

## A TALK TO PRISONERS

(In the Jail at San José, Costa Rica)

By C. Jinarajadasa

BROTHERS, during the course of my travels, I visit many countries, and I am often asked to visit the prisons and address the prisoners. You have asked me to come and speak to you, and I do so gladly with the hope that I may bring you a little relief in the painful life, which you are forced to live.

The last prison that I visited was in San Pablo, Brazil, but I did not there address the inmates, as I cannot speak Portuguese. But I remember vividly the last prison where I spoke. It was two years ago in India. The Prime Minister of the State was a friend of mine and he went with me. All the inmates of the prison were assembled for me in the central hall, and they sang to me several songs before I spoke to them.

One song that they sang was a beautiful prayer, invoking blessings upon the world. It is not easy when you are compelled to reside in a jail, with no freedom to go out into the world, to invoke blessings on those who live outside the prison walls; but that was exactly what my brothers then before me, whom the law labels "prisoners," did. This was the song:

O merciful God, bless all—  
Bless man, woman, bird, beast, and insect, and all.  
May there be no pain, no famine in the world!  
May there be no war!  
May no one wish ill to any other,  
May all consider others' interests without difference!  
May each worship God according to his own faith!

But more remarkable still was the second song; it was about the Justice of God! When one is in prison, with the deprivation of everything that is happy and beautiful in life, the most natural feeling is one of resentment and anger. One sees nothing in the life within the prison that can give rise to any sentiment of gratitude. I will read to you first this song about the Justice of God, and then explain to you why the prisoners in the jail in far-off India sang it.

THE JUSTICE OF GOD  
(*Song sung in Bhavnagar Jail*)

O just Creator, Your justice is perfect.  
It is very dear to all men: Your justice is perfect.  
We suffer because of our bad Karmas,  
How can we blame You for that?  
Ours is the guilt: Your justice is perfect.  
Playing as we do the game of sin,  
We still hope for happiness!  
But the idea is futile: Your justice is perfect.  
One who treads the path of righteousness  
Verily gets happiness;  
This can be demonstrated by thousands of instances:  
Your justice is perfect.  
When evil deeds become ripe for fruit,  
Their doers have to undergo sufferings,  
This is the unerring law: Your justice is perfect.  
Some say that God errs in giving justice,  
Verily they are thoughtless lunatics: Your justice is perfect.  
Each has to take the consequences of his actions,  
Each must reap what he sows,  
This is the universal law: Your justice is perfect.  
You are not affected by undue influence,  
You are not to be won over by bribes,  
O All-pervading God, You are guided by justice alone,  
Your justice is perfect.  
Shankar the poet says, pleaders<sup>1</sup> are not necessary in Your court,  
This is indeed a great relief: Your justice is perfect.

Is it not strange that a body of men, deprived of all that is happiness in life and forced to live behind prison walls, should sing that God's justice is perfect, even if that justice means to live in a prison? They sang this song because in India we have some beliefs in our religion that may seem strange to you.

One belief is that each one of us has lived before on earth, not once but many times. Before we appeared as children in these our present bodies, we have lived in other bodies, in other parts of the world. We lived to be men and women, we worked at various occupations, and we died when God called us to leave those bodies. We do not now remember anything of this past of ours.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawyers, advocates.

But in that past we thought good thoughts or bad thoughts, and we did good actions or bad actions. Now, there is a law of life which we all know; it is that if we put into the ground a grain of maize, presently a maize plant will grow and give maize, and not wheat. What we sow, that we reap—that is nature's law.

This law is the Justice of God in the song, which I have read to you. We are born with a tendency to good thoughts and good actions as children, because in our past lives we thought good thoughts and admired good actions. We are born of rich or poor parents, because we gave happiness to others, or were cruel to them. Calamities happen to us or good fortune comes to us, because we sowed their seeds in the past. God's justice is perfect and gives a good harvest of good grain to those who sowed good grain, and He sends a harvest of weeds to those who sowed weeds. God does not punish and He does not reward. He sends us the harvest of what we sow. This is the meaning of the phrase: God's justice is perfect.

"God's justice is perfect"—so they sang in the prison, because Hindus believe that everything that happens in life is a result, a reaping of thoughts and deeds of long ago. Whether you can accept such a thought or not, one thing is very essential in your thinking, if you are to find even a little peace and happiness in your present painful situation. You must put aside every idea of any injustice done to you by others. God watches everything, and if He has permitted misery to come to you, it is because in some way you deserve it. You must believe that, even in your present life of unhappiness, you are being treated justly, because God does not permit injustice.

After removing from your mind all idea of injustice, the next thing is how to find a little peace of heart and mind while you are forced to live inside the prison. This depends on yourself.

It is not the place we are in, nor what surrounds us, that is the cause of misery or happiness. It is ourselves. Certainly just now, you have to live within a prison; you look forward to the time when you will be free. But will you be really free, when you leave the prison? That will depend on your heart and mind.

Think of hundreds of men and women, who live outside, who move about in trains and automobiles. If you could look into their hearts, you will find that they are in a kind of prison also. One man is always planning to be rich; he is in a prison and cannot free himself from his thoughts, which often result in cruelty to others. Another is thinking of someone whom he hates and his thoughts of anger are like a prison, which shuts him in. Thousands outside this prison are miserable, because they live in prisons of their own making.

My brothers, when the time comes for you to leave this place and go back to the world, learn to be happy there, by learning a little how to be happy here. You can find a little happiness, even in this prison, if you will look in the right direction.

For instance, your prison regulations exact certain duties from you. Perform them willingly and not with a sense of injustice, even if they cause you misery, believing that God's justice comes to you in those duties. You will then slowly find that a little peace comes into your heart. Give what help you can to a fellow-prisoner; help him in his task, if that is allowed. At least, as you look at him, give him your sympathy. Bless every one around you with your thought of goodwill, even if some of them cause you hardship. Like a lamp that radiates light, radiate good will, wherever you are within the prison. Think of those you love, who are far away; send them thoughts of blessing. Forgive those who have injured you, and make your heart a place of pity for those who in their ignorance do evil instead of good.

Then slowly you will find a new peace comes to your heart and mind; you will find more strength to bear your present lot. And when the time comes for you to resume your place in the life outside these walls, you will understand the justice of God more clearly, and so possess more strength to live according to His laws. Your mind will be more clear to understand what is right, and you will have more strength to resist evil.

God's love surrounds you all the time; but you must listen to His whisper. Your ears are open to His voice, as you do each duty well, as you radiate goodwill and blessing.

I, who live outside this prison, come to you to tell you that you and I are all alike in this, that God's justice is the same for us all. I, and others like myself, live in prisons too. Our sorrows and griefs, our disappointments and our failures are our prisons, though we have broken no law of the country. We too are asking for happiness, as you are. We too have to learn to do our duty willingly, to be centers of goodwill. Without the prison or within the prison, life is the same fundamentally for all men. We are happy or miserable according to what we think, and so according to what we do.

As one brother to another brother, I give my utmost goodwill to each one of you. And because we are all the children of one God, and partake of one life in common, I know that I shall be sending you a little peace as I learn to do my duty better. I shall remember that you are here, and send you always my goodwill to help you.