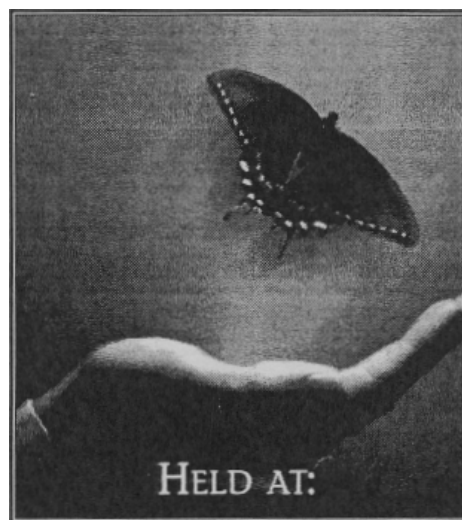


Personal Development and Relationships in Prison:

Managing Our Hopes and Expectations

A seminar for prison staff

11-13th November 1996



The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University
Global Retreat Centre,
Nuneham Courtenay, Oxford

Tel: 01865 343551 • Fax: 01865 343576
e-mail: pris@uk.bkwsu.org

Setting the Scene with Tim Newell,
Governor, HMP Grendon & Springhill

This seminar, like the two before it, reflects the work that has been taking place with the Brahma Kumaris, in prisons, looking at staff support during a time of very critical change. The Service is trying to identify values to dominate, inform and lead us in our actions, and our relationships at work. These changes have ranged so widely that without an inner core of separate values, and a personal quietness, many of us would have felt totally lost. This is an opportunity for us to have a moment of rest from our working pressures.

The context within which we meet sees the Service under great pressures, which cause each of us as individuals, great stress and strain. For instance we are all aware of the rising population, unprecedented in prison history. In addition we have to deal with reduced finances, Governors are having to decide how to manage the budget when it affects quality of life issues. Thirdly, we have to contend with the highly focused attention upon security issues, which could be skewing the way in which we operate.

It is because of those pressures that we need to examine where we stand. We will be pushed aside by these pressures, and asked to do things which will otherwise cause us a lot of discomfort.

Keynote Address: Dr David Wilson,
Head of Prison Officer and Operational Training,
HM Prison Service

David wanted to mix some moral philosophy with contemporary history, and to look more broadly at an ethical consideration in respect of a particular individual, in his role within an organ of the state. More personally he wanted to look at his own moral position as a Governor within the prison service, and as a reasoning, autonomous individual.

He was concerned with questions of political philosophy, the nature of a just and good society, and the right way for an individual to behave in that society. How should a person live a life? What values should one have? What rules should be observed or ignored? This has particular relevance to servants of the Crown, charged with incarcerating those who are deemed to have transgressed.

David then reminded us of the circumstances which led to the Falklands War in 1982: The Argentinean invasion, the sailing of the Task Force, and the liberation of the islands by British forces.

The war was also fought away the Islands. A British diplomatic offensive based upon Article 51 of the UN Charter, supporting self-defence against

an aggressor, allowed the UN Security Council to pass resolution 50 2, calling for Argentina to withdraw.

At this point David read from the memoirs of a civil servant:

"I joined the civil service in 1970 as an assistant principal, the conventional way for a budding mandarin to start his career. I was not an idealist, but I did have hopes that this was to be a job where rational decisions and analysis of problems would help, at least in a small way, to provide good government."

David wondered if these words echoed the thoughts of any of those present, in terms of their decision to work within the Prison Service. He acknowledged that they echo aspects of his own career decision.

David gave us another quote from this same civil servant, now in a position of reasonable power, referring to a time fourteen years after the first.

"As an assistant secretary, Head of Defence Secretariat five, in March 1985, it was here that I came up against circumstances I had never seen before in my career, and faced the most difficult decision of my life."

The nature of that decision relates to the sinking of the Argentinean warship Belgrano, attacked by submarine on May 2nd 1982 at the express command of the British war cabinet. This resulted in the deaths of 370 Argentinean sailors.

The civil servant was Clive Ponting and the decision referred to was relayed in his own words.

"Ministers had continued to mislead Parliament. Consistency, not truth, was to be the order of the day. I found myself wondering whether the civil service was really going to be party to the deliberate deception of Parliament, simply to try to preserve the illusion that Ministers had told the truth and thus protect their political reputation."

Ponting leaked official documents to Labour MP Tam Dalyell. These showed that the Belgrano was outside the exclusion zone sailing away from the conflict when sunk.

Ponting was prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act, which allowed that any information gained by a civil servant in the course of his work was official and therefore not to be given to anyone. There was no suggestion that the information leaked by Ponting was classified. The section under which he was prosecuted was later amended.

Ponting defended his actions by referring to another section of the Act, allowing for

'disclosure of information to an individual, if it involved the national interest.' Ponting maintained that it was his duty, under this section, to advise Mr Dalyell, an elected MP, that he was being misled by Ministers.

A long trial saw Ponting acquitted, despite the trial judge indicating the Government of the day were the only ones who could legitimately define the National Interest, and so could deny the Opposition full access to the facts. The jury preferred to accept that Ponting owed a higher duty to Parliament, and to the country.

Ponting's decision set the scene for David talk. Regardless of our relationship with our employer, in our case ultimately with the State, at what point do we have to exercise our own moral and ethical judgements, against the interests of those who pay us, and sometimes in direct competition with what we are required to do, or how we are directed to act? What are our Ponting decisions?

This moved us from an academic investigation into a more personal reflection. David told us of his reasons for joining the Prison Service in 1983, of some of the difficulties he had found as a Governor, and of the circumstances under which he would find it intolerable to continue working as a prison governor

The thrust of David's talk was to maintain a debate about what we do, as servants of the State, both within and without the Service, about not sitting too easily with the decisions we make day to day, which have an enormous impact upon the lives of those in our care.

What follows are some of those responses and further comments by David himself:

- *"For me the debate should be about the billions of pounds going into the effort of getting ever more people into prisons, while organisations which support ex-offenders, and direct youngsters away from crime, get virtually nothing. I also think it is important to attempt to influence the thinking of new entrant prison officers."*

- *"I wonder why it is that you and your colleagues joined, as I and my colleagues did a generation before you, and yet all of us have failed to change the Service as we wanted to."*

- *"We may make compromises with our values and we may get seduced by 'the big chair' to further our career's in order to support our family and pay the mortgage. 'Ponting decisions' are few and far between. Usually we let a succession of little things go by."*

- *"At a recent briefing to governors, the gross overcrowding was being discussed, along with the contingencies of dealing with this. When*

the morality of this position was raised, the message from the top was clearly given that this is not for us to concern ourselves with. Our task is to hold the prisoners, to deliver the service, not to comment on it. This is efficiency without vision."

- *"I have never met a prison officer who said that from childhood this is what he or she wanted to do- Most just seem to drift into it."*

- *"I think it is useful to look at the macro side of our system, perhaps by contacting another sector of the criminal justice system and checking out what it is like for them. Also, I find it a corrective experience to try to examine the personal tragedy of each of those we care for in our prisons, to get behind the macho coping stance, and feel how it hurts to be locked away."*

- *"I am worried about the politics of victims. We are very selective about which victims get the chance to say there is a decline in morality. They are usually white, middle class, and have access to structures of power which allow their statements to be heard. We have talked of the children of Dunblane and of Philip Lawrence. Quite correctly! There was also the case of the young Afro-Caribbean boy stabbed to death by a gang of white youths at a bus stop. There was so little attention paid to it that I cannot recall his name. His parents had to bring a private prosecution to be heard. There was no Philip Lawrence type upsurge. Parents did not have access to Cardinal Basil Hume. We need to be clearer about who we allow to be victims, and to acknowledge that any breakdown in society did not happen with Thomas Hamilton at Dunblane. It happened before that, to allow Hamilton to become what he was. We hear of Hamilton as evil. In writing about Eichman at his trial, someone wrote about how ordinary he looked meaning that in truth, evil is banal."*

Plenary Session: Working in Prisons - Concerns and Experiences: Chaired by David Sherwood, Governor, HMP Highpoint

Referring to David Wilson's address, David facilitated a wide-ranging discussion of what might be the 'Ponting decision' for any of us.

He recapped upon the events of the first evening, and gave us some of his personal responses to things which were said.

"It has been suggested that the prison system is fundamentally rotten. I don't think this is so. I do think it is incredibly arrogant of people outside prison to suggest that they know. It's a system that struggles under enormous pressures which are not of its own making."

"I think that if all we did was to fulfil the first part of our mission statement and simply keep people in custody we would be doing a valuable

service, without talking about the second part.”

“We surely don’t have a set of personal values which we bring to our work. We have a set of personal values which we bring to all aspects of our lives.”

David then opened things out by asking questions of specific people and inviting comment from all:

- “It was the issue of the common good which brought me here. I work for an organisation which claims to have certain values and yet that doesn’t appear to be the case. I struggled with that but decided to stay because I wanted to bring my values and my beliefs to the role. I am at peace with that.”

- “I have found that once you are able to achieve a kind of inner peace, it actually changes the way in which people see you.”

- “We talked about compromise. We each have principles we think are important. Another will also believe in theirs, which is valid. To meet somewhere in the middle, to recognise that, and share the cost of giving up a little, is not a bad thing. Making a compromise within a set of circumstances you cannot completely control is not the same as compromising your principles.”

- “It can be very frustrating working in an institution where other departments are not there for the same purpose as you, where people have a completely different baseline for their motivation. One of the things I have been learned with this University is to look beyond the physical superficiality.”

- “Are there universal truths, universal values, which we would all arrive at if only we were more patient and listened more? I actually believe that the Prison Service is at its best when it delivers part one of the mission statement which is to keep people in custody. Others see part two as most important, yet we all contribute to the service.”

- “I am an educationalist. I enjoy what I do but I know that I will not make any difference with my ‘Ponting moment’. They would just say okay and get someone else. But I do try to make a difference in my prison in spite of what feels like a lack of interest from the uniform side in anything other than the first part of the mission statement.”

- “I think prison officers see us as having access to money and initiatives they do not. I work in education but I have been listening to them recently. They have their own problems and concerns which they feel are not being addressed.”

- “Prison officers feel deskilled and devalued because whenever there is interesting work to do we bring in outsiders.”

- “When a prisoner is beginning a long sentence and has his first Christmas inside, you won’t see a psychologist, a probation officer or a teacher. You will see people in white shirts, and perhaps a governor, dealing with his pain while being away from his family. Then when the specialists come back after the holiday and sense an atmosphere of despair they will blame us [officers] for it.”

- “We bow under the pressures of working in prisons, when we ought to see opportunities in the interactions with prisoners and other staff.”

- “When we are doing something we are often thinking of how we got to be doing what we are doing, or about what the outcome will be. This makes us less effective for working in the moment.”

- “The vital thing about any organisation is shared relationships and a shared community, arising from shared values.”

Personal Values in Relationships.

Sister Jayanti, European Director, Brahma Kumaris

“If you put too many birds in a cage, whether or not they are sweet nightingales, they will not be sweet for long. This is what it is like for the world’s cities today. One can understand why there is such crime and violence, why the human condition is as it is. We are dealing with artificial conditions which have never existed before.

So what have we done to the world, to ourselves and what are we to do about it?”

Sister Jayanti referred to the values manifesto recently published by Mrs. Lawrence, whose husband was murdered.

“This echoes a new discussion of values world wide. Learned people are now saying we are suffering ‘a crisis of spirit.’ Unexpectedly, I recently heard this statement from politicians and scientists. They say we now need a change in consciousness, attitude and values.”

Sister Jayanti suggested that, before we begin to try to understand things at an external level, let us explore what is happening in our inner world. This is a necessity for it is this which we will bring to any relationship, to any situation.

“We might believe that what happens inside is by chance, or through external circumstances, but we must spend time sorting out the inner world every single day. Then I can see myself and things around me as they really are; a combination of all the different perceptions.

I believe that inherent in every single human being there is goodness. If I touch into that part of me which is eternal, not physical or temporary, the "I", then I find goodness. To know it is one thing but to bring it into my consciousness is another, to keep that at the forefront of my perceptions, my attitudes, my vision of others. If I realise that eternal goodness in myself, so creating self-esteem, it will determine the respect I give to others.

I have done things against my own conscience; I see this when I examine myself in silence. This may be why we dislike silence. It may expose our subtle addictions, for example, the need for acknowledgement and recognition.

I also believe it is difficult for young people to grow up in balance when we live in a time when the family is breaking down and we are losing the secure environment which a young person needs to grow up in. Perhaps linked with this, over the last few decades a belief in God or a higher being has slowly been fading in the West. Growing up in an atmosphere where there is faith, I believe helps to give us security and health. Now I sense a turning point. People used to want to learn to meditate but without God. Now they are asking about both.

I met briefly with Nelson Mandela last week in South Africa. I really feel that this one man, his humility and spirit of forgiveness, changed the course of an entire nation. He in turn talked of how Ghandi had inspired him over his twenty five years in prison. Each of us has an impact on those around us whether it is by inspiring others or by disempowering them."

Recognising the three factors that drive us: survival, external factors and inner factors, Sister Jayanti asked everyone to reflect upon three questions:

- At a time of crisis what has guided me?
- Which relationships have shaped my values?
- What would I do differently next time?

Mime Workshop: *Behind theMask* with Stevie Butler, Drama Teacher, HMYOI Huntercombe, Viv Lever, Deputy Education Manager, HMYOI Huntercombe, and Mal Gillan, Senior Prison Officer, HMP Grendon

The session was an exploration of issues related to the relationships between individuals working in different prison departments. A series of role plays were acted out followed by discussions about the feelings they generated and how to do things differently

Because of the sensitive and personal nature of the feelings raised in people it is inappropriate to record more than the comments below. Enough to say it was an interesting and useful way to involve participants.

- *"I have realised that not only can I take off the mask of the role I play, but that I must take off my internal masks. It is relatively easy to take off the external masks. Taking off the internal masks requires much more."*

- *"As I develop as myself, I will discover more masks I need to remove."*

- *"If you spend your life believing you are a chicken, how do you know you are really an eagle?"*

- *"You finally know whether you are an eagle or a chicken when you discover your parents. I think that has something to do with a connection to God."*

Redefining our Values and Purpose led by Tim Newell

"We all know of the Prison Service's vision goals and values. I wonder if we are able to realise that vision of a Service respected throughout the world? The Chief Inspector of Prisons is to release a report today stating that the Service is under threat and is in decline due to population pressures and resource constraints. He is worried about the future health of our prisons."

Speaking of the measurable changes reflecting the use of Key Performance Indicators, it was flagged up that while the KPI's remained the same, the cost per prison place is being driven down each year.

"Our own performance reviews are measured against the Service values, such as integrity and commitment to staff. Some might wish to debate the latter and ask how that is being demonstrated."

Tim shared from the book, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", by Steven Covey. In this Covey states that we are what we repeatedly do quoting Aristotle who says that 'excellence is not an act but a habit.'

"Habits are a combination of knowledge (what to do), skills (how to do it), and desires (the wish to do it). To change our habits and to integrate new ones into our behaviour can be difficult because all of these factors must intersect. Habits that make us effective are internalised principles and patterns of behaviour.

We begin our lives in a state of dependence on others, a concentration on the 'You'. Later we develop independence, a concentration upon ourselves, the 'I'. The stage we want to reach, and most of us do, is the stage of interdependence when we think of 'we'.

Covey suggests seven habits for being effective:

1. Be proactive. This is about being self aware.
2. Begin with the end in mind. We should know where we are going.
3. Put first things first. Decide what is urgent and what is not.

4. Think win/win. Work and live so that all parties win in each situation.
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Hear empathetically what others say.
6. Synergise. Value the differences in others. The whole is greater than the sum.
7. Sharpen the saw. Continually renew yourself. Enhance what you are.

Closing Address: by Dadi Janki. Additional Administrative Head, Brahma Kumaris

“Recently I was in New York for an event called ‘Honestly Speaking’ and later, in South Africa at a similar event. So, I have been thinking a lot about honesty and know the importance it has in our lives. Sharing it is like cleaning a mirror in which I and others can see our reflection.

Take the time to think about each value in this way. When something is clearly understood I can incorporate it into my life. Then change becomes easy.

Others introduce me in long complicated ways. I ask why they do that? It is true I carry much responsibility, but with it there is much ease and lightness. When one is an instrument for a task one must feel that one is doing it accurately. Each one of you is also an instrument for a task. The task must begin with you, your thoughts and ideas and actions. You all pay attention to values in your lives. With those values comes a desire to serve others, and that allows the values to become very real. When we have values we do not live and work out of desperation but in pleasure.

When everything is clear and open, as it really is, there is ease and lightness, and things work well. If I live my life in a complicated way, always thinking about the consequences, then there is fear. If I have courage, truth and faith, what I do will be successful. In my thoughts, and actions let there be truth, so that others will be inspired.

If I decide to sit here and teach then no one will learn. To teach I must inspire others with the ideas I incorporate into my life. If I do not have ego but have self respect, then I will see the truth. Let me look at myself with my own inner eye before looking at others. If my eye fails to open let me take help from God. As a child of God I seek his qualities of truth, love, mercy and compassion.

From a very young age I have had distaste for falsehood. In my life I have been free of lies, defamation, gossip, stealing and deceiving. If you are free from these things in your own lives, then the prisoners you work with will take inspiration from you.

Just as we have coffee breaks to refresh ourselves, so we should take time to refresh our spirit. I have discovered that in order to develop

values in my life it is important to awaken my understanding of myself as a spiritual being. Also, I must develop my relationship with God to remove the defects and negativities I may have. As a spiritual being I have a vision of myself, and knowing God gives me the power to act on my ideas in my life. Anything is possible.

Phrases which are not part of my vocabulary include: - Why is this happening? - How is this going to happen? - This is difficult! - I will try. I needn't ask 'why' or 'how' for I can look inside myself and change it. If we think positive thoughts we find the way and the word difficult does not emerge. Pure powerful thoughts will encourage others to help.

Let us together create powerful, positive thoughts. That way the impossible becomes possible. We have no need to think 'I cannot do this because I am female or because of my colour, my culture.'

We all need wisdom and happiness. If we work with happiness the intellect becomes truthful, learns to think in the right way and is not in constant battle and struggle. There is power through righteousness. Love and Truth are our religion. Bringing both to our relationships banishes injustice.

A donkey must obey his master and not use his own intellect. It must carry loads for its master. The human intellect has become like that. We carry loads all day long. We move as others wish us to move. Everything has become artificial, including our relationships with others and ourselves

Angels protect us; they are the children of God. I too am a child of God. I should have values in my life so that others can feel protected in my company. My feeling and message for this gathering is to carry away the message that you are a child of God, His messenger, and as you give this message to others, you too become angels. God protects us so we can protect others. One angel is like a lighthouse and shows the path to many. I should be light in all I do and others will feel that. I should be correct in all I do and others will feel benefit from those vibrations.

Question. *It is difficult to be a woman in a male dominated world of prisons. Can I simply get rid of that feeling in an instant and get on with the work?*

Answer. *It is not about one thought at any time. It is about an awareness of who I am and what I represent constantly in the world around me. Power is superficial and false. It cannot be forced upon us by another. Male or female we all have weaknesses. When we understand them there is no problem. Have self respect.*

Q. *It has been said that to give attention to many is not as important as giving attention to one. What do you think?*

A. *Both should be done.*