

PRISON PROJECT UPDATE

by Swami Padmapadananda



Dear friends,

Seven years ago during a time of great trauma and sorrow (including the death of my mother) I fell into a terrible depression. I started using drugs (heroin) and within three years I had lost everything I owned - my home, car, the business I owned, everything, and more importantly, in the end, the love, trust and respect of my family and friends. I resorted to robbing banks to supply my habit.

So here I am, forty-six years old in prison for seven years with nothing but the prison clothes on my back. And something wonderful is happening! I feel very free. I realize I've been in far worse prisons on the outside, like the prison of drug addiction. I've always felt that there was so much more to life than going to work, getting a job, a wife, or a house. So I spent a great deal of my life literally traveling the world in search of this truth, this understanding. And I realize now, the trauma of what I've done to my life is life staring back at me - in my face. Maybe it took losing everything material to awake to the realization that none of that stuff really matters. All the material stuff is just stuff. It never made me happy, and I realize that in the end it wasn't that hard to give up, really! Or maybe it's just time for me? Whatever, it is really not important! What is, is that I'm here! Right here, right now! And all the searching and travel was not necessary (for me anyway.) Actually in retrospect - the more I chased the further away it was. It only took for me to just stop. To be still, to look deep, deep inside, to touch my heart, my soul and to let go of everything else. To realize that I am That!

Everything that I've been searching for is right here. It always has been, just waiting for me to awaken. And I know now that I truly am never alone.

M.T.

Activity was a little slow this year due to my absence from the Ranch in the summer; when the Project was put on hold. The teaching was lovingly continued by Krishnadas, who did such a good job that on my return I found some of the classes had grown considerably. The most striking result was the positive improvement in the men from the Mental Health Department. When we began this class just a year ago their span of attention was very short. Their perseverance has won out and now that class, which started out as a huge challenge, is now almost like a normal, regular class. I feel this is a minor miracle that only the Lord can explain.

In January 2004, I moved to Los Angeles to direct the Center there. The teaching in the local prisons has been continued by Narayana Chaitanya. Paul Magennis took over the processing of incoming letters and mailing books. I am continuing to answer all mail requiring specific information or help, and keep overall supervision of the Project.

Statistics for the year 2003 are as follows:

Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga 241,

Meditation and Mantras 35,

Yoga Mind and Body 44,

Others 149.

Total books 469, as well as *Yoga Life* and small items like japa malas and neti pots.

Dear Brothers, Sisters

The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga that you sent me back in August has made significant changes in the quality of my life.

I was on chemotherapy and morphine for the pain. I am in bed a lot and put on weight. All this affects my mental state and the ability to concentrate. I'm a prisoner here in Trenton State Prison for the last 28 years so I have plenty of time to practice.

The book you blessed me with has stabilized my body, and my mind settles down as well.

I've been trying mantra to develop concentration but I don't know what I'm doing. Could you send me Swami Vishnu-devananda's book

Meditation and Mantras and also

Concentration and Meditation by Swami

Sivananda. Forgive me but I have no money.

I fear I must use my begging bowl again.

Thank you and peace through meditation.

Your brother,

P.

ANY DONATIONS FOR THE PRISON PROJECT ARE GRATEFULLY RECEIVED. PLEASE SEND THEM TO THE PRISON PROJECT, SIVANANDA ASHRAM YOGA RANCH, PO Box 195, BUDD ROAD, WOODBOURNE, NY 12788 OR CONTACT THEM BY E-MAIL AT: ranch@sivananda.org