

Monday, July 16, 2007

Healing must continue, both inside and outside jails and prisons.

Â This follows up on my July 15 blog entry about focusing on the roots of crime rather than just on the cure. Â Many jails and prisons are depressing beyond depressing. Many jail and prison guards probably feel like they are voluntary temporary prisoners in these bleak places. Prisons dehumanize.Â My awesome friend and mentor Jun YasudaÂ has spoken of the time when the land that now comprises the United States had no prisons: "Why is there a prison here? Five hundred years ago there was none. There were only Native Americans living in peace. They had reverence for each other. Now we fear each other. I am here to help people stop fearing each other, and to trust. We need to change the way we think. Putting people in cages is not a solution."Â Nevertheless, thousands of new people are caged each year in America's jails and prisons. We should not just let them be warehoused, hidden, and forgotten. You can make a difference in providing compassion and more humanity for inmates, who consist of people still presumed innocent and awaiting trial, and those already convicted. After all, accumulated feathers still sink the boat. Every little bit helps, and every larger step helps all the more, including getting on the backs of your lawmakers and the other government powers that be; spreading the word of justice for prisoners and criminal defendants to your family, friends and acquaintances; and visiting inmates (and even offering to provide them classes in your areas of strength, beÂ it academic, creative, supportive, or otherwise)Â and giving them moral support. Â The Human Kindness Foundation has an excellent webpageÂ about how to easily arrange to visit with inmates and what to do with the visits, and sends thisÂ messageÂ about whatÂ you can do to help inmates.Â In this spirit of helping inmates, Vipassana meditation teachers have gained access to inmates in SeattleÂ -- since at least 2001 -- to help their healing and harmonization process, as detailed in the above YouTube video. Hopefully, jails and prisons nationwide will welcome such programs, both for their inmates and for the jailers.Â Jon Katz.Â ADDENDUM: Another example of excellent assistance to inmates comes in the form of the Beat the Heat manual by ex-inmate and now-lawyer Katya KomisarukÂ (whom I first met in 2000 when training to defend April 16 anti-globalization activists). It offers practical tips for adjusting to incarceration (e.g., how to avoid taking sides with other inmates, and not to join a conversation in progress unless invited to do so) and for creating harmony with other inmates (including recommending that cellmates give each other daily time alone in the cell).Â

Posted by Jon Katz in Criminal Defense at 00:01