

We're All Doing Time

With Practical Suggestions for Finding Freedom

This Course is always practical. M-16.4:1

By Jon Mundy

*There is no one who does not feel
that he is imprisoned in some way.*

T-3.VI.11:1

*If it elects to do so, the mind can become the medium
by which spirit creates along the line of its own creation.
If it does not freely elect to do so, it retains its creative potential
but places itself under tyrannous rather than Authoritative control.
As a result, it imprisons because such are the dictates of tyrants.*

*To change your mind means to place it
at the disposal of "true" Authority.*

T-1.V.5:4-7

Tyrannous or Authoritative Control

In 1985 Bo Lazoff (1947-2012), an American writer and interfaith-humanitarian published a book titled *We're All Doing Time*. In prisons throughout the country, his book became known as "the convict's bible." *A Course in Miracles* makes 28 references to our being prisoners in the ego's dream of separation. There are also a number of references in *A Course of Love* to our being prisoners. We are prisoners in so far as we place ourselves under the tyrannous control of an ego. We seem to be trapped within an ego frame of mind, in a body—in an illusory dream-like, insane and often troubled world. The Course calls upon us to "undo," or "unravel," the mess we find ourselves in, in order to be free of what amounts to self-imposed confinement.

Those who have crippled, broken bodies, or are confined to a bed or a wheel chair, certainly have a tough time making it through this world. It can, however, be done and with dignity. There are many untold stories of those who have lived valiant lives despite severe handicaps. Two of our best examples were the deaf/blind American author Helen Keller (1880-1968) and the English theoretical physicist Dr. Stephen Hawkins (1942-2018), who lived with Lou Gehrig's disease way beyond his doctor's expectation. There are many such examples, including my best-friend and my best-man at our wedding,

Myron Blackman, who lived inside a body taken over by muscular dystrophy.

The body is the ego's chosen home. Yet, no "body" lasts. The name—the façade, the guise, the mask, the image, all that which constitutes "the dreaming of the world"—falls away and disappears when we come to the remembrance of the True Self, no longer delimited in space/time. Note the following from the famous physicist Dr. Albert Einstein.

*A human being is a part of the whole called by us the universe,
a part limited in time and space.*

*He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling
as something separated from the rest,
a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.*

***This delusion is a kind of prison for us,
restricting us to our personal desires
and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.***

***Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison
by widening our circle of compassion to embrace
all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.***

Redemption, Freedom, and Release

As long as we are in this world—we cannot transcend our skin. The skin (the eyes, ears, and senses) along with the mind tell us of "an outside" and that which constitutes our prison. There are, of course, exceptions on the part of those who have near death experiences and are "relieved" for a moment from the heaviness of a body. Those who have such experiences tell us they did not want to come back and only do so because there is some mission they have yet to fulfill. Perhaps there is a child to raise, or as in the case of Anita Moorjani, author of *Dying To Be Me*, there is a story she needs to tell.

It is easy to feel imprisoned in a body, especially when that body is in pain. One of the most moving and difficult consultations I ever did was with a woman who was in excruciating back pain. The pain never stopped. A couple of months after that call, her husband phoned and asked me to drop her subscription to *Miracles* magazine as she had taken the gun, he purchased to protect them and used it to find freedom from pain the only way she knew how.

I look at our preschool grandson, Bryson, and our granddaughter, Avery. They are all body, toddling, running, laughing, falling, screaming, getting up, playing, impulsively jumping into the arms of anyone who will catch them. How free they are. They fall and cry, and a few seconds later, it's an ancient memory: all forgotten and buried in some disregarded past.

*You may believe that you are responsible for what you do,
but not for what you think.*

*The truth is that you are responsible for what you think,
because it is only at this level that you can exercise choice.*

T-2.VI.2:5-6

A mind that does not rely on divine guidance places itself under tyrannous, rather than Authoritative, control. The older we get, the more we realize that we are not just bodies. It is the mind which runs the show, telling the body what to do. The question is “who is the thinker?” “The mind can become *the medium by which spirit creates along the line of its own creation.*” Or, we can abandon our God given responsibility and let an insane ego take over. “*Miracles,*” the Course tells us, “*are natural.* When they don't occur, something has gone wrong.”

The story of Adam and Eve tells us of a man and woman who separated from God by symbolically “eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.” * The moment we have good and evil we have division—right and wrong, helpful or hurtful, selfishness or self-fullness—and there are decisions which must be made. (*The word *apple* never appears in the entire Bible, though the word apple can be used to mean any kind of fruit).

Desiring

Just as there is *right-mindedness* and *wrong-mindedness*, so there are two kinds of desiring, depending on which mind the desiring comes from. A prison, Einstein says, can also be defined by *personal desires*. “I teach desiring,” said the Buddha, “its origin, cessation, and path. That's all I teach.” Buddha is trying to teach us a peaceful path free from *needing, wanting, and having to have*. He is trying to tell us of what *A Course of Love*, and spiritual teachers like John Mark Stroud, call *spaciousness*—a state of mind that can be reached

through practicing the principles of the Course and through meditation.

The spacious Self knows no obstacles for it knows no uncaring.

It knows only love for the One Self.

It feels the obstacle but does not know it.

*The feeling that is the sense organ of the spacious Self
then remembers its spaciousness and calls upon it.*

ACOL, D:Day 12:8

In 2005, Byron Katie wrote a book called *I Need Your Love. Is That True?* Do we really “need” some of the things we think we need? The most helpful thing might simply be to ask the Holy Spirit for help: then sit in a place of spaciousness and let some of the things we worry about work themselves out. The Holy Spirit can bring peace to any situation if we are willing to turn things over to His care and keeping.

The Course calls for a correct use of desire. It says that we should *desire* to make “the holy instant” the Heaven that it is. We “should” desire to look upon each other, in holiness, seeing everyone as holy no matter what their ego has led them to believe.

Judgment always imprisons because

it separates segments of reality by the unstable scales of desire.

T-3.VI.11:4

Freedom From Tyranny

One of the simplest ways to release the ego’s strong hold is to be aware of any desire to attack or to defend. Lesson 135 from the Course is “*If I defend myself, I am attacked.*” Much of the Course can be explained very simply in two, three-word sentences: “Do not attack.” And, “Do not defend.” Of course, you would defend your body if you were physically attacked. It’s the natural thing to do. To not defend in this case means not defending the ego.

*Everyone is seeking to escape from the prison he has made,
and the way to find release is not denied him.*

Being in him, he has found it.

**“When” he finds it is only a matter of time,
and time is but an illusion.**

T-13.I.5:3-5

We “chose” to come here. We chose to be in this world, in these bodies. Otherwise, we would not be here. Circumstances cannot be blamed on happenstance. “*No one is where he is by accident, and chance plays no part in God's plan*” (M-9.1:3). We chose a body bounded by space and time. We are all doing time – living out a story, trying to learn along the way how to be the loving beings we were meant to be. We choose our prison. We *choose* a place where the body can live. We *choose* to be single or married. We *choose* to have children or not. We *choose* the work we do. We *choose* the way in which we spend our free time. In the same way, we can choose to escape from the prison we made by seeing our circumstances, not as a prison but a classroom from which we will one day graduate.

Freedom from tyranny is possible simply because *only the mind is real*, therefore, *only the mind can be free*. Your body can be in a wheelchair and your mind at peace. You can drive a luxury automobile, live in a mansion, and your mind imprisoned in horrific guilt. A documentary about the Mafia on PBS played an FBI 1980's secret recording of a Mafia boss talking privately about how he hated his life. He did not know whom to trust or when the police might show up. He always had to be looking over his shoulder. He was not proud of his behavior. He did not enjoy hurting people. He said it made him sick to be doing what he was doing. He had a lot of money, but it came at a heavy cost, and it gave him no satisfaction as he lived in a constant state of fear.

I will occasionally ask members of an audience, “Who would like to come back here again?” Almost no one raises a hand. Once in a while, I'll get a hand or two, usually from a young healthy person who has not as yet collected too many scars. If I do get a raised hand, I'll say, “Are you sure?” Bodies are a lot of work. It is best, therefore, to enjoy yoga, swimming, exercising, whatever, just keep the body moving and healthy.

One day my assistant Fran took a call in the office. After she got off the phone, she said: “Julie died.” To which I responded, “Oh good!” I was happy for Julie. Julie had been hoping for Home for a long time, and now she was free of a body that was well-worn and also a bit torn. The hard part of a loved one dying is what happens to those of us who have shared our lives with them—and now they are

gone from our presence in space time. It is we who suffer, not those who have gone on.

*As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my
freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness
and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.*

Nelson Mandela

The Addiction Prison

Hurtful habits and debilitating addictions are obviously prisons. We can blame an addiction on the body, or blame it on a drug, but all addictions regardless of their form are first “a decision.” The choice to give way to judgment, to say an unkind word, to light another cigarette or have another drink are all decisions.

*There is a way in which escape is possible.
It can be learned and taught,
but it requires patience and abundant willingness.*

M-17.8:3

To be addicted is to be enslaved to a habit. The hardest habit to break is our addiction to the ego itself. A first step toward freedom is a willingness to acknowledge the extent of the ego's tight hold on our individual psyche. Topping the list of bodily-based addictions is something everyone on the planet must deal with daily; namely, the need to eat and the choice to avoid overdoing it. Americans tip the scales on the heavy end when it comes to being over-weight. While 65 percent of Americans are overweight. The figure is only 25 percent for people living in Japan. One simple reason is that they eat healthier and far less than we do.

Of the 65 percent of Americans who are over-weight, 38 percent are obese, and of that total, 8 percent are excessively obese. Obesity is not fun. It can be changed with a simple decision to do something today in order to weigh less tomorrow, even if it's just the loss of a few ounces. Then again, by choosing to weigh less the day after that, the percentage grows. Cutting back, we start feeling better, and we have more energy. Likewise, financially one can slowly and steadily reduce their debt.

*To wish is to imply that willing is not sufficient.
Yet no one in his right mind
*believes that what is wished is as real as what is willed.**

*Instead of “Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven” say,
“Will ye first the Kingdom of Heaven,” and you have said,
“I know what I am and I accept my own inheritance.”*
T-3.VI.11:6-8

I have a friend who lost 45 pounds, and he has kept it off. He did not *wish* the weight away; he *willed* it away by simply cutting back on the amount of food he put in his mouth and exercising more. I listened recently to James Clear’s book *Atomic Habits*. Atomic habits are little things you can do to slowly break bad habits or to develop healthy habits. First, you have to decide on where to cut back or what you want to begin. Start by being more aware of eating. Who, if not you, decides how much, how often, and what will be eaten?

Nothing in Excess

A very long time ago, in the ninth century b.c.e., the historian Hesiod wrote: “In works and days observe due measure, moderation is best in all things.” The motto “*nothing in excess*” appears frequently in the teaching of the ancient Greeks. Once moderation begins, it can be continued and practiced bit-by-bit, less and less, or more and more, depending on where we’re going. It is said that when Einstein was asked what the most important mystery is in the universe, he replied tongue-in-cheek “compound interest.” The more we save, the more our saving compounds itself.

Practical Advice

Develop a *tendency toward* losing weight, instead of and *tendency toward* gaining. Get a digital scale that measures in pounds and tenths of a pound. If possible, put the scale below or near a calendar perhaps in the bedroom, and then weigh yourself at the same time each day, perhaps before taking a shower. Work on the ounces and the pounds will take care of themselves. If the scale goes up — think, “What did I do that made it go up?” If it goes down — think, “What did I do to help it go down.” What can you do to weigh less tomorrow than today?”

Start Stopping

Losing a pound in a week is not a big deal. The thing to do is to start stopping (gaining weight), and with just a little discipline added on to a little more discipline, the process will gain in momentum. Very simply, the more we eat, the more the stomach expands. When

we don't eat, the stomach shrinks. How simple is the obvious? The less one eats, the less one needs to eat. It's a decision.

*The Holy Spirit is in you in a very literal sense.
His is the Voice that calls you back
to where you were before and will be again.
It is possible even in this world to hear only that Voice and no other.
It takes effort and great willingness to learn.
It is the final lesson that I learned,
and God's Sons are as equal as learners as they are as Sons.*
T-5.II.3:7-11

The answer is so simple: you've got to want to do it. One of my favorite books from the 1970's was Carlos Castaneda's *Journey to Ixland*, wherein Carlos' teacher, Mexican shaman Don Juan, says, "Success must come gently, with a great deal of effort, but with no stress or obsession." How do you do something with "a great deal of effort," but no stress or obsession? You can do it the same way my friend lost 45 pounds: ounce by ounce, day by day, the job gets done, the prison doors are opened, and a new sense of freedom is found. It's true for losing weight. It's true for improving relationships. It's true for improving one's finances. What is true is what is true. Aim for what is true and everything else will be given unto you.

*Look straight at every image that rises to delay you,
for the goal is inevitable because it is eternal.
The goal of love is but your right,
and it belongs to you despite your dreams.*
T-12.II.5:6-7

*The Holy Spirit cannot ask more than you are willing to do.
The strength to do comes from your undivided decision.
**There is no strain in doing God's Will
as soon as you recognize that it is also your own.***
T-2.VI.6:2-4

Lovingly, Jon

