

SUMMARY REPORT

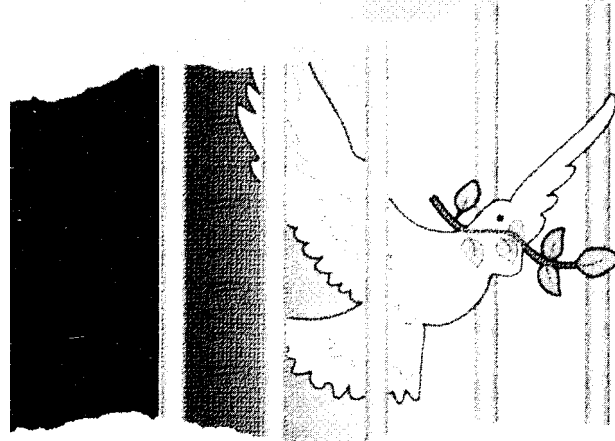
Caring From the Inside

- Looking after each other

19th – 21st September 1997

A seminar for prison staff

Caring
from the Inside



held at

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, Global Retreat Centre,
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Setting the Scene

During National Prisoners' Week, in 1991 and 1992, the Brahma Kumaris held events under the title of "A Celebration of Human Dignity in Prison". These became the springboard for collaboration between the University and a small group of practitioners working in prisons. They asked "What can we do to help prison staff find and maintain values in their work?" This question became the seed for 'Integrating the Values Inside'.

This successful seminar took place over three days in June 1994, at the Global Retreat Centre, Oxford and was followed up with a gathering for prison governors at Global Co-operation House in London. They spent the day examining the Prison Service 'Statement of Purpose' with fresh eyes.

What followed was regular seminar designed to explore issues arising from the previous gatherings.

Session 1. Introduction with Tim Newell, Governor, HMP Grendon & Springhill

This seminar is about looking after each other. During these times of overload, we're under a lot of stress and pressure and it has become more important than ever to maintain our respect for others as well as our own personal identity and values. This protects us from creating distress and pain for each other. The present experience of many staff working in prisons is that they feel anxious, believing their self-worth has been damaged by what is happening in our Service. This seminar is an important counter to those feelings. This time together will help us to examine this further.

We must start by looking within ourselves and seeing how our experience, behaviour, and feelings can be used to help others as well as to see more clearly how others can help us. This is a crucial part of working together and of being part of a caring organisation. It creates a family feeling, one which many of us have experienced in the Prison Service in the past.

Participants shared their own reasons for attending the seminar. These included:
"I was attracted by the title: about caring for myself as well as others."

"I am here to see what material my charity can send into prisons to help there, and to find out how to care for each other at the same time."

"Every time I come here I learn more."

"Apart from any other reason for being here, this is personal refreshment."

"I am very interested in the idea of caring for myself while working in a caring environment."

Keynote Address by John Marriot, Former Governor of Parkhurst Prison

John spent about twenty-five years in the Prison Service, the latter fifteen as a governor in the long-term system. He is unashamed by the fact that he felt he had a vocation. He believed in what he was doing and that it was important to him.

John mentioned his involvement in riots and hostage incidents over the years but found nothing to be as stressful as his leaving the Service. He was the Governor of HMP Parkhurst in January, 1995 when three prisoners escaped. It was the start of a very traumatic period for both him and his family.

John showed us the series of headlines and articles which appeared in the press in the days following the escape. They spoke of a lax regime but few of the reports were up to-date or accurate. They dwelt on relatively superficial things and neglected the fact that three dangerous criminals had escaped. He talked of the influence of such reporting upon public perception of the Service and of his suspicions about the kinds of briefings journalists were getting from sources in the Home Office.

We looked at some of the forces that were at work at the time. The media deals in sound bites where it is easier to criticise and be negative. It is more acceptable to talk about the punitive aspects of crime, such as hanging and flogging, than it is to consider the more practical issues such as how we can help to integrate prisoners back into society. We saw this symbiotic relationship between the media and the politicians before the election, with all the talk about crime tackling measures. In America this kind of competition between parties led to a massive increase in the prison population and, of course, we are seeing rises here as well. Has crime really risen that much?

John expressed his belief that we need to combat the powerful negative and punitive forces before we can devise an effective way of dealing with prisoners.

He spoke of being besieged by the press, of feeling terrible about the whole thing, yet having no peace. He helped us understand the effect this kind of thing can have on families. He was sent a Home Office press officer but was unsure of his

loyalties. One of the other stressful aspects was being forbidden to talk to the press. No matter what was said in the House of Commons, or in the papers, he could not respond.

Amidst all the bad publicity, the family had to be sure they cared for each other. Talk of care reminded John that he had only five minutes warning of his very public vilification by the Home Secretary in the House of Commons, with no right of redress. His children could not be reached in time, so heard it first on the radio and the television.

In this scapegoat culture, at times of stress it is often difficult for those involved to keep a clear hold of the truth. Even at Parkhurst things were said which were not accurate. We should recognise the dynamic that people, when they are running scared, will cling to anything that diverts attention from themselves. In taking care of all our staff we need to recognise their fears.

John talked of how prison staff, of all grades, are likely to reflect the common view of society, to want to 'hang and to flog' as opposed to rehabilitate. It is much easier to be pessimistic than optimistic about criminal justice. Peer pressure within the Service encourages staff to either go along with it or shut up. How do you change that culture and sustain yourself within it? Prisons can be damaging places for staff, for prisoners and for families.

With no religious background, John has a belief in human beings and that we should treat each other in positive ways. To do that we need to keep a balance between our emotional and intellectual reactions. Equally, in difficult times, we should seek out kindred spirits who can support and help us to maintain positive energy.

It is also important to allow others to care for you. If people feel you have all the answers, they will not respond to your offers of help. We must all know about our own needs. Prisoners too can care for each other as well as for staff. John talked of boundaries and how a little self-disclosure can allow others to trust you and respond to you. There are times when we can say that it is OK to take time off work to visit a colleague who is sick or having a difficult time.

One of the basic things we can do to support other staff is to be good at what we do, and plan ahead so that our workplace is safe and we all have a commitment to what we are doing. We need to destroy the culture of scapegoating. So that people can feel OK about acting on their own initiative, taking positive risks, and experimenting. More things will go right than go wrong. Risking nothing actually risks everything.

There are logical steps we can take when a prisoner acts badly, destroying property and committing violence. We can give punitive messages and take actions that save face. We need to break that cycle. Any philosophy of care must allow the heart to intervene. We can do it differently. We can take risks. By setting a personal example we can give staff and prisoners the confidence to find different ways of resolving conflicts.

Session 2 Appreciative Enquiry with Mike George

Mike began by explaining the philosophy behind Appreciative Inquiry. The aim is to stimulate learning which will lead to a kind of renewal. Essentially we look at the past to find what values we can bring out to spark that renewal. We shift our focus from problems to possibilities. The process encourages us to disengage from negativity and dysfunction.

This takes place through a period of reflection to identify the values and practices which have worked for us in the past. An examination of where they fit into our lives in the present follows, with a view to renewing and constantly reshaping our lives around the affirmation of the values and principles identified as serving us well in the past.

The focus was on the value of caring for others, through appreciative questions.

- *What does caring actually mean for you?*

- *In what ways do you express care for yourself and for others in the prison environment?*

- *In what ways do you experience other people showing care for you in the prison environment? If you can recall a time when you experienced real care, was it touching? Why was that? What qualities was the carer expressing?*

- *What are your own qualities or values that help you to express your care for others?*

- *What, if anything, prevents you from being more caring towards yourself?*

- *What, if anything, prevents you from being more caring towards others?*

- *In what ways, if any, do you prevent others from expressing their love towards you?*

- *In an ideal world, how would you and others look after each other in the prison environment?*

Participants were then invited to share the insights and vision prompted by the questions with a

partner. This was followed by a whole group discussion.

Mike ended with a final reflection, asking:

- What do you feel you learned about yourself during the process of your own personal enquiry, and the process of sharing?

- When you were listening to your partners sharing, what did you learn about them?

Session 3. Panel discussion and Open Forum

With Mal Gillan, Senior Officer, HMP Grendon, Stewart Jeffrey, Senior Probation Officer, HMYOI Huntercombe and Gail Bradley, Partner, Behavioural Health Partnership and Probation Officer

Mal briefly described the 'Staff Care and Welfare' set-up. Each prison has a local care team offering support and first line counselling for staff. Other staff with extra training to become In-Service Counsellors, are the second line, and a facility exists to bring in outside specialists if needed.

Stewart Jeffrey talked of how, in any of the caring professions, we can give so much to those in our care that it leaves little room for either our colleagues or for ourselves. He also touched upon the issue of confidentiality and, whilst acknowledging the rightness of that, explained how it creates difficulties in an organisation when someone might be off for a long period, and colleagues have to cover without any clear idea of what is going on.

Stewart also mentioned his observation that, certainly in prisons, it is considered OK to have physical problems, but psychological problems are seen as somehow different, less acceptable. Finally he acknowledged the difficulty in predominantly male environments as to how men can actually demonstrate care for each other.

Gail Bradley shared some of the emotional issues which had been raised for her by John Marriot's talk and by the appreciative enquiry. This led on to a more general sharing.

The discussion explored how difficult it can be, when you are caring for someone, to admit that you are unable to help and to decide to refer on.

There was a discussion of the training requirements. It is not enough to simply want to care. It is important to acquire certain skills.

It was noted that some people have difficulty approaching their care teams because of worries about being seen to be vulnerable in front of their

colleagues, and insecurities regarding confidentiality.

The experiences people have when they seek care are variable. It depends on the kinds of relationships each of us have with our co-workers. The official care team in an establishment can often be by-passed in favour of someone we feel more comfortable with. Those having problems often preferred to find more informal ways of approaching those they wanted to talk to. This is one of the ways we overcome the fears of appearing vulnerable.

Sometimes caring about others is not to do with saying "there, there". It may be the personal issues, not the professional ones which need addressing. It might be necessary to say to someone, or to hear from someone that a particular behaviour is not acceptable, and the reason it is being pointed out is because one cares.

The essence of caring is to turn something around. Whether that is for yourself or others, it is an empowering process.

If you go to someone who gives you sympathy, then your grief will be reinforced. If you seek out someone who offers you empathy, you will find a means of moving on from your grief.

The one thing which cannot be over-estimated is the power of touch. Care should not be a gender issue, although it was recognized that this may present difficulties in institutions such as prisons.

Caring for the Self

With Maureen Goodman

When you travel on the underground, people often avoid looking at each other. On other occasions, we hesitate to involve ourselves. In order to care we need an inner strength. How do we gain that inner strength?

One of the slogans used by the Brahma Kumaris is, "When I change, the world changes." When I look at myself, and discover what I have, only then can I offer it to someone else.

We find it easier to care for our families, our colleagues and for others than to care for ourselves. Yet the self is where it must begin. I cannot give what I do not have. If I want to offer you love, and I have not experienced it myself, how can I share it with you? The people we work with are often damaged by not having experienced that love and that care, so they do not know how to express or receive it. If someone we are dealing with is giving off vibrations of anger or other negative feelings, I have a choice of whether I accept them or not.

When the Buddha refused a gift from someone, he was asked why? He replied that his not taking the gift meant that it stayed with the giver. We can take what is on offer, or we can decline.

If I am feeling disgruntled, inadequate, or unworthy, I am unable to give what is needed. In fact, I will attract feelings from others which mirror my own. If you are feeling negative, you will not be able to recognise the positive feelings emanating from others.

If I can begin to care for myself, to create good feelings in and about myself, those around me will feel that. I must give real quality time to myself for this. I will then find I am unable to accept the negative feelings of others.

In order to care for myself, I must understand that feelings are created internally, not externally. Whatever experiences we are having, whatever beautiful places we may visit, we eventually leave or move on. Those places and experiences make us feel good but what generates the good feelings, the place, the experience? No, the feelings are generated inside us, in response to the situation.

Giving is not a business. To care, to love, to offer kindness is open ended. I must not be looking for something in return. To be able to give in that way I must have a stock of these feelings inside me. If I give time to care for myself, my and my stock of good feelings will remain high. If my stock runs low it is because I have not taken the time for reflection and so I become tired and feel drained. We need to learn to know ourselves, to understand ourselves and the way to do that is to be with the self in silence.

It is important not to wait for the care we need to come from others but must take the time to care for ourselves. Care from others will come, people want to care but sometimes it does not come in time or it may not be what is needed.

It is worth asking what we mean by care. It is not just sympathy. It is giving support which allows others to maintain self-esteem, to gain the tools which can turn any situation around.

To begin that process for ourselves we must achieve mastery over our own thoughts and feelings. At moment we have choices about how we feel or think. We have limited control over external factors, but what we can control is how we respond to those factors. When you feel that your values are being compromised, that you are being driven down the path of least resistance, remind yourself that you have a choice. This can empower you and give you the strength to positively transform a situation.

When I give time to myself, it also helps me to value myself, irrespective of the ups and downs in my life. Even at the worst times in my life, I am still valuable. Each situation is an opportunity for learning and growth. Self-value helps you to learn from everyone.

The group then took part in an illustrative exercise of caring for the self, and shared feelings about it.

Keynote Address by Dadi Janki,
Additional Administrative Head Brahma Kumaris

“Things spoken in words reach the ears. Things spoken from the heart reach the heart. This means no misunderstandings.”

“Every individual has a desire to be honest with themselves and that others should feel their truth. Also, the truth of others should be felt by us. Dishonesty pricks our conscience. This is because human beings have the intellectual capacity to know the difference between right and wrong and the capability to do what is right.”

“The absence of truth disturbs me, and when that happens nothing feels right for me now and my future will also be affected by this. None of us want to lose what feels right within us, nor to be influenced by, or suppressed by others.”

Dadi spoke of the basis for a healthy physical life as being pure air, atmosphere, and diet and that of a healthy mental life as being free from impurity.

“If our minds think in the wrong way, they become stressed and pressurised. This makes us feel empty and alone. Sometimes we feel there is no-one with whom we can have selfless interaction. How can we trust someone when what is happening outside is different from what is happening inside?”

“What is missing from our lives that we feel like this? I must ask myself: Am I clean inside and outside? How can others trust me if I do not trust myself? My own experience is that I never feel either empty or alone.”

I should also give my mind pure thoughts, that is to think in the right way, to be honest with myself, regardless of whatever others might do. This increases the quality of my interactions. If I stay honest then I can face anything.

To achieve this it is essential to understand myself very clearly. I must not compare myself with another, nor as I was in the past. I must know myself as I am now. This comes through having spirituality in my life.

We are so absorbed by the world and create so many barriers for ourselves. To have spirituality I must put those aside. Our bodies are simply costumes. They are different but our feelings and our needs for relationships, a home, food, air and honesty are the same. We all need values. To have an attitude of purity inside me that is developed by a spiritual understanding, self-knowledge, and knowledge of others, I must spend time with myself in peace and silence to satisfy the needs of my heart and my mind.

This allows me to see the acting going on around me, but to avoid becoming sucked in. When a child is sick the mother suffers because of her attachment to the child. The nurse serves the child better because of her detachment. If I fluctuate in my feelings, liking some people and not others, I become inconsistent and cannot do what I need to.

Don't think about all that you have to do, just do it all with peace and with love, with courage and faith, free of anxiety and it will be successful. If you think about it, all your paperwork will be in your head together with all your files. Instead, fill your mind with positive thoughts which give spiritual sustenance.

No journey is a straight path, but at the end even the peak of the highest mountain is reached. Learn from the journey and teach others. Take care of yourself during the journey. What is the point of anger? There is no point in being peaceless, no matter what might come in front of you. Spiritual knowledge makes us sensible and wise. We learn the art of living a good life. It is not expensive. It does not require lots of words or study. Just do it.

I know the news but do not need the detail of picking up a paper. I should live my life in such a way as to be newsworthy. I should be an example and an inspiration to others.

I have been asked where my wisdom comes from. From an early age I have had no interest in worldly things. I have had a desire to know myself, to know God, to lead a life of quality and spirituality, to have that which is real, that which is the truth. This has enabled me to become successful in my life. This is universal. It has no label of religion or guru, nor the external splendour of material things. The desire is to go beyond the consciousness of the physical, to the realisation that I am a spiritual entity, and to interact in the knowledge that I am a 'trustee'.

This learning still goes on. Even today I am still a student.

Do whatever you do with an honest heart and your conscience will be clear. In this way you will be satisfied.

Ego, attachments, greed, jealousy: these are the causes of my sorrow. When they go, sorrow goes. I say to everybody, be happy, and move and walk as angels. Do not let your feet touch the ground to become dirty and be pricked by thorns. Be clean and pure and happy. Be simple and be truthful. Stop worrying and start doing that which is good. Take benefit from what is done to you, do not complain. Do not just say sorry, but change as well.

When we have such a sweet and easy life, we feel like leaving behind the life we experienced before. We have a great responsibility but we should stay free from worry.