

# Facing Change, Changing Face

A seminar for people who work within  
and care about the prison system

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HELD AT



The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

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## Spirituality in Prison – Seminar Report: Facing Change, Changing Face

### Setting the Scene

With Gail Bradley, Regional Resettlement Strategy Co-ordinator for Peter Wrench, Prisoner Administration Group, Sister Maureen, Programme Co-ordinator, Brahma Kumaris

On the Tuesday evening, fifty participants gathered together for the tenth annual seminar for prison staff in the beautiful country house of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University. They came from more than a dozen prisons across the UK plus international guests from the Polish Prison Service and the Belgium Social Services.

Gail gave an overview of the value of ten years of these residential retreats and introduced the seminar and its legitimacy with the challenges, expectations and effects on the penal system.

Small group discussions investigated what change meant to them personally and what was the biggest change each were currently facing.

The evening session was rounded off by Sister Maureen introducing the ethos of the Global Retreat Centre, its intensive work with many sectors of society, and its national and international connections.

### Architects of Change

With Neville Hodgkinson, Author & Journalist, Gabriella Goddard, Managing Director, Claravia, Sister Jayanti, European Director, Brahma Kumaris.

Gabriella began by sharing her personal experience of how managing staff redundancy brought about personal change within herself and influenced her perceptions and values.

*"I had team members in my office planning for the year ahead and I would be saying 'yes, that is a great idea,' knowing full well that I had put them on a list for probable redundancy. I couldn't deal with the lack of integrity."*

She found the process so stressful that she took coaching, an experience that inspired her to train as a coach herself in order to pass on the skills.

*"I realized I was taking on too much responsibility for my team. I was playing the rescuer and wanted to save everybody. That wasn't my job. I couldn't guarantee their job security but I could coach them on who they were and what they wanted to do."*

*Often when we work for an organisation we hand over our power to them. It is important to look at what you can take responsibility for in yourself, your career and*

*your life. I could have given a much stronger development plan, a sense of direction that was independent of where they were actually working at that moment."*

Sister Jayanti shared how many people come to the University at a time of personal change and instability because they recognize the need to address change at an inner level and become wiser to their own identity and self worth.

*"We help them with that in terms of getting them in touch with their own dignity so that their dignity is no longer dependent on the label outside the door or the label that is on the desk. As a human being I am valuable just as I am and the work that I do is something that is separate."*

*Through knowing and valuing myself I am creating a stable base, an independent spirit, that is unaffected by whatever is happening externally. However, it is a reality that we don't know ourselves very well because we haven't given ourselves time. When one spends time with oneself they are able to understand the whole process of transformation."*

*It is very beautiful to see how people get to know themselves. Through knowing both their strengths and weaknesses they are able to manage their weaknesses and develop their strengths."*

*If I were to see my own weaknesses in isolation it would be depressing and cause of loss of hope. When I see first my strengths and start using those, then I have the confidence and the power to look at my weaknesses and to change them. Then, if others comment on those weaknesses it doesn't cause pain."*

*In response to external change, I need to be in charge of myself to cope with those changes. On the one hand, there has to be the flexibility to move with the situations and on the other hand there has to be an inner strength that holds you as an anchor."*

Both agreed that the values and vision of an organisation become effective when there is the courage of the individual to positively engage with wisdom, truth, faith and consistency.

Alignment with organizational values harnesses the power of the organisation to help you fulfil what you would like to do. However, sometimes people adapt to the organisation and its values in ways that are actually making them unhappy by going against how they would really like to behave. What can one do about that to help people survive better within an environment that they don't feel is nourishing them?

Gabriella shared her perspective.

*"I think of an organisation as a green house and the people who work there as plants. If you are in an*

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*environment that is not conducive to your growth you are not going to flourish. It is, therefore, about knowing who you are and what you need from your environment. At each point in life, it's your choice."*

One tool to help actualize our hopes is to become more conscious about how we project ourselves – personal branding. Within seconds of meeting someone we are making judgments about them based on subtle cues we receive. We, too, need to think about the signals that we give out to others. Gabriella, an expert on personal branding said,

*"The ideal is to create branding from an authentic core. Each one of us is like a diamond with many facets of which we perhaps reveal only a few. Maybe there are qualities or strengths that are underused. In branding we look at personal strengths and select two or three to develop more. We aim to line up our self image and our projected image. Actually, this is your gift to the world."*

Gabriella suggested that, with a group of friends, ask them to describe your strengths in three words. Do they recognize something in you that they would like to see more of?

*"I have a client who is a TV presenter and comes across as quite stern. When you talk to this woman she has got the most wicked sense of humour which is what makes her really unique. So part of her coaching is to bring out that humour – not saying, 'be funny' because that is already a part of who she is."*

In the Prison Service, where there is a need to balance the exterior, stern appearance of authority with the softer side of caring, how might this work? Gabriella suggested to use the same approach.

*"Write down three words of how you would like prisoners to describe you."*

*How do you need to behave to really project, live and breathe those qualities? If respect is one quality you want the prisoners to be seeing, then respect yourself first – the only way is to start with yourself."*

*Focus on these three qualities for a month and you will find that people start to use those words around you. These become your rules of engagement for the next month. not just at work but all areas of life."*

Sister Jayanti suggested that,

*"To continue the analogy of the plant, if you are in the presence of the sun then the plant is able to blossom; whatever is latent within the plant is able to be expressed. So, for a few minutes everyday, before I start work, I experience the light, warmth and love from the Divine then that which is the highest and the best in me emerges. That is what I then share with others."*

The question was asked that if, in your organization, changes are happening that are not in line with your inner values, what can you do about that?

Sister Jayanti emphasised the importance of staying.

*"To leave is giving permission to the things that are not right to gain strength and develop further. If you stay, then you and others who think like you will have a positive impact. This takes a lot of inner power, courage and commitment but people find that with meditation they discover that power."*

*There is a lot of opportunity for learning within conflict. If you continue to sidestep you will find the same situation repeating at a later date. Even though it might be painful moving through the change, it will make you a stronger person."*

It was suggested that having a strong sense of personal purpose is also important to navigating through a change process.

*"Purpose is key. If you are aware and clear of your purpose then it is easy to adapt to changing ideas and circumstances otherwise all sorts of little things will shake you."*

Sometimes in life we have sense of the difference we can make. A quote from Anita Roddick of Body Shop was shared and appreciated by the audience – "If you think you are too small to make an impact, try sleeping with a mosquito."

Participants took part in a short exercise.

*"What called you to come into the Prison Service to work with prisoners? With your purpose, what difference do you want to make within the Prison Service? Take a minute to write down what your purpose is. Don't be afraid to think big – think of the mosquito."*

### Question

Do you think our behaviour is affected by the people with whom we mix? Can they rob us of our energy if they themselves need energy?

Sister Jayanti replied,

*"Absolutely. It is important to realize that the negative forces surround us continually and not just the influence of friends but also the impact of television, films, videos as well as the things that I read. Research shows the impact that images have on our thoughts and feelings."*

*There is a law that says that for every action there is going to be an equal and opposite reaction. This also applies to ourselves. If I feel good about you those feelings will reach you and you'll begin to think well of me."*

*If I built up a bank of goodwill then if I make a mistake, you will say, 'never mind, it is OK' If I don't have that accumulated goodwill and say a word that is out of*

*place, I am on the line. We don't have to be a victim of circumstance."*

*Think about a roller coaster. When it is coming down it needs no help, When it is on its way up it needs a powerful engine to drive it. Because of the current forces around us are taking us down we have to find our own inner space in which to access that power.*

### Foundations of Change

Malcolm Gillian, Head of Resettlement, HMYOI Huntercombe

Malcolm shared his experience of working for 24 years in the Prison System from prison officer to governor grade, twenty years of which had been working with young offenders.

*"I joined the prison service in 1980 working within the borstal system – a value-based system.*

*My very first lesson was, if you tell a trainee that you are going to do something for him, make sure that you do. If you are unable to do it then go back and tell him that you can't do it and why not.*

*It was about treating people with dignity, respect and honesty. We were being encouraged to set an example that was very positive."*

The foundations that helped Mal through these exciting, challenging changes where the values of respect, honesty and dignity.

*If you get too close then you become too involved and can't make appropriate judgments. If you become too detached then your judgments have no value or impact. The correct perspective is to have 'warm detachment.' This is about realizing the impact of your decisions, judgments, actions and words; being detached enough to think about that before you do it and warm enough to care."*

For Mal, underpinning all of this has been compassion for the human condition, an ability to accept and welcome change without it affecting his core values, and a deeper wisdom for their usage.

*"Above all, the most important value is compassion. If you let that influence everything that you do then everything else will fall into place for it is about love, care and respect. However, sometimes I lose sight of that. Coming here helps me to reconnect. When I go back I am stronger, more resolute about what I am going to do and how I view the world. This makes me stronger in the face of the derision found within a prison setting."*

More recently, UNICEF invited Mal to Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo to work with prison officers working with young offenders. This made Mal aware of great cultural differences.

*"I went to Kosovo expecting to be able to say to them, 'this is the way that we do it' and they would grab it with both hands. In fact they challenged the way we do some of it. We lock a young person in a single cell because we think they are safer that way; they don't get abused, beaten up, nor their canteen taken away. In Kosovo, they think that is absolutely abhorrent. They always put youngsters in dormitories because they think that is civilized.*

*We make assumptions that what we do and the way we do it is right. Periodically it is worth being questioned as well as for us to question ourselves."*

To further explore the foundations of change, three questions were asked to participants.

1. *As you look back over your life, focus on a particular situation or a period of time that stands out as a time when you felt able to embrace positive change. Tell that story. If it involved someone else what did they contribute that made it possible? What values underpinned that change? What good feelings did it bring?*

2. *A personal positive vision of the future can be described as our preferred future state. When you see the future clearly it becomes a powerful incentive to influence our present decision making.*

*Imagine that we are five years into the future – it is 2009 – all the values, practices and positive feelings that you identified in question 1 are now present in your work place. How does that look, feel, and sound? What is the atmosphere? How do your colleagues relate to you?*

3. *What three key areas of your own personal inner change have contributed most to the external changes that you are describing.*

In the feedback it was clear that there needed to be flexibility when embracing change, whether negative or positive and that came from empowering the self with positive self-regard.

*"Despite very different stories and areas of work key words were decency, respect, and dignity."*

**Ryszard Seroczynski**, Senior Officer, Cultural and Educational Wing, Wloclawek Prison, Poland.

Richard gave a beautiful presentation of his work with long-term prisoners in a mainstream Polish prison. It was of interest for all to see what could be achieved when the custodian taps into the creativity of the imprisoned, helping them live more fulfilling lives – one prisoner had received a national award for poetry.

### Building Blocks for Change

Workshop facilitated by John McConnel, Trainer  
Juliette Brown, Management Training Consultant

A series of practical, experiential exercises were conducted that explored the quality of thoughts and our adaptability at times of change.

For example, participants were asked to write down 16 words or phrases that described themselves. Then, working through the list, delete each descriptor that relates to the body (age, appearance etc.), roles, relationships, possessions, belief system (politics, faith etc.) or any negative comments.

What is crossed off tends to be things that are beyond our control, that are transitory. What remains tends to be qualities and value-based actions. A high cross-off list is indicative of a more external identification of the self. This highlights a need to be more introspective, giving more attention to the internal. A low cross-off list indicates identification with the internal. This focus on those aspects that are not transient but stable leads us to be more able to ride the storms of change.

Other key points from the session.

- Perception influences thought. Thoughts are the precursor of emotions. Emotions impact on my physical well-being, which in turn influences my actions. As we each perceive situations differently, a different flow of thoughts, emotions and experiences are generated.
- According to my perception, I can create positive or negative thoughts.
- I create the thought and so I am responsible for the thought, the feeling, the action. I can't blame others.
- At each moment I have a choice of the thoughts I create – reactionary (the first thought that springs to mind) or responsive (given consideration to all the factors)

The definition of positive thought could therefore be, *any thought that brings benefit to myself and others. That benefit can be at a physical, mental, emotional or spiritual level.*

### Creating Inner Stability

Dadi Janki, Co-Administrative Head, Brahma Kumaris

Dadi spoke about three different topics; stability, value of thoughts, and honesty and truth

Stability: *“Without stability of the intellect it gets caught up in a lot of unnecessary thinking, in sorrow, pain and doubt. This creates fluctuation. Concerns of the past or fears of the future don't allow me to remain still inside. When I go deep inside I begin to recognize unnecessary or waste things that drain my energy.*

*Look within and ask myself if I have inner peace, happiness and power? If not, why not?*

*An atmosphere of quiet, such as here on the retreat, enables me to go within, make everything very still and to merge everything else. Sometimes when people have a period of silence, they don't speak yet there are still things going on inside; still worries or concerns. Here, we have to go beyond that, to have the thought of making ourselves peaceful inside.”*

Valuing My Thoughts: Dadi gave the example of a valuable diamond. So too, we should consider our inner peace to be that valuable. To access this diamond throw away all other thoughts and concerns. Too many thoughts will prevent you from accessing the diamond.

*“For this, I have to pay a great deal of attention to myself inside. Even one negative thought can bring bankruptcy. Let me have that much attention to accumulating positivity – good thoughts, pure thoughts, happiness. When the mind is peaceful and happy inside then I have power. The intellect becomes unshakable and immovable.*

There are the words in the scriptures in India where God has spoken to Arjuna. And he said to Arjuna, saying keep your mind concentrated, keep it peaceful and connected to me and you will experience happiness.

*I accumulate an energy of compassion and I am able to share this energy with others around me, I will want to cooperate with others. If I don't have this energy inside of me, I will keep on complaining about one thing or another. Such a person will not have contentment or tolerance inside.*

*It is when I give value to my thoughts that I begin to realise the value of what I have inside. You are on the path to create such a beautiful and valuable life so how can you say that you don't have time.”*

When Dadi first started teaching meditation she would think about what kind of thoughts she needed to create to give energy. In India they have a saying that when you churn butter, you do it from cream, not from churning water. If you want to create a building then you first create a strong foundation. What are you doing?

Honesty and Truth: *The main thing is truth, the practical proof of which is honesty with myself and in our actions and relationships I shouldn't hide what I really am on the inside and have a show something different on the outside. Let the seed of honesty be so strong that it doesn't have any mixture in it whatsoever. Others should feel that honesty from me. If there is any trace of greed, jealousy or selfishness then honesty cannot stay with me.*

*If a situation comes in front of me and I start to experience a little fear, that fear shows on my face and*

*that situation will overcome me. If that situation comes in front of me and I remain stable in my inner peace then that situation will go away by itself.*

*We don't have to become too delicate nor too forceful. Those who are sensitive become affected by things too quickly. Sometimes some become too forceful and tough, as though they don't care about anyone else. We have to develop a merciful and honest heart and give everyone happiness.*

*Let the thoughts in my mind be clean. To constantly keep the mind healthy I need to 'water' it constantly with good clean thoughts. I look into the mirror of the heart and ask myself what I have to change, what weaknesses or defects that I have to finish, and what are the virtues I need to develop in myself. Then I will easily be able to achieve success. The diamond is for the future. As I let go of the rubbish I secure my future and that of others around me.*

*One who has this kind of trust is able to remain in the fortress of happiness, not a jail. The walls of a fortress are very high, as are those of a jail. When in a fortress there is the concern that nothing from outside should come in. Live in a fortress."*

### The Power of Awareness

Ann Renton, *'Family Matters', New Bridge*

Doug Stephenson, *Prison Education Co-ordinator, Brahma Kumaris*

The workshop provided participants with practical experience of the concerns and fears of a change process. These are summarized in the following seven observations and their respective solutions.

**1. People will feel awkward, ill at ease and self-conscious.**

Ensure people are properly informed and aware of impending changes before they happen.

**2. People will assume they have to give something up.**

Always clarify what there is to gain from the impending change.

**3. People won't think of new ways until the old way becomes too uncomfortable.**

Make sure that people realise that the old ways aren't going to work any longer.

**4. People will feel alone even though everyone is going through the same change.**

Take time to build trust and help people readjust their way of thinking to the new experience.

**5. People are at different levels of readiness for change.**

Be sensitive to the underlying feelings of others. Listen to those who are resistant as there are probably good reasons for their response.

**6. People can only handle so much.**

Involve people early in the change process and let them set their own limits.

**7. When you take the pressure off, people revert to their old behaviour.**

Don't try to change people. With the right information and inspiration, they will change themselves.

Management consultant, Stephen Covey suggested that, "people can't live with change if there is not a changeless core inside of them. The key to the ability to change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about and what you value."

The connection between ones values and that 'changeless core' was explored through the association of eight powers.

*"There is a close connection between our values/virtues and our inner personal powers. Without the powers I cannot use my virtues. I may be caring and compassionate but if I do not have the power of tolerance, I lose the ability to use those virtues. We need to develop these powers."*

Eight specific powers follow in succession

- power to **withdraw** - to create a little distance from the world around you.

- power to **pack up** - to stop thoughts not directly necessary at this moment. Once I have control over the direction of my thoughts I can begin to see the world around me without reacting.

- power to **tolerate** - to utilize knowledge and insight that enables me to see people and events in a compassionate manner and respond positively.

- power to **accommodate** - to expand and accept the presence, ideas and desires of others. When I have understanding the intellect is no longer clouded by negative thoughts of criticism, anger or rejection.

- power of **discrimination** - to discern the subtle and separate what is true from false.

- power of **judgement** - to assess the quality of choices, decisions and actions in yourself and others. Recognising altruistic motivation and the benefit in everything I move with confidence.

- power to **face** - to confront and resolve external/internal obstacles, tests and challenges.

- power to **co-operate** - to give your attention, time, and experience in the service of others.

*"Bringing ones thoughts under control is essential. The key is to create space in ones' life for reflection, contemplation and meditation, each of which has its' own importance. Reflection is looking back on the quality of my interactions and learning from that. Contemplation is the accessing of insights and new understanding and to consider how that can be*

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*implemented into my way of being. Meditation is to give focus to and experience my highest potential and innate qualities and to visualize that.”*

In summary, the succession of the eight powers can be summarized as ‘go **inside**, create **elevated** thinking, and come **out** into the world.