

WHAT IS THE DUTY OF TODAY'S PRISON SYSTEM? IS IT DESIGNED TO RECTIFY THE CRIMINAL MIND, TO REHABILITATE AND TRANSFORM THE TROUBLED WAYS OF THE OUTLAW PEOPLE? OR IS IT DESIGNED TO SUFFER THE INSTITUTIONALIZED MIND, TO PROVOKE THE EVIL TENDENCIES OF DESPERATE MEN, OR TO PUSH AND PULL, BEND AND BREAK THE MIND, BODY, AND SOUL OF A MALADARTED MINDFRAME? THROUGH EIGHT YEARS OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, I HAVE FOUND, THAT WHEN A MAN IS THROWN INTO THE THROES OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, HIS MENTAL STATE IS AFFLICTED MOST OF ALL; ALTHOUGH, NOT SOLELY BY THE SYSTEMATIC FUNCTION THAT IS BUILT AROUND HIM, BUT, ALSO, THROUGH THE EXTORTIONATE DEMANDS OF THE FUNCTION ITSELF, WHICH ARE FORCED UPON THE FALLACIES OF HIS ALREADY TROUBLED MIND — THAT IS, THE DARK INTERIOR SPACE BETWEEN THE TEMPLES WHERE HIS SANITY LIES.

MOST OF THE MEN HELD IN LEVEL 5 UNITS (MAX CUSTODY / SOLITARY CONFINEMENT) ARE THE MOST DANGEROUS AND REPETITIVE OFFENDERS THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS HOUSES. A LOT OF THESE MEN HAVE SPENT THEIR ENTIRE LIVES IN THE STREETS, IN AND OUT OF DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS, AND RULED BY THE HAMMER FIST OF GANG ACTIVITY, VIOLENCE, AND ORGANIZED STREET CRIME. IT'S ALL THEY KNOW. TAKE A THIRTY YEAR OLD MAN WHO HAS LIVED HIS ENTIRE LIFE IN THAT WAY, THROW HIM INTO A COLD, DIMLY LIT CELL, BY HIMSELF, FOR 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK, AND, THUS, DETERIORATION BEGINS IT'S PROCESS, FIRST, AT IT'S MOST BASIC LEVEL:

IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, THE INMATES ARE FED ONLY TWICE A DAY: SANDWICHES FOR BREAKFAST, A HOT TRAY AT NIGHT.



SO, FOR A MAN WHO RECEIVES NO FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM THE OUTSIDE, THERE IS NO RELIEF FROM THE LURKING HUNGER THAT WOULD SURELY STRIKE AT SOME POINT THROUGHOUT THE DAY, AND SINCE MAX CUSTODY UNITS DON'T OFFER IT'S INMATES ANY TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT, A MAN WITH NO MONEY IS A MAN WITHOUT COMMISSARY - NO FOOD, NO HYGIENE - , THUS RENDERING HIM INDIGENT ; NOT A DOLLAR TO HIS NAME, NOT ANYTHING AT ALL - NOTHING.

MANY OF THOSE WHO FALL INDIGENT WITHIN THE PRISON SYSTEM FIND THEMSELVES LACKING, TO BEGIN WITH, A HEALTHY AND SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR FRIENDS, FAMILIES, OR LOVED ONES, WHETHER THEY'VE ALL PASSED AWAY DURING HIS INCARCERATION, OR JUST SIMPLY DO NOT CARE TO INTERACT WITH HIM ANY LONGER. OTHERS, STILL, MAY ACTUALLY BEGIN THEIR SENTENCE WITH A WIFE OR GIRLFRIEND WHO, THROUGH STRUGGLING DEVOTION, IS FORCED TO KEEP UP WITH HER FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS, AS WELL AS THE WANTS AND NEEDS OF HER IMPRISONED OTHER, BUT, OVER TIME, EITHER THE MONEY SITUATION BECOMES TOO MUCH OF A BURDEN, OR, EVEN WORSE, SHE ENDS UP MEETING ANOTHER MAN - A FREE MAN - WHO WOULD ROB HER OF HER PROCLAIMED DEVOTION, LEAVING THE IMPRISONED OTHER BROKEN HEARTED, BROKEN SPIRITED, AND JUST FLAT OUT BROKE. SO, IN ADDITION TO HAVING NOTHING, IT IS NOW THAT HE HAS NO ONE.

IMAGINE EVERY EVENING, THEN, AS MAIL CALL MAKES IT'S ROUNDS. THE LONELY, INDIGENT MAN AWAITS, PRACTICALLY HOLDING HIS BREATH, FOR A LETTER, OR A MONEY DEPOSIT



RECEIPT, THAT MAY NEVER EVER SHOW UP (AND IT USUALLY DOESN'T). THE FRUSTRATION OF IT IS IMMENSE, WATCHING HIS NEIGHBOR BEING SHOWERED IN MAIL EVERY EVENING, MONEY DEPOSITS ON HIS BOOKS EVERY WEEK. GOOD FOR HIM. OH, AND HIS NEIGHBOR'S NEIGHBOR JUST RECEIVED SOME PERSONAL PHOTOS AND JUST WON'T SHUT UP ABOUT IT. I MEAN, GOOD FOR HIM, BUT THE "LONELY ONE" GETS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING BECAUSE HE HAS NO ONE, AND SO MAIL, VISITATION, PHONE CALLS, AND COMMISSARY ARE ALL OUT OF THE QUESTION FOR HIM, ALL OUT OF HIS LEAGUE, AS FAR AS HE'S CONCERNED. STRUGGLING HARD TO CONSERVE HIS PATHETIC INDIGENT ISSUE EVERY MONTH, AND STRUGGLING HARDER, STILL, TO KEEP THE FRUSTRATION OF HIS JABBING HUNGER AND WRETCHED LONELINESS FROM BOILING OVER AND ERUPTING INTO VIOLENT EPISODES OF MANIC DESPERATION IS A CHALLENGE FOR HIM. BUT WHY FIGHT IT? I MEAN, WHAT DOES HE REALLY HAVE TO LOSE? THIS ARE THE THOUGHTS OF THOSE WHO SUFFER MUCH IN THE PRISON SYSTEM.

AS THE DAYS, MONTHS, AND YEARS GO BY, YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW HIS FRUSTRATION BEGINS TO BUILD, AND, BEING STUCK IN HIS SUFFOCATING CELL FOR SO LONG, HE CAN'T SEEM TO FIND A WAY TO RELEASE THAT STRESS, THAT ANGER, THAT RESTLESSNESS. HE DOES A THOUSAND PUSHUPS EVERY DAY. AFTERWARDS, HIS STOMACH JUST WON'T STOP GROWLING FOR SOMETHING, FOR ANYTHING, TO EAT, SO IT EATS ITSELF — AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT IT FEELS LIKE.

BUT ALL HOPE IS NOT LOST. HE'S BEEN TEACHING HIMSELF HOW TO DRAW, TO HELP KILL SOME TIME, AND, IF HE GETS GOOD



ENOUGH AT IT, HE MAY BE ABLE TO START SELLING IT TO THE OTHERS IN HIS POD WHO BUY PRISON ART TO SEND HOME TO THEIR LOVED ONES. WITH A HUSTLE LIKE THAT, HE'D BE ABLE TO OBTAIN FOR HIMSELF SOME SOAP, SHAMPOO, MAYBE EVEN A JAR OF PEANUT BUTTER; THE VERY THOUGHT OF IT DRIVES HIM INTO PERFECTING HIS CRAFT.

IT DOESN'T TAKE LONG FOR HIM TO MASTER THIS NEW CRAFT OF HIS, AND, INDEED, HE IS ABLE TO SCROUNGE UP HIS HYGIENIC NEEDS, AS WELL AS A LITTLE BIT OF FOOD TO FINALLY BRING HIS ANIMALISTIC HUNGER TO A STATE OF TRANQUILITY. DRAWING FULL TIME NOW, HE RUNS THROUGH PAPER QUICKLY, SO HE BEGINS RIPPING PIECES OF HIS BED SHEETS TO DRAW ON THAT. WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET HIS PRODUCT OUT AND THE MONEY COMING IN.

COMPLETELY IMMERSSED IN HIS WORK, THE INDIVIDUAL DOESN'T REALIZE THAT EVERY HOUR, AS THE FLOOR OFFICER IS MAKING HIS ROUNDS, HE NOTICES THE INMATE FOCUSED IN ON SOME PROJECT THAT HAS TAKEN UP HIS FULL ATTENTION, WHEREAS, BEFORE, HE WOULD LIE IN BED FOR MOST OF THE DAY, TRYING TO SLEEP HIS TIME AWAY.

" I WONDER WHAT HE'S DOING, " THE OFFICER WOULD MUMBLE TO HIMSELF AS HE FINISHES DOING HIS WALK.

MEANWHILE, THE INMATE IS RUSHING TO FINALLY FINISH THIS TIME CONSUMING PROJECT - ONE THAT HAS TAKEN HIM AT LEAST 2 WEEKS TO COMPLETE - , AND JUST AS HE IS EAGERLY APPLYING THE FINAL TOUCHES OF HIS PRODUCT, TWO OFFICERS SHOW UP AT HIS CELL FRONT: GLOVES ON, PEPPER SPRAY HOLSTER UNLATCHED:



"CELL SEARCH!"

IF YOU'VE NEVER HAD TO ENDURE THE TEMPEST OF A CELL SEARCH, YOU'D BE IN FOR A DEFINITE SURPRISE, WERE YOU EVER TO EXPERIENCE ONE. WHEN IT IS ALL SAID AND DONE, YOU'D BE THROWN BACK INTO YOUR CELL, WHERE EVERYTHING YOU OWN IS COMPLETELY TURNED UPSIDE DOWN: CLOTHING, MAIL, LEGAL PAPERWORK, YOUR BED SHEETS AND LINEN - ALL THROWN CARELESSLY ABOUT THE CELL FLOOR. THERE IS NO RESPECT FOR YOUR PERSONAL PROPERTY, NO CONSIDERATION FOR OBJECTS OF SENTIMENTAL VALUE, OR EVEN FOR THE RELIGIOUS ITEMS THAT YOU HOLD MOST SACRED. EVERYTHING YOU OWN IS TURNED INSIDE OUT, THROWN AROUND, AND DAMAGED EVEN. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR ONE TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM HIM UNTIL AFTER HE CLEANS AND REORGANIZES THE WRECKAGE THAT THE OFFICERS LEFT BEHIND. BY THEN, THE SEARCH TEAM HAS LONG GONE - A TACTIC I'M SURE THEY USE IN ORDER TO AVOID HAVING TO DEAL WITH THE GRITZINESS THE INMATE MAY HAVE OVER WHAT HAD BEEN DAMAGED, OR TAKEN FROM HIM.

IN THE END, HOWEVER, AFTER POURING HIS HEART AND SOUL, HIS TIME AND PATIENCE, INTO THAT DRAWING, THEY SEIZE IT FROM HIM; THEIR EXCUSE: DESTRUCTION OF STATE PROPERTY, PROMOTING GANG ACTIVITY, SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIAL, TATTOO PARAPHRASES, OR WHATEVER EXCUSE THEY CHOOSE TO INVENT SO THAT THEY CAN TAKE IT - AND KEEP IT. AS IF THAT WASN'T FRUSTRATING ENOUGH, FROM THAT TIME FORWARD, THOSE "RANDOM" SEARCHES BECOME A LOT MORE FREQUENT, AND A LOT LESS RANDOM, ONCE THEY'VE GOTTEN



A PRETTY GOOD IDEA OF WHAT THEY CAN EXPECT TO TAKE FROM YOU (WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER, IN OTHER WORDS).

HOW IS HE SUPPOSED TO DEAL WITH THAT TYPE OF INDIGNATION — AND REPEATEDLY? THIS IS A GROWN MAN, A VIOLENT MAN, WHO, THROUGH HIS UPBRINGING, KNOWS ONLY ONE WAY TO RESPOND TO SUCH CONFLICT, BUT THROWING HIM, AND KEEPING HIM, IN A CELL, BEHIND A STEEL DOOR, DEPRIVES HIM OF HIS ABILITY TO RESPOND TO SUCH SITUATIONS — WHICH PISSES HIM OFF EVEN MORE. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, HE CHOOSES TO DO NOTHING, AND CONTINUES TO ENDURE SUCH HARASSMENTS, WHO ELSE, THEN, WILL HOLD THESE OFFICERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS?

THE ANSWER: NO ONE. BUT WE ARE ONLY SCRATCHING THE SURFACE OF THE TENSION THAT INEVITABLY DEVELOPS BETWEEN THE PRISONER AND THE D.O.C STAFF; IT DOES, INDEED, GET MUCH WORSE.

IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, THE PRISONER FINDS HIMSELF MUCH MORE DEPENDENT ON THE CORRECTIONAL OFFICER THAN HE WOULD BE ON A LOWER CUSTODY UNIT. BEING HOUSED IN RESTRICTIVE MOVEMENT, HE HAS NO ACCESS TO MEDICAL, LEGAL, AND DAY TO DAY REQUEST FORMS, OR WHATEVER ELSE HE MAY NEED, EXCEPT THROUGH THE OFFICER WHO IS WORKING THE FLOOR. IN FACT, HE HAS TO DEPEND ON THE OFFICER TO BRING HIM HIS MEALS, OR WALK HIM TO MEDICAL; TO ESCORT HIM TO VISITATION, OR TO SIMPLY BRING HIM THE UNIT TELEPHONE.

THIS DEPENDENCY IS THE SOURCE AROUND WHICH MOST OF THE ISSUES BETWEEN THE INMATE AND THE OFFICER REVOLVE. HERE YOU HAVE THE INMATE WHO IS EXPECTING TO BE PULLED OUT OF



HIS CELL, AT A SPECIFIC TIME, IN ORDER TO MEET A CERTAIN APPOINTMENT, VISIT, OR A SCHEDULED PHONE CALL, BUT YOU ALSO HAVE, HERE, AN OFFICER WHO MAY NOT BE TOO ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT PULLING, FOR EXAMPLE, FIFTH IMPATIENT INMATES FROM THEIR CELL - AND THEN BACK - AT SPECIFIC TIMES, THROUGHOUT HIS ENTIRE SHIFT. SOME OFFICERS ARE MUCH TOO LAZY, OR JUST UNWILLING TO MEET THE CONVENIENCE OF WHATEVER SCHEDULE THE INMATE IS THEN DEPENDING ON. FAILURE TO MEET HIS APPOINTMENTS, OR SPECIFIC TIME FRAMES, OF COURSE, FRUSTRATES THE INDIVIDUAL, LEADING TO HIGH TEMPERED CLASHES BETWEEN THE DEPENDENT, AND HE WHO IS MUCH DEPENDED ON.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CORRECTIONAL OFFICER WILL ALWAYS CONTRIBUTE TO THE ALREADY STATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CAPTIVE AND THE CAPTOR. I'M REFERRING, MORE SPECIFICALLY, TO THE YOUNG, PROUD, AND, AT TIMES, ANTAGONISTIC OFFICERS WHO, THEMSELVES, KNOW ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ABOUT PATIENCE AND HUMILITY; THOSE WHO REFUSE TO HAVE AWAY OR BACK DOWN FROM ANY FORM OF A CHALLENGE; THOSE OF WHOM ARRIVE TO WORK WITH THE "OFFICER - VS - INMATE" MINDSET, WHO ACTUALLY SHOW UP LOOKING TO PICK A FIGHT, HOPING FOR SOME TYPE OF THRILLING EXPERIENCE TO TAKE PLACE SO THEY CAN HAVE ANOTHER STORY TO ADD TO THEIR COLLECTION.

THE SKEPTIC WOULD PROBABLY SAY THAT THESE CHARACTER TYPES DO NOT EXIST AMONG THE D.O.C STAFF, THAT MY JUDGEMENT OF ANYONE'S CHARACTER IS A MATTER OF OPINION, BUT LET ME SAY THAT THIS IS NOT, IN FACT, THE CASE HERE. THESE ARE THE TYPES OF THINGS THE OFFICERS CAN BE HEARD TALKING ABOUT AMONGST



THEMSELVES, LET'S SAY, FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN THEY ARE GATHERED IN BIG CROWDS, JUST BEFORE A QUARTERLY SEARCH IS ABOUT TO TAKE PLACE. THEY STAND OUT IN THE HALLWAYS, CLAMOROUSLY LAUGHING AND EXCHANGING STORIES ABOUT HOW THEY BOY SLAMMED AN INMATE WHO, AS IS CUSTOMARY IN MAX CUSTODY, WAS ALREADY IN HANDCUFFS. THEY BOASTINGLY SWAP TALKS OF INCIDENTS WHERE THEY'VE HAD TO USE THEIR TASER, WHERE THEY'VE PEPPER SPRAYED SOMEONE, OR WHERE THEY PRACTICALLY ASSAULTED AN INDIVIDUAL WHO WAS ALREADY AT A DISADVANTAGE - HE WAS IN HANDCUFFS!

IT'S COMMON, IN MAX CUSTODY, FOR THE OFFICER TO DEVELOP THIS TYPE OF ATTITUDE BECAUSE, WHILE THE INMATE IS LOCKED BEHIND A STEEL DOOR (OR IS HANDCUFFED, IF HE HAPPENS TO BE OUT OF HIS CELL), SERIOUS INJURY CANNOT BE INFLICTED ON HIM, HERE A SITUATION TO END IN PHYSICAL AGGRESSION. KNOWING THIS, THE OFFICER FEELS COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO SPEAK RECKLESSLY TO THE INMATE, TO DISRESPECT HIM, TO WALK RIGHT PAST AND IGNORE HIM AND HIS GRIEVANCES, OR EVEN TO FLAT OUT MOCK AND LAUGH AT THE INDIVIDUAL WHO, AT THAT TIME, MAY BE DESPERATELY DEPENDENT ON HIM.

THESE ARE ALL VERY COMMON OCCURRENCES IN THE LEVEL 5 UNITS - OCCURRENCES THAT BOIL THE BLOOD OF THE MAN WHO SUFFERS THE EXPERIENCE OF IT. THIS IS THE SAME MAN, MIND YOU, WHO HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING AND NO ONE, A MAN WHO JUST CAN'T CATCH A BREAK FROM MISFORTUNE'S CLUTCH. HE HAS TO DEAL WITH THESE TYPES OF TAUNTING INDIVIDUALS AND CRITICAL SITUATIONS ON A DAILY BASIS, AND, JUST AS EVERY MAN HAS HIS BREAKING POINT, IT BECOMES DIFFICULT FOR HIM, TOO, TO DEAL WITH AFTER A WHILE; HENCE, THE VIOLENT ERUPTIONS.



IT'S NO WONDER, THEN, HOW A MAN CAN FIND HIMSELF SITTING IN AN EMPTY CELL WITH NOTHING TO OCCUPY HIS MIND BUT HIS OWN THOUGHTS AND FANTASIES OF SWIFT VENGEANCE. DIDN'T YOU KNOW, THAT THE LAST THING YOU'D EVER WANT TO DO IS LEAVE A PSYCHOPATH TO HIMSELF? IT'S BETTER TO DISTRACT HIM FROM HIS THOUGHTS, LEST HE SIT FOR HOURS OR DREAMING OF MURDER, OR ACTING OUT WICKED SCENARIOS OF BRUTAL ASSAULTS OR DEADLY STABBINGS AGAINST THE C.O.'S, INMATES, OR EVEN JUST RANDOM PEOPLE WHO PASS THROUGH HIS TROUBLED MIND.

I'VE EXPLAINED TO YOU WHAT TYPES OF MEN ARE KEPT IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, AND THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THOSE TYPES ARE PUSHED BEYOND WHAT THEY ARE WILLING, OR ABLE, TO BEAR. EVERY SITUATION I'VE PRESENTED HAS LED HIM TO THIS VERY POINT OF BLOOD THIRST, AND IT WILL HAPPEN. HE WILL ACT ON THOSE THOUGHTS WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY ARISES BECAUSE HE HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ELSE TO LOOK FORWARD TO, NOTHING ELSE TO ENTERTAIN HIMSELF WITH BUT THE PURSUIT OF THAT MOMENT.

BEFORE JUDGING THIS STATE OF MIND, HOWEVER, IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU SEE WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE. HERE YOU HAVE A MAN WHO GREW UP IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE HE HAD TO FIGHT. HE HAD TO FIGHT FOR HIS RESPECT, FOR POWER, OR SIMPLY TO DEFEND HIMSELF FROM RIVAL GANG MEMBERS, PHYSICALLY, OR SEXUALLY, ABUSIVE FAMILY MEMBERS, FOSTER CARE MEMBERS, DETENTION CENTERS, OR EVEN A SCHOOL-YARD BULLY; HE'S A



FIGHTER, IT'S ALL HE KNOWS. THIS MAN WAS SENT TO PRISON WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES ALREADY, AND, ALTHOUGH THE SYSTEM WAS QUICK TO ADOPT THE TITLE OF "THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS", THERE IS NO "CORRECTING" TAKING PLACE FOR THIS INDIVIDUAL. HE WAS DEEMED A MENACE TO SOCIETY, AND THEN THROWN INTO SOLITARY CONFINEMENT WITH NOTHING AND WITH NO ONE, WHERE HE IS STARVED, AND THEN SCANTILY PROVIDED FOR; HARASSED, AND THEN NEGLECTED; STRIPPED OF EVERYTHING THAT HAS SHAPED HIS INDIVIDUALITY, AND THEN LAUGHED AT FOR HIS VULNERABILITY - IT'S PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE! WHAT KIND OF REACTION WOULD YOU EXPECT, THEN, FROM THIS, OR ANY OTHER MAN, FOR THAT MATTER?

I IMAGINE THAT ONE WOULD ASSUME THE KEY TO ESCAPING SUCH HARSHIPS WOULD BE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL TO WORK HIS WAY OUT OF MAX CUSTODY, DOWN TO A LOWER CUSTODY UNIT (MUCH LIKE THE IDEAL "MODEL INMATE" WOULD); I ASSURE YOU, THOUGH, IT IS NOT THAT SIMPLE FOR THIS TYPE OF INDIVIDUAL. EVEN IN THE CASE WHERE HE IS FORCED OUT OF MAX CUSTODY FOR BEING THERE FAR LONGER THAN ONE SHOULD BE WITHOUT A PERMANENT ASSIGNMENT TO THAT TYPE OF UNIT, HE DOESN'T LAST ON A CLOSED CUSTODY UNIT FOR MORE THAN SIX MONTHS, OR SO, BEFORE BRUTALLY ATTACKING SOMEONE - IN MOST CASES, A C.O.; IN OTHER CASES, ANOTHER INMATE. AND THE PROBLEM ISN'T, NECESSARILY, THAT THE MAN IS ANIMALISTIC IN BEHAVIOR, BUT THAT HE HAS BEEN TRAINED, THROUGH THE HARSHIPS OF HIS LIFE EXPERIENCES, TO BEHAVE THAT WAY, AND, LIKEWISE, HE CONTINUES TO BE TRAINED,



THROUGH THE HARDSHIPS OF HIS PRISON EXPERIENCES, TO BE AGGRESSIVELY RESPONSIVE TO THE ANTAGONISTIC WORLD SURROUNDING HIM. IN ADDITION TO THIS, THE D.C.C. STAFF HAVE NEITHER THE PATIENCE, THE DESIRE, NOR THE TRAINING TO HELP "RE-TRAIN" THIS MAN'S ANIMALISTIC WAY OF THOUGHT; NOR DO THEY, AT THE VERY LEAST, OFFER HIM ANY DISTRACTIONS FROM HIS MANIC INSPIRATIONS. BOTTOM LINE: THERE IS NO "CORRECTING" GOING ON IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS - AT LEAST, NOT IN THE MAX CUSTODY UNITS.

THE WORSENING OF THE PSYCHOPATHIC STATE, HOWEVER, IS ONLY ONE EFFECT OF THE SOLITARY CONFINEMENT EXPERIENCE. THERE IS, IN FACT, AN ALTERNATE EXTREMITY THAT THE MIND HAS BEEN KNOWN TO FALL INTO: THOSE WHO LAND THEMSELVES IN MAX CUSTODY, NEVER TO MAKE IT OUT ALIVE BECAUSE THEY END UP TAKING THEIR OWN LIFE; LET US NOW SPEAK ON THE SUBJECT OF SUICIDE.

SUICIDE IS A VERY FREQUENT, AND POWERFUL, OCCURENCE IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT THAT DOESN'T RECEIVE THE RECOGNITION IT FULLY DESERVES. THE EXTERNAL ELEMENTS THAT DRIVE THE INDIVIDUAL TO SUCH AN EXTREME ARE THE SAME CONDITIONS THE FORMER TYPE OF INDIVIDUAL HAS COME TO EXPERIENCE. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO IS THAT THE SUICIDAL LACKS THE ENDURANCE, THE FORTITUDE, OF HIS INNER FIGHT, AND, MORE THAN LIKELY, HE HAS ARRIVED AT THE PRISON'S DOORSTEP ALREADY DEFEATED. AMONG HIS PEERS, AS YOU'D EXPECT, HE DISPLAYS A FACADE OF STRENGTH AND BRAVADO, BUT, INTERNALLY, HE HAS DETERIORATED ENOUGH ALREADY, THAT LEAVING HIM IN A CELL WITH NOTHING, AND WITH NO ONE, TO DISTRACT HIM FROM HIS MELANCHOLIC THOUGHTS, MAY NOT BE IN HIS BEST INTEREST, NOR



IN THE INTEREST OF THE STATE.

IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, ONE HAS SO MUCH TIME AT HIS DISPOSAL, THAT HE CAN'T HELP BUT TO DRIFT OFF INTO HIS HEAD, RELIVING THE MANY CHAPTERS OF HIS LIFE THAT HE IS MOST ASHAMED OF, MOST AFRAID OF, AND COMPLETELY BROKEN BY. IF YOU'VE EXPERIENCED MORE LOSS THAN GAIN, MORE STRIFE THAN JOY, MORE DEATH THAN LIVING, THEN A PRISON CELL CAN FEEL MUCH LIKE A STRAIT JACKET IN NO TIME AT ALL.

I ONCE HAD A NEIGHBOR WHO USED TO WAIL, LIKE A CHILD, WELL INTO THE LATE NIGHT — AND EVERY NIGHT. "I'm sorry! I'm so so sorry!" HE WOULD MOAN IN BETWEEN EACH ONE OF HIS DREAFFUL HOWLS. I WOULD SIT THERE, IN THE COLNESS OF THE NIGHT, AT TIMES, WONDERING WHAT IT WAS THAT WAS CAUSING HIM SUCH DISTRESS, ALTHOUGH I WOULD NEVER ACQUIRE THE ANSWER. SOON THEREAFTER, THEY FOUND HIM WITH HIS BED SHEET WRAPPED AROUND HIS NECK, HANGING FLACCIOLY FROM HIS AIRCONDITION VENT.

THE MENTAL STRUGGLES THAT SO MANY MEN IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT HAVE TO DEAL WITH ARE DISASTROUS. MANY OF THE INMATES HAVE SEEN THINGS IN THEIR LIVES, OR HAVE EXPERIENCED THINGS THAT WILL HAUNT THEIR LIVES FOREVER. FOR THIS VERY REASON, THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS PROVIDES THE MAX CUSTODY INMATES WITH ON-SITE PSYCHOLOGISTS AND PSYCHIATRISTS. ALOT OF THE MEN, HOWEVER, DARE NOT SPEAK A WORD TO THESE DOCTORS WHO ARE INFAMOUSLY KNOWN FOR TAKING ONE'S WORDS ~~OF~~ OUT OF CONTEXT, AND, BEFORE HE KNOWS IT, TWO OFFICERS ARE DRAGGING HIM OFF TO S.M.I HOUSING (SERIOUSLY MENTAL ILL), WHERE HE WILL BE STRIPPED DOWN TO BARE NOTHINGNESS, FORCED INTO A HEFTY BUILT, NAVY BLUE SUICIDE DRESS, AND KEPT UNDER CONSTANT OBSERVATION FOR 72 HOURS —



NO PERSONAL PROPERTY, AND NO KIND OF MATERIAL THAT CAN POTENTIALLY BE USED TO HARM HIMSELF, OR OTHERS. IN THE END, IT'S JUST HIM, HIS DRESS, AND THE AGONY OF HAVING TO ENDURE THE CONSTANT DISTURBANCES OF THE MENTALLY ILL, WHO, SURROUNDING HIM, WILL UNDOUBTEDLY DEPRIVE HIM OF MUCH DESIRED SLEEP.

THE DOCTORS, OF COURSE, CLAIM THAT THE OBSERVATION PROCESS IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE INDIVIDUAL, THAT HE MAY NOT BE A DANGER TO HIMSELF, OR OTHERS. HOWEVER, ANY INMATE WILL TELL YOU THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF IT IS MORE LIKENED TO A PUNISHMENT - AND, INDEED, I HAVE SEEN IT BEING USED FOR PRECISELY THAT, IN CASES WHERE AN INDIVIDUAL HAS ASSAULTED AN OFFICER, OR EVEN SOMETHING AS MINOR AS BECOMING AN EVERYDAY NUISANCE TO THE D.O.C. STAFF. SO, IT'S BECAUSE OF THE NOTORIOUS "WATCH PAD" THAT MOST MEN IN MAX CUSTODY WON'T EVEN BOTHER WITH THE PSYCHOLOGISTS, NO MATTER HOW MENTALLY AFFLICTED THEY MAY ACTUALLY BE.

THOSE WHO DO CHOOSE TO GO THAT ROUTE, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE LIABLE TO SUPPRESS THEIR INNERMOST STRUGGLES, SO AS NOT TO END UP IN THAT UNMERCIFUL WATCH PAD EVERY TIME THEY FEEL THE NEED TO SPEAK WITH A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL, IF ONLY FOR THE SAKE OF VENTILATION. IT IS COMMON, THEN, FOR ONE TO REVEAL HIMSELF ONLY SO MUCH AS TO RECEIVE A MINOR DIAGNOSIS AND THE PRESCRIPTION THAT MAY COME ALONG WITH IT.

ULTIMATELY, AND DUE TO THE NOTORIETY OF THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, A LOT OF THE MEN FIND THEMSELVES HAVING TO DEAL WITH THEIR MENTAL ISSUES IN THEIR OWN UNHEALTHY WAY. AGAIN, AS FAR AS SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IS CONCERNED, THROWING THE INDIVIDUAL INTO A CELL WITH NOTHING TO DISTRACT HIM FROM HIS SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND TENDEN-



LIES WILL CAUSE HIM TO FALL DEEPER INTO THE DARKEST CHAMBERS OF HIS OWN MIND. HERE, HE WILL FACE HIS MOTHER AND HIS FATHER, HE WILL RE-EXPERIENCE HIS PAINS AND HIS SUFFERINGS, HE WILL SUCCEED TO HIS GREATEST MISTAKES AND BECOME A SLAVE TO THE SPIRIT OF HIS REGRET. THERE WILL BE NOWHERE FOR HIM TO RUN, NOWHERE FOR HIM TO HIDE, NO ONE TO TURN TO. WHAT YOU HAVE DONE, THEN, IS TO PROVIDE HIM WITH AMPLE TIME AND SPACE TO DESPISE HIMSELF, TO TORTURE HIMSELF, AND, ULTIMATELY, TO MURDER HIMSELF. CRIMINAL OR NOT, SUICIDE IS, AND ALWAYS WILL BE, A UNIVERSAL TRAGEDY.

IN CLOSING, THERE IS AN APHORISM IN FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S "THE DAWN", WHERE HE SAYS OF PUNISHMENT: "A STRANGE THING, OUR PUNISHMENT! IT DOES NOT CLEANSE THE CRIMINAL, IT IS NO ATONEMENT; ON THE CONTRARY, IT POLLUTES WORSE THAN THE CRIME DOES."

INDEED, THE EXPERIENCE OF MAX CUSTODY / SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CAN BE MERCILESS ON THE ALREADY BATTLE WOUNDED MIND; NOT EVERYONE IS MENTALLY FIT TO ENDURE ITS HARDSHIPS. THERE IS SO MUCH THAT CAN BE DISCUSSED ON THIS SUBJECT, AND EVEN MORE CAN BE ARGUED, BUT THERE IS ONE COMMON FACTOR, A POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE ELEMENT FROM WHICH ALL OF US INMATES WILL AGREE TO HAVE SUFFERED — THE LOSS OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S POWER, THE DEPRIVATION OF THE CHOICES THAT WOULD GIVE A MAN A SENSE OF CONTROL OVER HIS LIFE, AND THE HUMILITY OF HAVING TO HAND THAT POWER OVER TO THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF THE CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, THE TAUNTING ENEMY. HERE, THE PRISONER FALLS DEPENDENT ON THE PRISON SYSTEM, AND YET THE SYSTEM WILL NOT GUARANTEE HIM ANYTHING — NOT REFORMATION, NOT MENTAL STABILITY, NOT EVEN ASSURANCE OF HIS OWN SURVIVAL. THAT DEPRIVATION IS WHAT PUSHES THE PRISONER OVER THE EDGE



OF EXTREMITY, LEAVING HIM WITH THE ONLY TWO CHOICES HE HAS LEFT TO CALL HIS OWN: HE CAN EITHER FIGHT, VALIANTLY, OUT OF THE CORNER INTO WHICH HE HAS BEEN SHOVED, OR HE CAN BREAK AWAY FROM HIS HONOR AND SHAMEFULLY SURRENDER TO THE WEIGHT OF THE DOMINATING SYSTEM. AS AN EXTREMIST, WHICHEVER ROUTE HE CHOOSES TO TAKE, HIS FATE IS ALREADY IN THE HANDS OF HIS DOOM, FOR EITHER ONE OF THESE CHOICES, TAKEN TO IT'S EXTREME, COULD VERY WELL COST HIM THE REST OF HIS LIFE. TO POLLUTE, TO BREAK, TO DESTROY - IF THIS IS THE PURPOSE OF TODAY'S PRISON SYSTEM, THEN WE ARE ALREADY DEAD, MY PEERS AND I, THE VERY VICTIMS OF THIS SYSTEMATIC PRISON MACHINE, AND THE EPIDEMIC IT UNSYMPATHETICALLY PRODUCES: INSTITUTIONALISM.