

On the Other Side of Survival

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Prison is a human zoo. A pest hole of sadness, madness and pain. This is no great news. Every person who's ever done time knows it all too well.

And a prisoner learns, too, that survival, on many levels, becomes the overriding focus of his or her life. But simply "surviving" gets old -- really old! So you reach a point where you ask yourself, "why bother?" Why bother to go through this silly bull shit? Why bother to endure the same old Mickey Mouse garbage day after day, year after year? Everything gets so dirty and so dark. So **why bother?**

There is a reason -- a very good one! In fact, there is a reward that, if understood and cultivated, can grow out of the perversion of a prison. But let's be clear: it's not simple or easy to obtain -- and certainly nothing the system will be willing to share with you. And, even if it did, you wouldn't be receptive to such insight from your captor, from your enemy.

It is essential to understand the deeper impact of what captivity does to the human mind and spirit. Especially how the experience forces you to narrow your vision (or "understanding") down to the madness of the moment. In so doing, it is easy to get lost in the idea that this is all there is -- that this nasty, noisy, sick place is, in fact, a true reflection of what life is all about. But, you see, it simply isn't true!! Survival in a cage is NOT what life is all about. It is essential to be constantly aware there IS something on the other side of survival that stands to make it all worthwhile.

Stop and look within the very center of yourself. Come to terms with the fact that prison can never be your home, no matter how long they keep your body in a box!! There is a reason to hold on, to fight your way through, to be strong and brave, to control your mind, to refuse to surrender, to practice discipline, to cope with your rage, to maintain your dignity at any price. There is a reason -- *but no one wants you to know it!* Why? Because the reason itself is the key to your ultimate freedom---the source of power, sanity, dignity, purpose, and pride.

This key is your sense of duty to yourself to be the very best you can be, to play the best game with the hand that has been dealt you. And to maintain your faith and efforts until such time as you can finally reshuffle and re-deal the deck. What you must clearly understand is that imprisonment, as a long-term event, undermines and erodes your knowledge of this fact and your vision of a better day. Its real damage is not the obvious results of life in a snake pit, but how, like drinking battery acid, it eats away at your awareness of your sense of purpose -- even your will to go on. So, before all else, each person must maintain his or her absolute determination to learn and grow, even on the bottom floor of hell. Guard it well -- it is your greatest treasure!

Those who have been down before know full well that the rat race doesn't cease the day they kick you out of the joint. No: it simply takes on another form...and speeds up! Trying to find an answer to "why bother" is not automatically taken care of just because they cut you loose.

So how do you effectively prepare to make it in the streets? Begin by confronting the harsh fact that you walk out "designed to fail," on a variety of levels. Why?? Before all else, the fantasy and illusions that inmates use to keep their heads and hearts together in prison fade away like a morning fog hit by the rays of the sun. At this point of vulnerability and panic, a person doesn't know where to go for the motivation to carry on. It's all too easy to turn to the most ancient sources of power: rage and hostility! This is the classic action of all powerless people throughout history -- a short-term remedy and a long-term curse!

Hostility, belligerence, and resentment become internal "power cells." But they are negative, dangerous, unstable and self-defeating. Yet it's often all you have, *so you go with it*. Unfortunately, most people are not sufficiently aware of the real influence this trap has over them. This is a big reason half of all released prisoners fail; they actually slam dunk themselves before they have a chance to move beyond this initial stage of the battle!

Two big problems arise out of a "bad attitude": first, the world will not put up with it. In fact you are seriously outnumbered and, after a brief period of relative invisibility, you will be flushed, snuffed or otherwise disposed of. The other problem is the nature of rage itself; it simply burns too hot and fast to last! Like a dragster running on nitro, it's powerful in the quarter mile but useless down the road. The use of rage is the same trip; in the end it won't get you where you need to go.

Be aware: by turning to what you know best, to the spirit of hatred and revenge, to what seems most natural, to the only thing you may feel you have, **you sentence yourself to hell!** And, by this act, you surrender your body, freedom, future, and dignity to an insensitive, inhuman process that doesn't care about you, your family...or anything else.

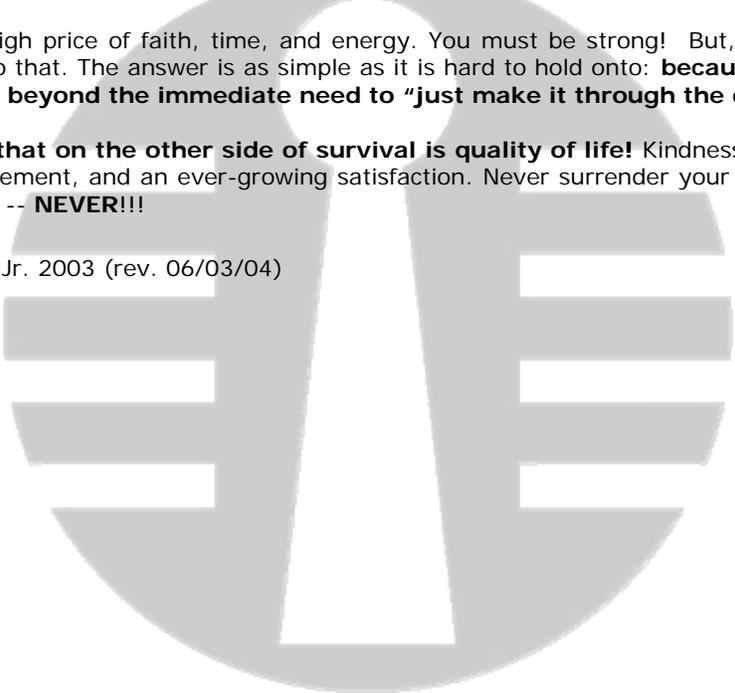
There has to be a better way! **And there is!!** Think of yourself standing on the bank of a wide river with your goal being to reach the other side. How will you make it across without being carried away by the current or eaten by the critters?

This is not a time for head games, self-deception, or playing dominos...it's sink or swim!! Focus your mind on that which is real, that which is true, that which is achievable...and be willing to pay the price, no matter how demanding, to get there. Go into training. If you don't know how to swim, you must learn. If you think that swimming wouldn't do it, build a boat. If those options don't work for you, find a ride! But whatever you do, it has to pass the "reality test!!" Will it work: *will it get you there!?!*

All this demands a high price of faith, time, and energy. You must be strong! But, again, why bother? It always comes back to that. The answer is as simple as it is hard to hold onto: **because of the beauty and joy that awaits you beyond the immediate need to "just make it through the day."**

Hold on to this fact: **that on the other side of survival is quality of life!** Kindness, comfort, tenderness, true meaning, achievement, and an ever-growing satisfaction. Never surrender your faith in yourself or the vision of a better day -- **NEVER!!!**

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