

As I layed inside this hot, musty south Georgia prison cell last night... my mind was at peace. But around me there is abnormal amounts of chaos and confusion. Laying here meditating, ^{my} mind becomes distracted by the sound of a shank being sharpened in the ~~over~~ ^{few} cells over. Sound travels clearly from cell to cell through the connecting heat vents. An the feeling of fears untold of can be felt through the connected manner with which convicts choose to relate or respond to one another.

My name is Brotha Man, and I am serving Life plus 5 years at Smith State Prison. As the summer quickly approaches, so does the news of this prison becoming the most Locked-down prison in the state. We're only in the second week of May and well over 50 men have been brutally stabbed by fellow convicts. Two of which died instantaneous deaths. Young, black, and labelled as "S.T.G." members by the facility and state classification agencies. "Security Threat Groups" are the new methods of supposedly dealing with prisoners and poor community citizens who have responded to ghetto and prison depletion of programs, activities, cultural enjoyment options, etc. and at the same instance saw the reverse effect of criminal programming, gang activity, sub-cultural division options, etc. This is the story of my world inside Georgia's pen.

I awoke this morning like every morning over the past 21 days... to breakfast in bed. We get this special treatment if we've been into trouble or if a few individuals have done something and our administration determines it is severe enough to justify a full compound lock-down. So in the 21 days that it takes most of us to psychologically change a habit, this prison has built the mind-state of coping without the normal prisoner needs of walking out side to a yard, going to church or juma, calling family & friends, visiting library for education, law, and intelligent entertainment, going

to positive support groups, having a visit with family, enjoying a game or activity, exercising, showering daily, cleaning our cells, preparing for freedom, extending support in recovery, developing a level of social skills required by today's standards, watching the News of daily events, establishing a case plan of accomplishments for parole, and so much more!

Some men of a religious group felt disrespected and violence soon erupted in one dorm before a chain-reaction was caused. Because of the understaffed close-security setting, the few available guards that responded to the single dorm incident, this isolated issue was handled sadly. The men who was above the rank of Captain took the aggressors that stabbed multiple individuals in front of the guards and placed these men upon the central prison yard, where they had access to several other dorms. This led to angry men spreading the pain they felt to others, who then begin to further hurt others inside of thier dorms too! Before you know it we hear on the officer radio that three more dorms are reporting multiple stabbings!

All I can do is to pray and ask GOD to protect us from ourselves and to protect all GOD's children, even the staff who treat us without compassion. As I looked up I see guards running one at a time from elsewhere with "Pepper-spray Ball Guns". Everyone is afraid because of the shanks and anxiety in the atmospher. The leader of the guards is begging the convicts to close cell and dorm doors, but the guards are'nt equipt to lock the prison down...so the convicts are stuck out in vulnerable situations trying to protect their life from unknown sources of violence! My mind is spinning because this whole situation should've been handled in a much better manner by those in the management positions, and then also by elders and leaders alike.

A fellow convict who had previously spent time around me at Hay's State Prison seven years ago asked me, "Brotha Man, how do we start back up the P.e.a.c.e. at Hay's program that you created back then?" My response was quick and direct, "We must be willing to go to any length for Peace.!" You see, GOD placed that program in my heart because of the utter pain that was unbearably felt from seeing so many fellow men in prison suffer from abusive up-bringsings and misguided youth stages of development. Empathetically, my heart cried out for healing and a peace of mind for them. I prayed and pleaded with GOD to use me. "Send me Lord, and I will go!"

One day, while watching Dr. King's commemoration the six steps to P.E.A.C.E. flowed out of motions as I wrote upon a blank sheet of paper...

- Step 1: Form A Bond, based upon be valuable to others...
- Step 2: Identify Problems, that we agree exist in and around us...
- Step 3: Express The Importance of Unity; working as one to face obstacles...
- Step 4: Get Into the Solution, by working Spiritual Principles into place here...
- Step 5: Build A Strategy; establishing a Think Tank and organize ideas to expand solution
- Step 6: Take On Responsibility, by taking ownership of duties to train other up in, spiritually

Asking older men around the prison what they felt might hinder these ideas, I came up with a cost/benefit analysis before taking this proposal to the head warden. Mr. Clay Tatum quickly approved and provided access to our Chaplain's office for meetings and strategy sessions. The deputy warden of security gave us lee-way to visit units and mediate conflicts and strive to resolve disputes. When the chaplain's time became stretched beyond his responsibility to his duties, the warden allowed a Kairos volunteer who had previously tried to implement some ideas for peace to now come in and work beside us in continuing the efforts for P.E.A.C.E. (Preparing

Everyone As Change Evolves) Though one man was stabbed to death during the 2011 quest for "P.e.a.c.e. @ Hay's", we all could bare witness to the fact that over half of the potential wars, battles, and knife fights was resolved through conflict resolution and mentor type inclusion.

By 2012, the heads of Georgia D.O.C. was hearing of the work being done by the inmates at Hay's and support was said to be on the way. But before it got there a executive group of administrators from Tennessee brought the idea of a different type of well funded program model for level 5 institutions. This politically backed program was called "Tier Program". It was set in place rather quickly and I was transferred and before long my security was lowered so that my presence was no longer around violent offenders for several years.

Though I faced three brief periods of relapse between 2007-2017 of this incarceration period, the work for recovery and P.E.A.C.E. has been ongoing and consistent. IF people google: P.O.P.S. Movement they will witness social media groups, blog talk radio, utube videos, and more, as a GOD given testimony of what can be created when "Prisoners Organizing P.E.A.C.E. Systems" (P.O.P.S.) cares so much that People Organizing P.E.A.C.E. Systems is carried on into the ghettos, borrios, and trailer parks we left broken and hurt.

Being at Smith State Prison 2018 & '19 has shown me how empty the spirits of prisoners have become. Coming back to the tough level 5 institutions after several years has provided me with the chance to look back upon the teachings found in books like The Criminal Personality, Reality Therapy, Alcoholics Anonymous, 1001 Solution Focused Questions, A Man's Search For Meaning, The Long Walk To Freedom, Convicted In The Womb, Blue Rage; Black Redemption, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Making Friends, The Prayerful

Spirit, Think & Grow Rich, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, and most certainly The Holy BIBLE as well as the QURAN & Torah. The love and service provided in these teachings has proven to enhance many lives inside these walls and outside of here. So, I know for a fact that P.e.a.c.e. can prepare these men as change confronts them. We all need somebody to lean on and trust. Just as Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice for my sins, so must we lay down our daily pursuits for the lives and souls of our fellow men.

It won't be easy because many of these men in prison are filled with minds that have been thoroughly "programmed" from adolescence to survive by the means and tools of violence, manipulation, and criminal methods of providing for themselves. These men was taught to cope from all the anxieties, wounds, and loneliness through isolating themselves and substance abuses. Defense mechanisms, coping mechanisms, and also arrested development have altered their abilities to see past the pains of abandonment, child abuse, molestation, and so many other childhood inflictions which contributed to such mental instability.

Each day I see men spending extraordinary amounts of their day in search of a hit of meth or a stick of marijuana. Some stand around for hours obsessing the opportunity to masturbate and expose themselves to the female guard on watch duty. Others are working out daily and sharpening shanks in preparation of the next violent outburst from a opposing group. Another group are fixiated upon the gamble of their commissary store items while the next crowd is planted under the t.v., where they learn more about LeBron James and rap artest than they've ever thought to search out about the nine year old child they left out there in the free-world. Further detaching ourselves from the very activities

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which are meant to remind us of why we must remain focused on what GOD has provided this life for!

Many of us blame the "System" for creating this prison industrial complex, which lacks the necessary therapeutic programs and settings which could facilitate healing and recovering of our spirit and mind. We often criticize the Reagan administration for assisting Contra and opening the flood-gates for cocaine to flood our unprepared ghettos and barrios. We quickly judge the Bush administration for encouraging the opportunistic approaches that set the stages for uncensored rap music, gun availabilities, and less disciplining of children in poverty. We jump at the chance to expose how the Clinton Administration ushered in the campaign for mandatory minimums, mass media focus of urban black gangs, crime, and drug sales... and finally the major push for constitutional allowance to use tax dollars in the "war on crime", "war on drugs", and the "war on poverty stricken urban development." Our complaints swiftly points out the belief that newly appointed Bush, G. W. secretly continued fuel with Middle East about oil and opium endeavors his father created... which gave politicians an advantage in the pursuit for tougher laws, sentencing guidelines, and the continued push for privatized corporations to tap into the growing wealth centered around the prison industry. "Political Reciprocity" is the term I'm striving to explain as we discuss in detail the back-scratching that went on the first decade of 2000. Most of us loved the sight of Prez. Obama, but still admitted the foul stench we all smelled due to the limited amount of exposure and education spreaded out about the operations taking shape to disenfranchise many poor black, brown, and indigenous people by way of criminalizing and further classification systems established for the elements required to justify such disfranchisement.

This blame-game is continued as many of us then place our index finger in the direction of the warden locally. We find ourselves here at Smith S.P. questioning why this warden refuses to establish a "opposite system" to what is causing these problems of violence, drug abuse, and anti-social disorder? If ignorance of the solution is the reason, then why has'nt he consulted with those who've experienced costless methods and approaches applied throughout the violent Louisiana's state system? Whatever the case, we long to encounter the form of leadership that encourages volunteer presence of ex-felons who overcame their demons, drug addictions, gang activity, violent nature, obsessive personality disorders, and the anti-social behavioral habits that fueled their criminality. We thirst for the opportunity for a set of programs like Faith & Character Based, Lifer's Group, Fatherhood, Integrity Dorm, Brotherhood, Culture Based, Mentor & Sponsorship Group, Recovery Unit, Anger-free Environment, etc.

My life in prison is one of waking up each morning to reading the Holy BIBLE and Our Daily Bread before mentoring, counseling, and advising men upon the road towards recovery and freedom. As I do this, my ambition is centered in the hopes of preventing the blame-game, and instead I strive to empower each man to become the example of Love & Service that he wish to witness around him. We pray for the wardens and governor. We ask God to heal our hearts and minds so that we can encourage the staff and each other to see us as human beings rather than just another inmate who has robbed or killed innocent people. It isn't easy to create a peaceful setting in a place like this, but we must remember the tools of the Spirit we have, and use them daily!

Today I heard from convicts who pass out the trays that the new rumor is that we was supposed to go back to regular old movement around the compound today... but because of the recent guards who quit from the hideous sight of all the stabbings and no fellow guards present to disengage this slaughter; plus the grotesque manner with which are the conditions of how guards must work 12 hour shifts in unsanitary and unorganized environments, too many resignations has left the warden and assistent wardens under-staffed. This is a tough blow to many prisoners who have Habeas Corpus petitions and appeal deadlines hanging in the balance because no Law books or legal material is allowed to be passed out from the library. Men are missing weeks, and possibly a month without access to call or see family and supporting friends. Emotional stress is running high as they claim that it's the inmates fault for all the pain and violence flowing through this prison, but blaming men with violent up-bringings is a bit unethical... in my humble opinion.

From my small 6 x 10 office, university, and home a.k.a. prison cell, I find the strength to blame nobody. My life is one of seeking to grasp the lessons that I learned from growing up as a 8th grade drop out who joined the street tribe called the G.D.'s. Juvenile and Prison soon became my teen-age play ground, where I had to quickly learn the pointers or else get punked. Being that I had a black father and white mother I used every tactic available to me so that I could learn from everyone. Taking many wrong turns, I found myself throwing up gang-like signs as I knocked out guards on camera and stabbed inmates between age 19-23. At age 25 I went home after over 8 years and 8 institutions. My last couple of months was at, non-other than Smith S.P.!

A year and a half of freedom to continue my drug abuse and painful quest for answers on why GOD and my family left a 16 yr. old boy to fend for himself in prisons set the stage for re-entering that same old county jail up the street from my childhood neighborhood. This time they sentenced me to Life! Though I entered the jail ready to commit suicide, the staff at Fulton Co. Jail took me to a unit where they had a Drug Recovery Program. Pre-Treatment Stabilization Unit is what Mr. Melvin Graye called it, but I called it Heaven!

The inmates ran the program under the directorship of Mr. Melvin. They put me before the group and asked me questions to determine whether or not they want to vote me into the program with them. The final question, I later found out, was the most vital one I had to answer. "How far are you willing to go Mr. Hester to get your Recovery?"

Standing there as a broken 14 year old boy, in a 27 year old man's body, I said what I had to say in order to survive this screwed up existence just one more day. "I will go as far as I can possibly make it." Then I went on, "I'll do whatever it takes to get recovered."

When the group voted me in it felt like I had been accepted into a strongly sought out fraternity! I owed it to these men and the director to prove my life and recovery was worth their vote and allowance. An so I set out upon a journey of a thousand miles with the single step of expressing my need for help.

From that winter of 2007 up until this day I've learned so much about myself. This journey has captured for me the much needed desire to love myself enough to take a vested interest in life. Through this endeavor it has become my greatest wish

to aid and assist other people in valuing the lives of themselves, in spite of what the gang encouraged them to do or the pain from such painful childhood upbringing. Never being able to look my father in the face before he passed from drug abuse hurt. Begging my mother to come off the streets of prostitution at age 14 was agonizing. But the most severe wound I have was the memory of using excuses and that old blame-game to give up on school, church, and eventually life.

Today I am a student of the Word of GOD and I love to take steps toward understanding the practice of Criminal Law. It is my hope to work diligently to use my testimony for the spiritual freeing of millions of ghetto prisoners, borrio prisoners, and rez prisoners. We can overcome the oppressive mistreatment of this current system, but the path to change begins with us. My mentor layed a valuable token of wisdom out for me. "Brotha Hest, the system will treat you all how they see you treat yourselves".

Lord knows I pray and faithfully serve each day with a big ole helping of southern hospitality. This is not a Life sentence in which I serve, because I'm only promised today...and in this day I find the freedom to be an example of what I wish to see more of in the world around me. May my true life confession of my experiences from where I'm at in life today enhance your views of the truth in my world. Please pray for us as we send up our daily prayers for you. An feel free to write if you, or someone you know of have prayer request. When we're not on this 24/7 lockdown we circle up and pray daily. (about 5 guys in the 96 mandorm)

...in Love & Service, Brotha Man
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P.S. The admin. let us off lockdown on the 21st day, in spite of all!