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TWO ROADS

Spirituality : Narratives of Being

An honest chronicle of the stories and service of the incarcerated women and men of the Illinois Department of Corrections

Two Roads

Mission Statement

“We are committed to empowering those most impacted by harmful systems to become servant leaders and agents of change. Using the connecting, restorative power of stories, we hope to do our small part in bringing us all together to overcome societal ills such as violence, poverty and mass incarceration.”



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Spirituality Issue

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Guest Editorial

Sgt. R. Flagg, II

Many people , whether they've been incarcerated or not, choose to sometimes let their past define their future. Let me begin by echoing and re-coining the words of an all too familiar phrase: "A mind, not to mention a future, is a terrible thing to waste . . ." To endeavor to bring about change is not an easy task! It starts with a vision and a specific, well-organized plan to accomplish the goal at hand.

One person can't do it alone! "A house divided cannot stand . . ." In order for this institution here at Kewanee LSRC to thrive and to become what it was meant to be, it's pertinent that we all have the same goal in mind: **to make a conscious effort, and if possible, equip those in custody with the necessary means, so that their tomorrow can be better than their yesterday!**

BE ENCOURAGED & GOD BLESS

Editor's Note

Keith P. Talley



The Two Roads editorial team is excited to present this issue on ***Spirituality*** to our confined and non-confined readers. Our mission as an e-zine (an electronic platform for marginalized voices) is rooted in the fertile soil of Restorative Justice; subsequently, we believe that the sharing of the personal stories of those impacted by the criminal legal system is a restorative practice.

It is our hope that all the stakeholders of our respective communities are moved by these intimate accounts to contribute their time, energy and resources towards our collective healing, transformation and wholeness.

If being “spiritual” means being more inclined towards “inner meaning” rather than that which is material/physical, then without question, spirituality is an indispensable ingredient in the renewal of the individual, which is a prerequisite for any realistic effort towards societal change.

BELIEF in ourselves—**PATIENCE** and **PRESERVERENCE** during difficult times—**COURAGE** to challenge our entrenched self-limiting beliefs—**FORGIVING** ourselves and others—**HOPE** that our tomorrow will be better than our yesterday—and our unshakable **DETERMINATION** to forge a purposeful future full of choices instead of chances are all manifestations of our inner/spiritual selves.

This issue is a revealing window that provides an insightful glimpse, through personal narratives, into the traditional and non-traditional paths taken by the confined to find meaning, purpose and strength.

Editor's Note (cont.)

Keith P. Talley (2)

My personal journey involves a sincere pursuit to find meaning and purpose in my life. Through study, prayer and meditation, I found that direction and guidance through Al-Islam. **Al-Islam** is a comprehensive way of life, made up of beliefs and actions, which establishes for me a harmonious relationship with my Creator, my own “Self,” and with my environment (everything else in God’s creation). This harmony facilitates my peace and contentment in this life, and my experiencing of those things in a better, more enduring way in the hereafter.

Please continue to read and enjoy the powerful, personal accounts of our remaining contributors. I’ll leave you with an inspiring verse from the Holy Qur’aan that has served for me as a daily, inexhaustible source of motivation.

Until our next issue, be both blessed and a blessing.



“Whoever does good deeds, whether man or woman, and believes, WE will give a new life – a life that is good and pure – and in the next life, WE will reward them according to the best of their deeds.” (16:97)

Spirituality?

Byron Jones



When I hear the phrase *spirituality*, the first thing that comes to my mind is what religion a person is committed to. And because I'm not committed to one, initially, I will be reluctant to touch on this topic due to the difference of opinions about religions becoming a debate. And, I stay clear of debates due to them amounting to nothing (my opinion). So to write this article, I had to first define **spirituality**: sensitivity or attachment to religious values. Then, I defined **religion**: the service and worship of GOD or the supernatural. All of this was needed for me to determine what being spiritual is.

So what is my stance? I believe that there is a Higher Power among us in which we all label as the life-giving force, **GOD!** We all praise this supernatural energy in our own way because we all know that NO human being could possibly create everything we see all around us on a daily basis, including what you see in the mirror. With that belief system, I know my life wasn't designed for my individual purpose, but for the true creator of my existence.

For me, the ONLY fact I can wrap my faith around is to live a selfless, righteous life, being a servant for humanity.

Therefore, my spirituality lies in the spirit that is unseen, but felt through every sensation with my mind, body, and soul.

A Spirit-Filled Life

Steven T. Hanserd



Hello incarcerated family. I just want to share what spirituality means to me. It's the voice in my subconscious that tells me right from wrong. It is the thought that gives me the faith, inspiration, and hope to hold on through troubled times. When making a crucial decision in my life doesn't make much sense to me, it is a voice of reason. I suppose you could say that my spirituality closely ties into my mental health, for my ability to recognize and cope with unhealthy triggers and stressors also stem from my spirituality.

There are spiritual laws that are vitally important for me to recognize and keep in front of me. For instance, the Law of Giving is based upon the more I do for my fellowman, the more my heavenly Father will do for me. I cannot beat GOD's giving; indeed love is the source of HIS

being, and giving and receiving comes from Love.

I also believe in the Law of Spiritual Warfare. This law dictates that my enemy and opposition, the devil, can only be beaten if I use the spiritual forces of good, which are always at my defense to fight the evil spirits with good and greater ones.

My life revolves around the spirit realm, where my own spirit is allowed to leave and transcend these dismal places and situations. I dwell in and soar far above the heavens in my thoughts, dreams and imaginations; it is this spiritual station that empowers me to internally make it through the position I am in now. Once I'm allowed the chance to regain a productive and responsible life on the other side of these walls, I have faith that my spirituality will give me a chance to be more than I have ever been.

Without spirituality, my life is meaningless and hopelessly lost, leaving me continually trying to find my way through this everyday maze that I am challenged to live through.

So search within your heart and mind, and find you inner, spirit woman/man. Your life will be better because of it!

A Better You

Buford Smith III



Often the word *spirituality* is used in reference to GOD or religion. It inspires visions of mosques, churches and cathedrals with people engaged in various forms of worship/prayer, each of them seeking the great divine beyond. However, spirituality does not come from the great beyond; an individual's path may lead there, but it doesn't start there.

Every religion acknowledges the individual. Through religious dos and don'ts, they establish individual rights and responsibilities. This is done with the understanding that a group is only as wise and faithful as it's members. Thus, spirituality begins within, or at least that's how my spiritual journey began.

There is a belief that everyone is born with a natural disposition to love what is good and right, and to hate what is bad and wrong. This disposition is what allowed me to find hope in difficult situations. **However, I found that my spirituality needed to go beyond my mere desire to remain positive. I needed to make a focused commitment to action. Belief, hope, and prayer would only carry me so far, I needed to exercise the power in my hands.** For sure, everything ever done started with someone's willingness to do it, and then them exercising the power in their hands to see it done.

Ultimately, I've found that spirituality at its simplest was about the harmony in my heart being displayed to the world by the actions of my hands. It started with me loving and forgiving myself—**harmony within**. Then, I had to love and forgive others so that I could live a life that allows me to have my wants and needs met without sowing discord in the lives of others—**harmony with the outside**.

Spirituality is about harmony. Harmony is about a better you. For me, that began with what I was willing to do, actually do, and get done at the appropriate time. I pray to Allah that my more productive days lead to better tomorrows, and a brighter future.

Odinism: A Way of Life

Raymond Matthews



WHO AM I? - WHY AM I HERE? These are the great mysteries that have dumbfounded mankind since the dawn of time, and it is these same questions that I believe every person struggles with at some point in their lives. To some, they find solace in the comfort of a particular religion which brings them the connection they're looking and yearning for. However, as I embarked on this journey to find the path for my life, it wasn't a particular faith, as today's society sees them, where I found the answers that I was looking for; but instead, the spark of divinity called and pulled me from within the very core of my soul towards the way of life known as **Odinism**.

I say a way of life instead of using the term "religion" because it is not just a religion in the common sense of the word, but it's a way of life that connects me to the very living universe, just as it did for my ancestors long ago. It shows how the natural forces are the guides driving a person forward while giving them the meaning of life. Whether it is the strength and wisdom within us, the sun shining today, the wind blowing tomorrow, or even the change of seasons that are upon us, they are all a representation of the Gods and Goddesses.

Odinism: A Way of Life *(cont.)*

Raymond Matthews (2)

Odinism shows through symbols, personifications, and virtues, an understanding of and the meaning of life today just as it was done way before the term “religion” ever came to be. It teaches that one can and should always strive to be something better. The stories that speak through the Sagas, Myths and Eddas are of honor, strength, obedience and aspirations. **They all connect to a network that runs through the very fiber of my being, all the way through my bloodline to my ancestors, as well as to the rest of the natural world, for we are one with nature and the natural order of the universe.**

The Turning

Ralph Pollock



“I’m praying GOD comes and turns this thing around; GOD, turn it around.”

I heard this song for the first time recently as it was played by our worship band. It immediately struck a chord as I felt those words go through me. I realized it was my prayer 17 years ago, as I sat in a cell guilty of a crime that destroyed the world I knew.

On that day, only a few hours before, in a state of drunkenness, I drove through a red light, causing a car accident that devastated a family, and left me uncertain whether I even wanted my next breath. In a holding cell in a small suburb, desperation and anguish turned to despair as the weight of hopelessness came upon me. At some point during those hours, I recalled an old Superman movie where in order to save Lois Lane’s life, Superman had to turn back

time. Superman accomplished this by making the earth rotate backwards in order to get those hours back and change what had already happened.

I am a **Christian** adult man, not taken to flights of fantasy, but the world had just ended for me and I could not live with what had happened. As I cried out to GOD in my guilt and shame, that movie came to my mind and I asked, begged, GOD to turn the world back so that I could undo what I had done. “GOD, turn this thing around; turn it around.” GOD can do anything, and HE could do this for me if HE wanted. That was my thinking, and somehow it gave me back some hope.

Now here is the amazing part. Seventeen years later, as I sat on my bunk and thought about that foolish, selfish prayer spoken in desperation so long ago—I realized GOD had answered it; however, HE did not answer in any way that served my self-centered, self-pitying cry. **HE did not need to change all of existence, or to rewind all of reality; HE only needed to change me. . . and HE did!**

Today

just another “Joe”



I was born and raised Catholic. I was baptized, confirmed, and received my first Holy Communion at a very young age, as well as receiving the sacraments of marriage and confession.

All of this is fine for the sake of religion. However, life has molded me into a spiritual man rather than a religious man. When I say “life,” I’m referring to the many regrettable decisions I made, and thankfully the good Lord has always been there to turn my messes into miracles.

Today, I don't judge a person's religion or belief, I'm simply happy to believe. . . .

Today, my GOD is a loving GOD who I choose to call Jesus Christ. . . .

Today, my GOD does not watch and wait to come down on me when I make a mistake. . . .

Today, my GOD gives me the ability to see how much we are all alike, no matter how different our experiences ar. . . .

Today, I can love my fellow man because we are all created in HIS image.

Today

Joe (2)

This means there is a little bit of bad in the best of us, and a little more good in the worst of us. We are all just trying to do the best we can, hoping for a little more peace and comfort.

I've experienced some of the most depressing times of my life while being confined, yet I find myself today wanting to help others avoid my pain. This can only come from a loving GOD. I only know this because doing things my way got me a ticket to IDOC. Doing things GOD's way has allowed me to experience a sense of peace and purpose that cannot be found any other place I've looked.

Thank GOD!

GOD Bless All!

U.U. and Social Justice

Clyde Best



I have been incarcerated for almost 25 years now, and I have always been interested in criminal justice reform and social justice. I have also studied many faith traditions. When I started to study and become a follower of Unitarian Universalism in 1996, I found that it had a profound resonance with my life as an incarcerated person and my beliefs about criminal justice reform and social justice in general.

I am now a member of the Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry of Illinois. This organization advocates for criminal justice reform in the Illinois prison system and has many programs (like a pen-pal correspondence and theological study through mail) to help individuals in custody.

The basic theological stance of Unitarian Universalism is the universal salvation of all of humanity regardless of faith tradition. The UUPMI seeks to help those who are incarcerated because they recognize the humanity of all those who are incarcerated. I can certainly attest to the fact that prison is a very dehumanizing place, and my deepest spiritual struggle throughout my incarceration is not losing my humanity.

As the years have gone by, I lost my father, and have lost touch with many friends and family. Being without a strong spiritual foundation during most of my incarceration, it has been difficult to find purpose in life, and that state can be very psychologically debilitating. Unitarian Universalism has given me a renewed

U.U. and Social Justice *(cont.)*

Clyde Best (2)

identity and spiritual structure and keeps me motivated to look towards the future (specifically my impending release) with a sense of anticipation and hope. I want to devote my life to fighting for criminal justice reform, specifically prison reform. I am confident that my knowledge, experience, and faith will guide me in that endeavor.

Unitarian Universalism's Seven Principles

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.



Emptied Vessel

Ronnie Carrasquillo



By GOD's grace, I came to recognize the havoc that I brought upon my family, community and society. This awareness caused me to re-evaluate my principles and values and resulted in me finding the need to transform my character.

Through the power of my family praying over my life, I eventually took to their wise counsel and began my own spiritual journey. The hardest part of the fight was the beginning, because I had to first eliminate the prideful reputation that the world knew me as.

It was harder for others (friends) to accept my spiritual change, for the worldly want you to stay the same. However, I was able to eventually overcome my reputation and empty myself of pride, thereby preparing myself for GOD to use me for better things. **“But we have this treasure in Earthen Vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of GOD, and not of us.” (2 Cor. 4:7)**

I understood that if I was a vessel full of myself, full of earthly reputation, that GOD would not pour anything into an already full vessel. Jesus made himself of no reputation but took upon him the form of a servant. **(Phil. 2:7)**

How hard it is to go against the norm of wanting to be recognized: the “Look at me!” syndrome – “Look who I am!” – selfishly searching for a title. Oh, how the world loves chasing those titles; however, true transformation comes in humility and the putting of oneself last. It is written: “They that findeth their life shall lose it, and they that loseth their life for my (Jesus) sake shall find it.” I had to lose it . . . to find it!

My personal spiritual values for transforming my character have played a huge role in my Restorative Justice work. Restore is to bring back to wholeness, meaning that there is something broken that needs to be restored. The U.S. Constitution mentions this dynamic, saying, “. . . to be restored to useful citizenship,” which means that I was not useful and therefore confined.

Emptied Vessel (cont.)

Ronnie Carraquillo (2)

My worldview changed as my spiritual journey, rooted in action, progressed. It is written that you will know them by their fruits; that's the impact of being a doer of the Word and not just a talker of the Word. I realized that I can't keep faking it to make it, I had to live it in order to give it!

My daily regimen for personal growth involves the feeding of my healthy appetite for the Word throughout the day, whether by reading and meditating on the Word, prayer, or conversing with someone about the Word. It also requires me to be compassionately mindful of those who are still of the world and who still can't "see", that I may extend Grace to all, as GOD has freely extended to me. Negativity is easy to find; we can point out the bad we see in all people. However, to not see the log in another person's eye is to seek the good—uplift—and exalt, that is doing what is written. This is my regimen as an Ambassador for Christ.

In closing, the most spiritually powerful moments in my journey are made up of those times when my love of GOD has empowered me to be a **giver**, whether through spirit-filled testimony, selfless spending of funds and time, or compassionately sharing the word; it sure beats being the **taker** that I was.



My Spiritual Journey

Jason Foster



Being spiritual is something I hold close to my heart, and my spiritual preference is **Baptist**. As a young child, like most of us, I was introduced to my faith through my family. My Grandfather was the pastor of the church I grew up in.

Although I was raised in the church, it was not until I got in my teen years that I started to take my faith seriously. Things I was going through made me reach out to my Lord for strength. It also made me study more, which led me to acquire more knowledge about my faith. One thing I learned is that most people were raised to believe and have their own preference in spirituality. Being an individual in custody, spirituality comes up often, and I respect everyone's preference.

When it comes to my faith,

there's a comfort that comes over me when I allow my GOD to take full control of any situation I find myself in. When I pray to my Lord, I know without a doubt everything I ask for will be done. It may not be done when I want it, but it's always on time.

Faith is something that has no room for doubt if you believe in a certain religion. Ultimately, it's up to you to have faith even when things seem to have no light at the end of the tunnel. That's the joy of being spiritual to me. Having faith the size of a mustard seed!

I never get into a debate with my fellow individuals in custody about spirituality. If they are into their faith like me, there's no way the conversation would go anywhere, because there's nothing they could say that would make

My Spiritual Journey *(cont.)*

Jason Foster (2)

me second guess my spirituality.

Being spiritual, there's an overwhelming feeling that you get when you're doing something that brings shame to your religion. Being on this spiritual journey for 38 years now, I find myself asking forgiveness for things that didn't matter to me years ago. To me, that's the gratification you feel when your spirituality grows.

In conclusion, one thing I've learned is that everyone has a different growth period. My fiancée has not been on her spiritual journey as long as me, but her growth is further ahead of mine, and she gives me so much encouragement while on this spiritual journey. The best part of being spiritual is having some spiritual warriors with you as you grow. **So when asked the question about spirituality, I say keep learning, always stand firm on your beliefs, and growth will come with experience. Remember, faith is one of the most important qualities in being spiritual.**

Testimony of Freedom

(poem)

John Williams



Dear Lord of all the worlds, please hear my plea.

I'm trapped inside a life of lies, within this world of greed.

I thought I didn't need You in my life, there was no room.

With foolish pride, I pushed You aside as darkness began to loom.

So many times You spoke to me, I even felt Your hand.

I couldn't hear Your voice so clear—I refused to understand.

So crazy the life I used to live and You saw my every move.

The world I thought was mine to gain, but my soul I stood to lose.

I've lied, I've cheated, I've done it all, I've hurt the ones I love.

So many excuses for all my abuses, what was I thinking of?

You've seen my life, I cannot lie. I come to You in shame.

A prodigal son, who's wealth is gone and only himself to blame

My life of sin has come to an end. Today I just want to come clean.

Regain my soul before I grow old, a new life, if you know what I mean.

I've read Your word, I've even heard that You're the most forgiving.

Your Mercy is free for sinners like me if I turn my heart to You—repenting.

I just want to say, through this poem I pray. Dear God, forgive my sins.

Renew my heart and give me a new heart. Let me inspire my friends.

I write this poem to expose my wrongs and to bless all those in need.

I was lost and bound, before I was found; **praise GOD, the prisoner was freed.**

It is GOD Who Sustains Us

Anthony Hayes



After being sentenced to 60 years imprisonment for First Degree Murder, I sat in a Cook County Jail bullpen, isolated, bewildered, and full of rage. Another detainee who was cleaning the opposite bullpen to earn an extra sandwich looked over at me and was moved to speak to me.

He stated, “Hey young brother, HOLD ON! Remember, the battle is no longer physical, it is spiritual now.”

Less than five years after that encounter, I would sit in Stateville’s seg. (I-House) starting what would turn into a two-year seg bid, where I would come to engage in spiritual battles. There, I would come to know that GOD is REAL! “Where is the nearest place we can find GOD? In our hearts.”

(Key 101)

Without my connection to GOD, I could not engage in any spiritual battles successfully. **(Eph. 6:12)** I would not know that I must worship HIM! HIS Spirit is within me, and I am nothing without HIM. Because of HIS sufficiency, I now stand at the entrance of my Promise Land. **(II Cor. 3:5,6)** This Warrior has been given the blessing to make it back to Coney Island.

HALLELUJAH!!!

Confession (poem)

Tyrone Delaney



After a long tenure of incarceration, my individual aspect of developing and maintaining a spiritual canvas has been very vast, for I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit **POWER!** The die has been made.

I won't look back, let up, slowdown, back away or be still, for my ALL is at stake. I have been to the abyss, lost my footing, my past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am done with low living, smooth knees, tamed vision, mundane talking, cheap living and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions and popularity. I don't have to be first, right, recognized, praised, regarded or rewarded. I live by faith—not by sight—leaning on HIS presence, lifted by prayer, labor and by power. My face is set—my gait is fast—my goal is heaven—my road is narrow—my ways are rough—my companions are few—my guide is reliable, and my mission is clear.

Confession (cont.)

Tyrone Delaney (2)

I cannot be bought, compromised, lured away or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, negotiate at the table of the enemy, not ponder at the pool of popularity. . . .

My spirituality is to never give up, until I have stared up, prayed up and paid up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus, I believe in Prophet Muhammad and the tenets of Al-Islam (Surah 6:80-82). For HE that guides me through the rough terrain has also been the ONE who has guided me through the bright days. . . .

A Warm Embrace

Carlos D. McDougal



My spiritual journey has led me on a whirlwind adventure towards a spiritual awakening. The first thing I can remember is praising GOD in church with my grandmother. I didn't know that much about GOD, all I knew was that my grandmother would talk to HIM all the time, and HE seemed to talk back.

As I grew older, I started to form a relationship with GOD on my own. However, I didn't feel the same warm feeling that I felt when I worshipped GOD with Granny. Now I know for sure that what I had felt was actually the Spirit holding me tight.

Throughout the years, I tried to discover my own spiritual identity causing me to walk the faith of many religions, but none gave me pause or that warm feeling I got in church with my grandmother.

I've been incarcerated for twenty years now, and the faith of my grandmother still gives me that warm protective feeling. As a result, I believe that without GOD I wouldn't have made it through this trying time in my life. Although my grandmother is no longer with us in the physical, sometimes I can still hear her singing and praising GOD, and I smile to myself with that warm feeling enveloping me.

I stepped away from faith for awhile and life has been tumultuous to say the least. Now that I'm nearing the end of my incarceration, I have sought that warm embrace that GOD provided for me when I didn't allow the outside noise to distract me away from HIS grasp. Thanks to a friend, GOD has reclaimed what I so foolishly thought I could take from HIM.

A Warm Embrace *(cont.)*

Carlos D. McDougal (2)

In coming here to Kewanee, GOD has shown me what my life could be if only I have faith. I'll leave you with this:

LORD I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT WITHOUT YOU THERE IS NO ME. I SURRENDER AND LAY MY HEART IN YOUR HANDS. SHOW ME YOUR MERCY, GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO WITHSTAND THE STORM THAT IS SURE TO COME AFTER THIS, BECAUSE AS YOU KNOW, THE DEVIL IS LURKING AROUND THE CORNER WAITING TO STRIKE. THROUGH YOU ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE, IN YOUR SON'S HOLY NAME, I PRAY.... AMEN.

The Crossover

Alvin Harris



Shalom (Peace),

As a **Hebrew Israelite** my spirituality has been and continues to be a major factor in the decisions I've made over the past 20 years of my life. My spirituality has guided me on how I treat others, and also how I treat myself.

Oftentimes we give no thought as to how we treat ourselves. Prior to my spiritual awakening, I treated myself like I didn't care what the negative outcomes of my actions would be. I smoked weed until I actually passed out, drank until I passed out, and didn't care if I got enough sleep or exercise. All of these things, and more, I believe were a reflection of my lack of spirituality,

As a Hebrew, spirituality became the source of the motivation that inspired me to change. It gave me a new authentic respect for myself and enabled me to focus on a purpose.

It demanded that I recreate a spiritual mindset, which ultimately empowered me to change my behavior. Once that happened, I began to see positive results in my life because I was now making better decisions. One of the things that I am proud to say is that after 23 years of being involved in "this and that", I have never been to Segregation. *(Since I am in Kewanee, I feel that it is safe to say that I'll go home with the streak intact.)*

My relationships with my family have also improved. I've been able to create real, lasting friendships because I am now able to identify what true friendship looks like.

All of these things and more wouldn't be possible if spirituality wasn't at the center of my life. For me, spirituality isn't just the belief in YAHWAH, it encompasses everything I do, work, labor and toil for, and manifests itself through what is observable.

Game Plan

Timothy Alexander



I was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. I've enjoyed life as I have pleased. I never had a problem with rules. I've always had a problem with people and systems, particularly bullies, losers, thieves, and the views of people who want me to do what they want for their benefit. I've always done things for my personal gain.

My life's game plan produced some wins, but overwhelmingly more losses. Now, looking back at all the issues, I see that I had been looking for short-cuts, cheating and not following the rules for so long that I had cut off all of the winning in my life, and simultaneously lost a lot of my winnings.

My last big loss came on December 3, 2011, when I was arrested in my home. The police conducted a search warrant and found a gun. I was

charged with Armed Habitual Criminal and subsequently sentenced to 17 years. **There was no one in the court with me, no family, no friends, no help, just me standing alone as I have for so long . . . losing.**

Once I knew that I was going to be gone for 14 years, I told myself that I needed a new game plan. I needed to help myself first, so I asked Allah for some help. I went to Jumuah service weekly and began my continued daily performance of prayer (Salat). I keep my faith close because this way of life, **Al-Islam**, must be followed if it is to help me hit the right targets in life and win.

Then, I began to re-work my game plan. You see, my game plan was never a winning plan because I was doing everything for the wrong reasons, and in the wrong way. I also eliminated the losing habits that prevented me from having better outcomes at hitting my life's targets. I give all praise to Allah for placing me in a mind frame to be open to life, and the needs I have in life. It took so many losing situations to get to this space of peace of mind, trust in others, love for self and need for supportive relationships with loved ones.

Game Plan (cont.)

Timothy Alexander (2)

That's what's special about Kewanee: here I can see myself winning. Through taking classes and overcoming setbacks, the losing stops here! The staff here have even been instrumental in my reunion with my family. They helped me reach out to my sister and brother after not talking to them for 22 years.

I now realize that winning comes when you seek out the right course; it takes small wins to become a winner again. I must be real with myself and affirm that I love me today. I say this in the mirror to myself every day. I also remind myself that my success requires that I do my part in putting myself in the position to win again, daily—monthly—yearly. That's what the Kewanee experience is doing for me.

**Winners never quit, and
quitters never win—never will
I quit on myself !!!**

Believed in Me

(poem)

Antonio Aguirre



Even the wisest of kings and the prettiest of queens, can fail at love like the simplest of beings †
Broke or rich, don't flinch, for all you hold dear can be lost in a cinch †
No one's above reproach, due to stature or coach †
So, beware of love that is unequally yoked, for the mindless wit, is easily provoked †
Eclectic desires can turn to lust, causing blissful hearts to swell and bust †
Sacred the Wound, so ripped than stitched; scaring our souls, I wonder, can we ever truly be fixed †
Humiliating the sting of being shunned and branded, as were slowly and silently abandoned †
From the beginning mankind thought itself to be winning, until we allowed our flesh to do our thinking †
Oh Eve, such a lovely creation to be received, we believed, and yet, she was so easily pleased to be deceived †
Our "First Adam" with dominion over all, somberly woes, for not adhering to the Almighty's call †
Thanks to a "Hissing Reptilian Thief," All God's glory and favor was diminished in a blink, Paradise was so brief †
Now disgraced by their deeds and unbearable shame, in search for anyone to blame, how lame †
But, as human beings, aren't we all built the same, sharing the Divine Masterpiece of our intricate frame †

Believe in Me (cont.)

Antonio Aguirre (2)

Always living at the mercy of our flesh, ensnared by its sinful mesh, but yet,
we snicker in judgment, how devilish †
Indulging in hypocritical cycles, while the innocent worship materialistic and
virtual idols †
Searching for truth where there is none, and later realizing that a life without
meaning is no longer fun †
Wishing to wake from their wicked dreams, beguiled in their defeated
screams †
Depraved with thirst and temptations that could never be quenched, †
Drenched, in the addictive trench, seeking salvation from their own
wretched stench †
Aren't we all tired of the fake highs and real lows, and of love that breaks,
flays and sways? †
You are, great, than let me show you another way, lets us pray †
Lord, please accept my surrender; heal us with your "Holy Spirit" and its
entire splendor †
Freeing us from our "Inner Trolls," bringing peace to our "Tormented Souls,"
Wash away our pains, "Scarlett Letters" and "Ill-Gotten Stains" with thy
Celestial Rains †
Divine and Powerful is your Blessed Son, who could have indulged in all sorts
of sinful fun †
But yet, he sacrificed all, to forgive and save the fallen ones; permitting us to
become family as God's chosen Sons †
Thank you, Jesus, for never leaving my side; while living this life of strife due
to my foolish pride †
Now I can start anew, confident that this pure Love is forged by blood that's
true, †
For in my heart, I faithfully believe, just as you have always,

BELIEVED IN ME!

Ten Gems

Khaaliq Smith



As-Salaamu Alaikum (peace upon you)

Over the years, my experience with being incarcerated has introduced me to a lot of brothers. However, none has had the impact in my life like the good brother Ahmed Ali Ghazi. Due to his advice, I was able to successfully do my time and become committed to developing my mind, body and soul. As a result, I began to experience a richer, more intimate practice of my faith . . . **Al-Islam**. So much so, that when I would read my Holy Qur'aan or anything about the Prophet Muhammad, it was like their presence was right before me.

In response to a question that I asked him, he responded, "All praise is due to Allah (Alhamdulillah), there are 10 Gems that will lead you to a righteous lifestyle." What follows is a summary of the 10 Gems that I've

incorporated into my life, and that has allowed me to live a life that is pleasing to Allah (The ONE worthy of worship).

ONE

Wake up during the last third of the night to pray and seek Allah's forgiveness and favors. (Q-3:17)

TWO

Every once in a while, seclude yourself from people and contemplate the reality of your Lord, His book, His messenger and the service you owe to Allah. (Q-3:171)

THREE

Stay in the company of the righteous believers who fear/love Allah and avoid wrong-doers. (Q-18:28)

FOUR

Bring Allah into remembrance as often and as much as possible. (Q-17:110)

FIVE

Pray as often as you can with sincerity, humility and devotion. (Q-23:2)

Ten Gems

Khaaliq Smith (2)

SIX

Recite the Holy Qur'aan daily with understanding and reflection. (Q-4:82)

SEVEN

Establish fasting on Mondays and Thursdays. (Q-2:183)

EIGHT

Give charity regularly. (Q-3:192)

NINE

Provide relief and aid to the afflicted. (Q-4:75)

TEN

Divest in the fleeting pleasures of this life and invest in your life in the Afterlife and your meeting with Allah. (Q-87:8-17)

Again, this is what helped me make it through this time in prison. Remain steadfast my sisters and brothers. What worked for me may not work for you. This is just my experience with what helped me get much closer to my Lord, Creator and Sustainer. InshaAllah (Allah-willing), may my story or experience will help someone choose the steep path of getting closer to Allah, or whatever fitting name you call Him.

*Wa Alaikum Salaam
(and upon you be peace)*

Nope

A Contributor



I am not spiritual, not in any sense of the term. A few of my friends might argue otherwise. Unfortunately, my friends often abuse language, and do not understand that when a word means everything, it means nothing. I do not believe in spirit in any other context than *esprit*, or in any type of soul other than what you might find at Motown. I have faith only in those few things that themselves have no rational foundation, but without which it is impossible to make sense of the world: the rules of logic, the principle of induction . . . and not much else. Even then, it is less faith than a grudging reliance. I have no hopes beyond my quotidian expectations—we as individuals can look forward only toward nonexistence, and as a species precisely the same. If we somehow escape the likelihood of early extinction, the heat death of the cosmos looms. I am too autistic to feel love as anything but strong affection. While I have an ethical sensibility that can satisfy a couple rounds of Socratic inquiry, no moral order endures much scrutiny.

The only things I have that approach the conventional notion of spirituality are a sense of wonder and an appreciation of beauty. There is no grand plan for the whole of reality, let alone for my tiny self. I was not put here for a purpose. I did not have to be. Yet I am. And this fact of my unnecessary existence bludgeons me into stunned amazement and instills in me a gratitude for the cosmic dice roll that allowed me to be and to behold a fragment of the mad, fantastic spectacle of this equally unnecessary universe.

A Journey of Accountability

Khalil Gay



First I would like to give all praise to Allah with honor, and blessings to all His true and divine prophets.

I began this journey 8 years ago. The frame of mind that I came to prison with was very selfish, and the worst part is that I didn't realize it. I considered the decision I made to sell drugs was motivated by my desire to take care of my family. The truth is, I was doing it for myself, all the while destroying my family and contributing to the destruction of others. Ultimately, it was self-destruction! When I was given 18 years for one drug conviction and 10 years on another, I initially blamed everyone else and created every excuse possible for why I was treated so unfairly.

It wasn't until I began my spiritual journey that I was able to take accountability for the harm that I caused myself and others. It's important to understand why I prefer the word spiritual studies and not religious studies. **My spiritual studies have allowed me to study and apply lessons to my life, regardless of the faith of the teacher or the text being studied.** If the information applied, and I was able to implement it towards my transformation and evolve as a man. I did my best to internalize it.

I could only do this by being on a spiritual mission. A religious mission for me would've kept me divided from others, and closed-minded to information and lessons that could have assisted me by providing me with the tools needed to destroy and keep my lower-self in check.

A Journey of Accountability (cont.)

Khalil Gay (2)

Today I can finally say that I am a man! I have learned to identify and take accountability for my choices. I make changes in my character when I see my flaws being a hindrance to my wholeness, and to the health of my relationships with those around me. I can finally say that I love myself, which now allows me to love others. I have applied integrity to my daily decisions. I now acknowledge how important it is to have empathy. Instead of tearing others down, I graciously build them up by planting positive seeds of wisdom with the hope that they blossom.

I am intimately aware of my conscience and understand that it is Allah who directs me to Him. I'm able to shun the evil whispers from within my "Self" and from others. So my spiritual journey of accountability has allowed me to elevate spiritually, surround myself with like-minded individuals, and move purposefully in the direction of success!

Peace & Good Will



Finding Truth

Leo Cardez



Most people imagine going to prison as the worst possible outcome in life—just shy of death. They're wrong. Viewed in the right perspective, prison can be a life-changing, life-enhancing, life-affirming experience.

When I came to prison, I lost myself and emerged in a whole new shadow world. I had neither any possessions nor any real control over any aspect of my life. I lived wholly in the present, both for my sanity and safety. Interestingly, by doing so, I began to see the world in a whole new perspective, noticing things I had often taken for granted, finding beauty in the mundane and love in the secret chambers of my heart that I didn't even know existed. Prison did that.

I've come to think of prison like a strong wind, not meant to harm us or to stop us, but to strip us down to our core being . . . to see ourselves as we truly are.

Once I was ripped out of society's expectations and plucked out from the consumer driven rat-race, everything seemed to slow down, becoming clearer in the process. It was only then, in that blinding clarity, that I was finally able to see **The Truth**.

See, in the "real" world, the truth can only reveal itself when our guard is down. He's easily driven away by our hyper-focus on every little detail of our real and digital lives. I've come to think of prison like a strong wind, not meant to harm us or stop us, but to strip us down to our core being . . . to see

Finding Truth (cont.)

Leo Cardez (2)

ourselves as we truly are.

Who is he? **The Truth**. Sometimes it is the reality of things you've done or changes you should make. It is rarely what we want to hear, but more often what we need to hear. If only we would listen.

The Truth shows up when you live in the moment (just ask any regularly practicing Yogi or Buddhist); he can not exist in an unknown future. As an inmate forced to live in the present, it was impossible for the Truth not to find me. He was never rude or obtrusive; he was patient and friendly, setting up in a corner of my consciousness and simply waving with a gentle smile as if to say, "Hi there, it's me, remember me? Let's talk . . . when you're ready."

Spending time with the Truth is a lot less scary and stressful than trying to duck him (as I had for 30 years). I had to meet the truth in spite of myself. Being stuck in this 6x9 concrete tomb eliminated the difficult part of making the formal decision to face him.

Speaking frankly, I don't always choose to face the Truth in here, not really. I admit, I still get lost in daydreams of different realities, imagining a person I never was and never will be. But sometimes I do, and the more I do, the easier it becomes, so that now he feels more like a buddy sent to help me, rather than a spirit meant to haunt me. And I know, the more I can come to grips with the Truth about who I was and who I am today, then the more likely I can define who I will become tomorrow.

Two Roads Editorial Team



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Two Roads Mission Statement

“We are committed to empowering those most impacted by harmful systems to become servant leaders and agents of change. Using the connecting, restorative power of stories, we hope to do our small part in bringing us all together to overcome societal ills such as violence, poverty and mass incarceration.”



PASSION / ASPIRATION ISSUE

In the face of spirit breaking conditions and seemingly hopeless circumstances, the human spirit, in an act of defiance, continues to hope, dream, and soar. Help us crush the dismissive single narrative about those impacted by the criminal legal system, and at the same time, educate and inspire others by sharing about your current passions and/or future aspirations with the thousands of our confined and non-confined readers. Yes, Two Road e-zine has global reach! ([idoc home page](#) → [about](#) → [news](#) → [two roads \[Issue\]](#))

DON'T WAIT . . . HIT OUR MAILBOX NOW!!!

Mail submissions now, or by:

January 15, 2023

(250-350 words)

With staff support:

Have a staff member electronically send submission and photo (if possible) to:

penny.rowan@illinois.gov

Without staff support:

Mail submission, with name and title to:

Attn: Ms. P. Rowan – Two Roads

Kewanee Life Skills Reentry Center

2021 Kentville Road, Kewanee IL 61443



SPECIAL ISSUE!

Like our brothers, Kewanee Horizons, the Two Roads editorial team also salutes your willingness and efforts to share your stories and suggestions to the Resentencing Task Force for a sound and fair resentencing policy. However, the election season has finally ended, the struggle continues, and the time is now ripe to share your hearts, minds, and voices once again.

The Two Roads e-zine's mission is simply to serve as a platform to tell our stories on a wide range of topics; indeed, our stories have value and power! We would like to share your unique story to our confined and non-confined readers, concerning the human toll, impact and trauma that the **Truth and Sentencing** law has had on the lives of you, your family, and your community. Your family and friends can then share the link to the special issue with lawmakers, advocacy groups and other power-wielding stakeholders ([idoc home page](#) → [about](#) → [news](#) → [two roads \[Issue\]](#)).

Although your insightful analysis, strong feelings and creative policy suggestions are real and deserve to be considered, this humble opportunity is limited to just compellingly relating your human story, to other human beings, so that they may make courageous human decisions with our humanity in mind.

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February 1, 2023

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