideration, but at the same time doesn't let others push him around. Someone others respect. Anyway, what it all comes down to is to use whatever tools are available to you that will make your time easiest for you that will benefit you in the long run. Do what you need to do to cope, as long as it doesn't get you in trouble or harm others. Whether it is prayer, meditation, study, you know what's best for you. Show everyone respect as that is really important in getting along with everyone and staying healthy.

Choose your friends, associates or mentors wisely as some of them could lead you wrong, take you somewhere you don't want to go or come to regret later. And when you finally do come up for that first parole, don't be discouraged if they set you off and say, "The hell with it." There's always the next time and, a lot of times they set you off to see how you're going to react, how you take it. If you take it bad and just start getting into trouble and don't care anymore, then you're not ready to get out. Just smile and keep on going and prove them wrong about you. Beat them at their own game.

—Perry Allen Austin

Has prayer or religious faith been a factor in facing the challenges of prison life?



When I came to state prison in the year 2000, I was troubled within. I was lonely and living in fear. I couldn't see any light at the end of the tunnel and thought I should just commit suicide. I tossed and turned crying all through the night. I was fighting with the guards and with other inmates. I was going in and out of lock up with a lot of

misconducts. I was being seen by the psychiatrist and put on medications. They even had me seeing a psychologist; however, nothing seemed to help ease my troubled mind. I rededicated my life to Christ but I didn't surrender. There was a seed, however, planted long ago. I turned my back on God, but he never turned his back on me. I continued to get misconducts. On November 13, 2002 after a misconduct hearing, I just broke down. I felt I couldn't take any more and my mind snapped. I was banging my head against the cement wall totally out of it. My head was bleeding and I was yelling "I can't take no more! I wanna kill myself!" The guards rushed in to stop me from hurting myself. I was strapped down like a wild animal and placed in a cell with just a metal bed frame. I was given a shot to calm down. Once I calmed down, they removed the straps. However, I stayed in that cell from November 13 to 19. On the 19th I was taken to the mental health unit and stayed there from November 19 to December 26, 2002. While I was there, doctors tried all types of medications, but none worked. While I was there in a cell, the Lord spoke to me in my thinking, and He said "I am the only one that can ease your troubled mind and give you peace. (Matthew 21:22 says "And all things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing; ye shall receive). I've grown to believe in prayer. It is the best way I know to draw strength from heaven.

Today, I've surrendered myself and now God has full control of my life. After repenting and praying, I know that I've been set free. Today I'm not troubled on the inside. I have peace like I never had in my entire life. I'm equipped with my whole armor of God defeating the snares of the devil, who tries to come at me so many different ways and through different people. God is using me in a way I never thought possible. A passage of Scripture comes to mind, which says "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight") Acts 9:18) God has given me sight; the darkness is exposed. It goes on to say that after he received sight, he rose and was baptized. I've learned that when a man gains a clear vision; he comes into a new understanding of himself. I know that I'm more than a conqueror, and I can do all things through God who strengthens me. I pray that my letter will encourage whoever gets to read this. In the midst of the storm, He'll give you peace!

How do you cope with a life in which is no hope? Where the sun no longer shines, and darkness seems to reign most of the time. Where there's no twinkle in the eyes, and smiles seem to be of another time. Where problems rise as gigantic mountains, and tears flow from the eyes like a human fountain. The picture drawn seems to be so dreary, but to many people this type of life is a reality.

How to cope? Is the question they ask, As their happiness seems to be a thing of the past. But who is to say darkness is a curse, and that bad times come in chapters and never a verse? And who says you have to smile to be happy, and that problems are not good therapy? Also are not mountains meant to be climbed, and tears actually bring healing to the eyes? So as an answer on how to cope, just continue forward, for as long as there is a breath and life there is hope!

Some people are more talented than others. Some are more educationally privileged than others. But we all have the capacity to be great. Greatness comes with recognizing that your potential is limited only by how you choose, how you use your freedom, how resolute you are, in short, by your attitude. And we are all free to choose our attitude.

—Shawn Montgomery

I came to prison when I was 17 years old. At this point in time I'm 34 years old, waiting to finally go home. That's easy to say, but when I look back, it was a very hard road I will never forget. It took a lot of helpful TOOLS to help me OVERCOME PRISON!

*FIRST, at a young age (or whatever age you are) you have to sit yourself down and ask yourself what do you want out of life (and Prison Life?) You can do time the hard way, or time the so-called easy way. Remember its your CHOICE. When I came up with the DECISION that my past life got me here, and it was not helpful to me, so why live it here where it will not get me anywhere, so I must change all that was wrong about me, and better myself from this point on. So you must make a FULL HEART CHANGE about yourself.

*Secondly, I was tried because of my Decision to change. Remember you will always be tried in whatever Decision you make. That lets you know if you were true to your Decision. That's when you must prepare yourself for what is to come your way. Here is a list of what I did, and it still applies today:

A. Find out on your prison units what helpful classes that they have to offer to you. No matter what it is. All self help classes will help you in some form or another. Even if you feel like you know it, take it, you will always learn something new from it. Remember there is always more than one mind (person) in there.
B. G.E.D Trade class (vocational) and college classes, these will be very helpful to you. For one, you will feel better about yourself. Your confidence will grow for what you have done, by finishing something helpful for yourself. And you will feel a whole lot better about who you are. *One key factor I see in education, you will learn to solve problems. Apply it to your life!

*Thirdly, put everything into ACTION! Let it become your daily lifestyle that will become you. NO, it will not take overnight to become that person of change. You must put it into action every day of your life. Remember you're not alone on this road of Overcoming Prison. There are others who will join you, if you can find that person or persons who are of a like mind. Stick together and help one another on this road of Overcoming Prison For at times you will need that someone who you need to talk to and he or she will need you as well. Together you will stand!

—Mark Soto Perez

The issue of health in single cell (ad-seg) conditions can be broken into three distinct groupings of equal importance. Physical, mental and emotional health can all be impaired by long-term incarceration in low grade sensory deprivation. To reduce these effects require thought and a willingness to take appropriate action.

With reduced mobility it's easy to become sedentary. If you allow yourself to give in to lethargy you will find your physical health quickly deteriorating.

The diet in prison is high in carbohydrates, what we once called starches. Add to that the junk food sold on the prison commissary and you'll understand why it's so easy for prisoners to become obese. It's human nature to replace what's missing in our lives with any available substitute. No sex?

Eat. No drugs? Eat. No cigarettes? Eat. With no healthy foods available in quantity to substitute for the high salt, high cholesterol, high fat ones, we are left with one answer. Resist, eat less and leave the salt alone, period.

Exercise can be as easy or hard as you wish. If you want to be a bodybuilder that's up to you, but for your health you need a twenty minute daily routine that gets your blood moving, your heart and lungs pumping and stretches out your muscles and joints so you don't lose mobility and keep your blood pressure down and your heart healthy. You must be the judge of what's right for you. Opting out is not an option, unless you want a stroke or heart attack. Your choice.

Mental health may be the hardest to maintain. What has worked for me is simple. You can't survive ad-seg without getting to know who you are. You're in big trouble if you can't learn to like you since you are all you have. Look at who you are and decide if this is the person you want to continue being. Forgive yourself for your past and move toward a new future by deciding how you wish to change and setting goals to transform yourself. Positive growth can come as a result of such introspection and ad-seg is the perfect place for it.

Facing reality is never easy or fun, but unless you want to become delusional, you'll need to do it. Look at your sentence, criminal history and disciplinary records. Be honest and accept responsibility. Do you deserve parole? Come to grips with the worst case scenario. Don't give up, just stop sweating what you can't do anything about. Do what you can and then let it go. Stress can be your worst enemy and setting too high an expectation for parole or release to general population can raise your stress levels so much that you destroy any chance you might have had by your actions. Don't take it personal. It's a bureaucracy and not worthy of hostility. You really can't fight the system. I've tried. You can do more working from within.

Create a life within the boundaries of your incarceration. For me, that has been writing. It may not suit you. Prison limits our options, but producing any thing of value can certainly raise our self-esteem. Each of us has a story to tell and we can help others by sharing it. In helping others we also help ourselves. Make an effort to inspire fellow prisoners and help them survive. If we refuse to help each other how can we expect non-prisoners to help us?

In my fifteen years in prison I've lost all of my emotional support. Mom died. My family gave up on me. I lost my common-law-wife, she was also my co-defendant, when I realized she was an emotional drain due to her jealousy. Some die, some desert us and others, if we're honest are not good for us anyway.

My family has been replaced by a collection of friends. If you build friendships on a foundation of honesty they'll last. Three friends provide the emotional support I need. All were met by chance. In my opinion, the pen pal romance game played by so many prisoners is destructive to emotional well-beings. It's worse for prisoners with little or no chance of ever getting out. These serial relationships by mail create an emotional roller coaster.

My friends all know I'm probably not going to live to get out. All I want is friendship. I ask for nothing else. I provided them with documentation of my time and other pertinent information so they never doubt my honesty and urge them to ask what they will. This builds trust and friendship blossoms. They care about me and when I get in trouble they stand by me. Honesty is a cheap price to pay for friendship so I'm not left alone.

Don't think I'm some sort of saint. I'm not and I don't portray myself that way. If you set high goals for your conduct you are sure to fail at times to live up to your expectations. I often share my goals without an explanation of how often I fail. It gives you the wrong impression. My blood pressure tends to be high and I'm overweight. I eat too much junk food at times and forget, or ignore, the need to exercise daily. My temper gets me in trouble. These are only suggestions that might help you survive while you find your own way to get by. Only you can decide what is important to you.

Why listen to me? February 2, 2007 was my fifteenth anniversary and I've spent eight of the last nine years in ad-seg. Not to brag, but I'm fairly sane and have been using my time productively for the last five years. Not everyone can say that.

In the end, these suggestions are not being written for you though I hope some of you will benefit from them. I do this for me. By making an effort to help others I help myself. You can do the same.

—Daniel Harris

2. *What advice would I give to a "fish" just starting out a long sentence?*

The advice I would give to a "newboot" or "fish" starting a long sentence would be first and foremost, do not lose hope! It will be easy to do but fight that feeling. 12, 20, etc seems like forever, even if you have to pull ½, but it goes quick. Your days will become a routine, changing very little as each year goes by. Also always keep in mind, laws change everyday. You never know when one will pass and it will benefit you, but don't dwell on this. Never count your days because it makes it seem longer, and is the quickest way to get discouraged. Keep your head up and stay positive, cause one way or another there is an end to your confinement, and right after a beautiful new beginning!

My most important piece of advice for a newboot: be yourself. It's way too easy to come down and become a follower. Eventually you're going to get tired of the charade, so why play at all? Be yourself! More people respect you when you are yourself. Nobody likes a liar or a faker. They're not trusted and trust and honesty are, believe it or not respected by most. Not everyone could be a drug kingpin brought low by the system so don't try to be one, ya dig?

Stay in communication with your family. Family support will help ease the passage of time. I know not everyone has this available. So next best thing, a relative or a friend, a pen pal. Some connection to the outside because you tend to lose touch once the fences/bars become your walls and the buildings become your apartments, the sidewalks, your street. Always try to remember, ours is a tiny world, but part of a big one.

Almost 90% of prison is common sense stuff. You don't have to be street-smart or have hood credibility to survive your sentence. Be on the lookout for the "Game" guys. Not everyone is like this, remember that. The majority are guys/girls trying to go home just like you and are not looking for bull crap.

Don't judge anybody because you're an inmate too. There are caste rules behind bars. Do your best to ignore them. This goes back to be yourself!

Do not isolate yourself. Make acquaintances, associate with people. Talk, b.s., crack jokes. These are the people who are going to be living with you for your time. Some you might get to know real well, regardless of race. And chances are very good, these are the ones who will help you overcome your bouts of despair. Because you will have them, as sure as God made little apples. Being sociable is the biggest part of prison life. If you isolate yourself, your life can become hell. You do have "wolves" in prison. For you to isolate yourself and to succumb to your time ensures that you become a "sheep." Think about it. Even though you're in prison looking at a stretch it could be worse. It can always, always be worse. You might have 20, but the guy has 75 with 20 stacked. Or you have life w/ parole. Hey hey, your neighbor has life w/o parole.

Try to follow the rules. They're easy for the most part and you will pick them up quick. Take it from someone who started off "close custody" for 2 years. Med custody 8 months. Minimum 1.5 Ad-seg 2 years and counting...being in a 10 foot long 8 foot wide cell with a 4 foot wide window at the very top of the cell? 23 hour lockdown? Trust me newboot, follow the rules cause ad seg sucks. High security is worse and prison systems across the U.S. are not playing anymore. You want to break the rules? Really? They always have a place for you. Always.

Last, keep your eyes open, your ears open. Take advice from old schools if they give it. Observe your surroundings and learn what is acceptable rules-wise and what's not. It's easy. It's

all easy. But to accomplish this you have to learn the number 1 rules that all inmates learn, break and relearn. Since you're new, and an ol' school passed it to me, well I guess I'll pass it to you cause we cool. Number 1 rule "DO NOT LOSE HOPE!"

—Rene Joe De La Rosa



FINAL NOTES AND OPPORTUNITIES

I get many suggestions from you all about programs you would like to see initiated. This issue of the newsletter will float by 2 ideas from Joseph Fritz. First he suggests we create a Dungeons and Dragons game by mail. He sent me some fairly complex instructions on how we could do this. He basically will take a lot of the work of managing the game, and I'll be forwarding your information to him. I don't know how exactly we will do it all, but I first want to gauge what interest you have in playing D&D by mail. He says that you will have to enclose stamped envelope to be able to receive the game updates. I know that Prisoner Express cannot afford to take on the postage cost for this. I'm not sure how many players it would be limited too. Drop me a line if you'd like to be involved in a D&D group by mail, and I will forward Joseph's plan to you.

Joseph is a renaissance man and has many interests. He has also suggested an erotic writing program. His idea is that it would work like the theme writing program. You write your erotic story and send it in. We compile them and then send each participant a copy of what everyone else wrote. I have some concerns about this, but figure I'd float the idea to see if this grabs anyone's fancy. So if you would like to take a try at crafting literature that has an erotic bent, here's your chance to be read by your peers. I will also post it on the website. Perhaps it will attract a different class of readers. I'd be interested in your feedback. I will accept erotic essays for the packet until Dec 1. then I will create the packet of the writings and send them to all participants. Am I opening Pandora's Box?

For you regular readers of PE you might notice how I am not mentioning pen pals until late in the newsletter. I am finding it hard to recruit regular pen pals. The best ways of getting mail from me or one of the PE volunteers is to participate in the programs. We will soon be posting the addresses of all the folks who have been writing on our website. Currently that group is made up of the theme writers, the journal keepers and some of the poets. We hope to keep adding to that group by putting your artwork on the website as well. I am so excited by the upcoming art show, and believe it will invigorate our art programs. On that note this is the first newsletter where I have not mentioned origami. Usually I have it as a program offering, but I still have not managed to develop the instruction manual. I haven't given up but will wait for the packet to be created before I offer it. We are constantly busy keeping up with your requests and our desire to create interesting programs for you, and there is only so much we can do. One thing I learned studying to be a school teacher was modify and adjust your lessons based on what is happening in the class. While PE is not a class I constantly have to modify and adjust what we do to make it possible to keep growing and accommodating all of the creativity we share as a group. I apologize for how long it can take us to follow through on some of our programs, but as I said before it is a money thing, and I need 200 responses often to afford a mailing. So when you sign up for a program and then do not follow thru it can cause others to have to wait for their return mail. An example is the 135 out of 400 who returned their math placement exam. They are waiting till another 65 of you send your exams, so I can afford to mail out the results. We are all in this together.

Here in Ithaca, NY the seasonal changes are occurring. Even though it is late August already the harvest season is approaching. Lots of fruits, vegetables and herbs to put aside for the winter. I freeze, dry, or root cellar most of my garden bounty. I am just finishing my garlic and onion

REGISTRATION FORM

Please note- If you have received this newsletter you are on our mailing list for 2007, and if you do not wish to participate in any of our specific programs or update your program registration you do not need to return the registration form. If you want to participate in some of the programs including the new Book Discussion group, history project or poetry project this form should be returned in a timely manner. I hope to begin mailings by the end of April. Note on the form when there are deadlines for registration. You are always free to request books and they are sent on a first come first serve basis. Currently there are about 500 names on the list and we send out about 150 a month. **If you don't want to cut up your newsletter, you may copy the registration form on a separate piece of paper, but make sure you include all information required for the programs.**

Personal Profile - Please check one choice and then print your name and sign in the spaces provided. Even if you check A, B or C, you can still ask that a particular piece of writing be posted as anonymous or never posted at all. We will respect your wishes.

I give the Alternatives Library permission to post my personal profile, writings and artwork on the web using the following guidelines:

- A. Use my name on my artwork, and my other writings
- B. Use my name on my artwork, but not on my other writings
- C. Do not use my name on my writings or artwork, but you may use any of my work and post it as anonymous
- D. Do not use my name or any of my writings in your program.

Programs – Please check the box of each program you wish to participate in. Carefully read the requirements of each program before signing up.

Book Mailings – I wish to receive books. Enclose a separate sheet detailing the types of books wanted.

A. How many books can you receive in a mailing? _____

B. What type of book can you receive? Check one.

soft cover hardcover both are accepted
 Poetry Project – Please send me the 2nd Edition *Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology*. **I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem to be considered for the anthology.** We hope to mail this out Jan '08 so please send your poetry for consideration in quickly.

Art Contest/Exhibit – Please consider my art for entry into the fall **Prisoner Express Art Show/Contest**. I understand the artwork will be used for a fundraiser to generate income for the Prisoner Express Distance Education Program. Everyone sending in artwork will be enrolled in the scholarship contest and receive updates on the art show.

History Project – I'm interested in studying world history, please send me the next unit (check one or both)

featuring **Ancient Rome**

featuring **African Civilizations to 1500AD.**

Math Project – Please enroll me and send the pre algebra course placement exam. If you have already received the placement exam please do not sign up again.

Journal Project – Please send me more information. This involves a commitment to keep a journal about your life and experiences for 1 year, and sharing that journal with Prisoner Express for publication with other journals. Next bulk mailing for interested participants will be in the late spring.

Brain Games – Please send me your newest pamphlet of mind bending problems, puzzles and mazes. I want my thinking processes challenged!

Book Club – New book discussion group. Please send me a copy of *Lost and Found* and the discussion questions. Limited to first 300 responses.

2008 Prisoner Express Newsletter I wish to enroll for another year (2008) as a member of the Prisoner Express Program.

Yoga Instruction Packet Please send me this valuable life skills packet so that I may increase both my awareness and flexibility.

NAME: (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

Donations are needed and welcomed. Any help you or your family can give, even something as small as a stamp, is greatly appreciated. Your donations help keep Prisoner Express running,

PRISONER EXPRESS
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127 Anabel Taylor Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853-100

Final Notes (continued from page 19) - harvest, and have begun digging up potatoes. For my 8 and 5 year old children it is like magic. We pull out the plant and start burrowing into the dirt and eventually they come up with handfuls of bright red potatoes. Not only is it fun, but they are so good to eat. When they are fresh like that they cook up fast. I am also freezing lots of leafy greens, kale, collard, beet greens, and broccoli. The corn will soon be ready, but I fear it will attract critters that will eat it at night. I've taken to emptying my compost bucket next to the garden. It is full of household food waste. I see every morning that it is gone and surmise the critters gobble it up, and probably their full belly keeps them from burrowing or jumping the garden fence. I've got some big pumpkins growing at the far end of the garden. They will be used at Halloween.

Working at the Durland Alternatives Library has me stamping books when people take them out. Books go for a month so I'm already stamping the end of Sept. It makes me even more aware of the end of summer. Here in upstate NY the seasons are very distinct, and while we have all 4, winter is the longest and can start as early as Nov 1 and go all the way through mid April. There is a lot to do to get ready, especially firewood. I have a lot delivered, but still have to bring in more. A neighbor cut down a lot of locust trees and they are mine for the hauling, so that will be some of what I'm up to the next few weekends.

Stamping the books ahead can get me out of the present and thinking about the future. The point of the newsletter is to remind you as best as possible the importance of the now. The future is only in our mind and the now is what we really have. I can understand how in prison living in the future can bring a certain escape from dreary or hard experiences, but in the long run perhaps there is something you can do in the present that is even a more effective way of dealing with your situation. I don't pretend to know the answer. While I believe there is intelligent design in the universe I am not personally in touch with the creator. It all seems so far from the life I live, and god seems like something humans invent to feel okay about not knowing what is really going on in the cosmos. God as a creation of humans is fun to speculate about,

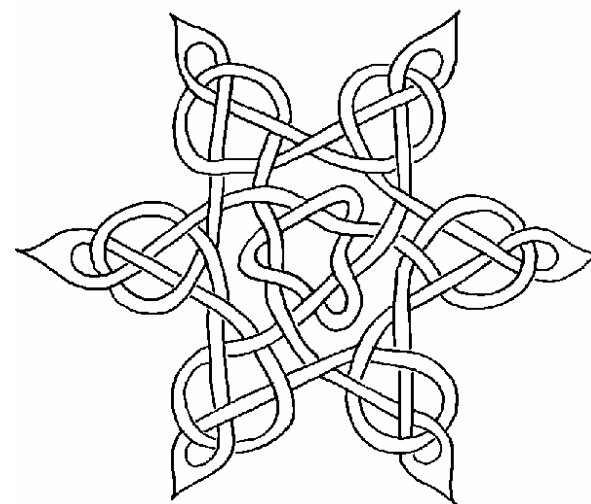
but for me there is no absolute proof of anything other than that up to now god is unknowable. Yet I do take comfort in the intelligent design of the universe. Things are orderly and natural laws give us guidance on how to best conduct ourselves. I don't know if this life is all there is or we go on and on in some way or another. So even without having any clue about what is going on I do know that everything in this universe adds up to 1 and that however small I am I am part of that 1, and that so are all of you, and through that connection I urge you to stay strong, look deep inside yourself for what is your true nature and calling, and to participate in the programs we offer that can help you reveal yourself to yourself. We all have a shot in this life to better ourselves and deepen our understanding. By bettering ourselves I don't mean material possessions, but rather to grow as living conscious beings. It is a unique gift in a world and universe where most objects seem to be rock and molten gasses. That we have risen up from the earth for this temporary experience of life as we know it has to be regarded as nothing short of miraculous. What we take for granted is really beyond belief. Life experiences are the tools we have for learning truth. We all have different paths, but our composite experience creates our culture and controls the future of our human experience. I honor life on this planet, and I am glad we all share it.

Thank you again for being part of this endeavor. Without you there would be no reason for this. Perhaps that should be our ultimate goal; a world where there is no need of the services we provide. We must find a way to live together with respect and dignity and eliminate the criminalizing of non violent victimless crimes.

Yours in mind-expanding adventure,
Gary

Answer to Brain Games (page 3)

- 1) A coffin.
- 2) 29 (TWENTY NINE)
- 3) "Polish" and "polish."
- 4) Herein: The words it contains are: "he," "her," "here," "ere," "re," "rein," "I," and "in."
- 5) Neither. That rectangle could not possibly exist in three dimensions.
- 6) 1: Fold straight down the middle so that the 7 is behind the 8 and the 4 behind the 1 etc.
2: Fold the 1 and 8 behind so that the 2 and 3 are now on the front
3: Here's the tricky bit... Lift the 2 so that you can see a gap between the 3 and 6. Fold the 4 and 5 into that gap and flatten the whole thing.
4: Now simply fold the 2 and 1 over the 3.



Lawyer Jokes

Q: What's the difference between a good lawyer and a great lawyer?

A: A good lawyer knows the law. A great lawyer knows the judge.

"You seem to be in some distress," said the kindly judge to the witness. "Is anything the matter?"

"Well, your Honor," said the witness, "I swore to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but every time I try, some lawyer objects."