

August 10, 2020

Dear Governor Newsom & the Staff who assist him,

I have lived nearly 61 years, the last 34 blamelessly, but my heart remains troubled by what I was and how I thought in the years between 16 and 24.

It is not a story I enjoy retelling. The media romanticizes the lifestyle of some of my cohorts in Los Angeles during the early 1980s. They were from wealthy families and were dissolute playboys. But the true history, the annals of my life during those years, is one of compounded stupidity, selfishness and deceit. Taken together those three qualities constitute depravity of character. Such was my character -- and my resulting conduct was deplorable.

On one level or other I lied to all of my male friends and all those that I did business with. I had a group of over a hundred outside investors who I intentionally scammed. Lying, I've come to realize, is the kernel around which almost every stripe of evil forms. I was not nearly as competent as I wish to be, so I lied to make up the difference.

Of course there were environmental and paternal influences that molded my character. I did not invent my behaviors and beliefs but acquired them in the normal way, principally through the words and actions of my father. However, the origin of my immorality is nearly irrelevant at this point. My fellow human beings were entitled to better from me. Thus, the consequences of my life and selfishness are justly borne by me.

What is the worst of my life? I was not, regardless of the notoriety of the Hollywood version of my story, a physically violent man. No one can say justly that I struck them or bullied them physically. That is true for my whole life, from childhood to this very day.

What I did is in the wickedness of abusing the love and trust of society, the God given gifts of a strong body and mind, and in betraying the confidence reposed in me by those who knew me, and at my behest, relied upon me.

To me, the first significant transgression of my life was against my High School sweetheart. Even in her teens, she was modest, kind, charitable and bright. The company and friendship of one so angelic should have been sufficient. Out of an ignorance common to many teenage boys, I pushed for an inappropriate level of physical intimacy, heedless of the inevitable biological consequences to her. I am ashamed at how I conducted myself with her. Fortunately, she was strong enough even then to recover from that setback and went on to become a Medical Doctor.

Perhaps because of the compelling example of my father, I began to lie by fabricating stories of derring-do and accomplishments at about the same time -- in my mid-teens. This trait burgeoned into a sort of "munchausenism" which blighted my life and produced much of the wreckage of my early twenties.

When pressed by the Chicago Mercantile Exchange for the origin of capital I was using to trade futures contracts in 1980 and 1981, i.e., while I was a Floor Trader on their exchange, rather than tell them the innocuous truth, that the capital belong to a group of investors out of Akron Ohio, I stonewalled their investigation and falsely claimed that I had earned the money trading at Merrill Lynch. I actually flew to

New York, infiltrated Merrill Lynch, and created false brokerage records in an effort to prove the lie I told them. Justly, the lie was discovered and I was banned from trading there for 10 years.

The most egregious chapter in my life was the three years of the BBC -- a social/business group I founded with Dean Karny and Ben Dosti in 1981. All of us were children behaving as if we were adults. My conscience is stung by the lash of shame repeatedly when I review my behavior. It was a tangled web of escalating deceit. The greater the real-world proof of our ignorance, presumption, arrogance, and incompetence, the more we, and myself in particular, responded with lies --broadening the list of victims of our fraud, until it approached 200.

Little purpose would be served by regaling you, the governor, with a details of those frauds. I testified in San Mateo County in 1992 and made a full confession concerning them all, but it took five days of direct examination. We lied, and I lied, promiscuously, energetically, elaborately and with moral abandon. I sought to bluff the world and -- at times -- my peers, with false accounts of physical and financial prowess. I built elaborate lies around the facts known to, or deductible by, my victims. And specifically, I falsely claimed to have killed Ronald George Levin, surmising as I did, that he had absconded while on bail for 12 felony counts of Grand Theft. I launched that lie and spun a complex tale to sell it to my compatriots rather than admit that Levin had utterly bested me and that I had stupidly fallen for every one of his artifices and gambits. I foisted that lie on my peers to intimidate my rivals within the BBC and quell an incipient revolt against my leadership of it.

The Infamous "to do" list found at Levin's house was a prop used in an attempt to intimidate Ron Levin on June 5th, 1984, a day before he disappeared. After I was convicted, his next door neighbor, Karen Marmor, came forward to corroborate the fact that Levin was in sole possession of the lists before he disappeared. Mrs. Marmor testified to these facts in San Mateo County in 1991.

I lied saying I killed Ron Levin because I could not face, and did want to be known for, the humiliating truth: that I was at the age of 24 an abject failure at everything I had tried to do -- and be, and that Ron Levin had figuratively run circles around me. Ron Levin, you see, was then an accomplished and professional conman of 42 years of age. I was merely a pathetic and reflexive (when under stress) liar.

The worst thing I did was in 1984, my 24th year. I was an accessory to murder after the fact. My business partner, Dean Karny, killed a man named Hedayat Eslaminia, the father of a person, Reza, whom we knew socially and had some business involvement with. Since Dean is my sole source of information concerning the exact circumstances under which Hedayat died, I will not relate what Dean told me here, especially since he was no more likely to be truthful in 1984 than I was. I testified in 1992 to the circumstances under which I aided and abetted Karny in disposing of Hedayat's body. We tossed him on a hillside 50 miles north of the San Fernando Valley in a place called Soledad Canyon.

It was a shabby and cavalier way of treating the remains of a human being. I owed society greater loyalty than my erstwhile friend, Dean Karny. There are laws and profound moral principles that should have been the basis for my conduct. Clearly, I should have called the police immediately upon learning of Hedayat's death. Yet, at the age of 24, given the depths of character to which I had sunk, I did not find it that troubling to assist Dean. Though I will add that such 'assistance' never truly helps anyone. I've learned that. One must surrender one's self to life and do the right thing, regardless of the apparent consequences. For as one sows, so shall he reap. This I have come to believe is an iron law of life, a true teaching of all the great saints.

The turn for me came in 1987, in Los Angeles County Jail, and at the age of 27. The experience of a penalty phase trial is like no other. It exposed me to the cause and effect of my life in a way that got past all my intellectual and psychological defenses. Shortly thereafter I read the Autobiography of a Yogi, by Paramahansa Yogananda, one of the most influential books of the last century. Its effect on me was profound. It reframed in spiritual terms all of life, the world, everything. I realized I had been wrong to seek role models among the prominent figures in conventional history. The generals, heads of state, and robber barons were often flawed men and only a fraction of them were purely motivated to serve humanity.

In contrast, Paramahansa Yogananda was a Saint. His whole life was devoted to helping troubled mankind to a higher state of consciousness. Since then I've read dozens of books written by his contemporaries, each attesting to his spiritual stature. I also read all of Yogananda's other books and carefully studied his lessons in "Self-Realization." The effect of trusting his words and a conscientious practice of his teachings was to renovate me, to bring me back to those qualities of spirit and heart with which I was endowed by God.

I have practiced a form of Raja Yoga he taught for over 30 years and meditated twice a day on average throughout my term of imprisonment. It was the practice of his teachings and the inspiration of his example, that got me through nearly 30 years on Level-IV prison yards without concession to the authority of the gangs, and without any resort to violence, drugs, alcohol, or theft. I practiced actively "non-cooperation with evil." I refused to move drugs and weapons. I did not participate in the riots. I made friends across all racial lines and openly showed brotherly affection to blacks. My ways caused me to be targeted by the gangs at times, but in each instance something deflected their malevolent intent. Once the two men tasked to shank me by the prison gang known as the "Nazi Low Riders" or "NLR," turned themselves and their knives in rather than carry out that commission. On another occasion, a man who intended to kill me with a straight razor turned aside at the last moment. On other occasions "shot-callers" whose orders I refused were caught by the karma of their bad actions before they could carry out their intention to have me attacked. In one case, the shot-caller was transferred suddenly by the warden of the prison. In another, the shot-callers was attacked by other convicts on orders from "the back," i.e., a more senior figure in his gang.

These experiences were profoundly reinforcing. They developed in me a faith, a settled reliance on my spiritual teacher and God. Never once did I resort to violence or any lesser authority to resolve these threats. Instead, I prayed about them and I prayed for those ignorant men. They just did not understand that they were doomed to fail. I know that in this world, effect follows cause -- and causality is inescapable. I never sought protective custody because I did not want to attempt to manipulate myself out of difficulty. I fully accepted the conditions of prison as my just desserts. I had chosen, albeit unwittingly, to be among these fallen men by lying, cheating, stealing and by being an accessory to murder after the fact.

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For insight, I do not offer here a minute examination of the springs and levers of the crude consciousness of my youth. Nor, have I chronicled the countless milestones of inspiration and illumination that brought my character to its current state. By the grace of God and true the kindness of our teachers, the great Saints, I see the world through an entirely different lens that I did at the time of my arrest. Then I was a dogmatic atheist, having been so indoctrinated by my father. I did not adhere to a system of morality but merely had some vague ideas about being kind to my friends. I also had some residual of the conscience with which I was born. I imagined that physical and egotistical pleasures were the best one could attain in this life. I had some concern for others, but if I was in a jam, I could justify and was capable of almost anything.

Now I evaluate my actions based upon the Ten Commandments of Hinduism (the rules of "yama/niyama"), which are parallel to the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament. I know that bad actions inherently produce misery and that one can never improve the essential quality of one's life by hurting others or by encroaching on the basic rights and needs of other human beings.

Flood-like, Paramahansa Yogananda's teachings carried the entire mass of my preconceptions and swept them aside. As a young man I aspired to be successful, I still do, but what I consider success has been wholly redefined.

I have risked my life on occasion rather than compromise my beliefs. Some of the letters from other prisoners that support this commutation application allude to such incidents.

I'm not a saint, nor do I see myself as a teacher or leader of other men. I am a reformed sinner and a dedicated student of those with a greater understanding, most specifically of Christ, Krishna, and the great Masters in my line of Gurus.

I have a notorious case. There have been dozens of documentaries filmed about it. Books have been written and two movies have aired. Lately, the documentaries and movies have veered from the orthodox version, which was based upon my 1987 trial. The latest media on my case acknowledges or incorporates discussion of the exonerating evidence that came to light after my conviction.

Governor, Sir, I do not take any pride in my notoriety and will avoid further publicity and any media entanglements if released. I do not think the story of my conduct in 1984 is particularly helpful to young people or Society. Perhaps, there is some value in the facets of my redemption.

I would not have had a chance at redemption absent the general benevolence of California society and the help of so many other people. I would have been executed promptly after trial in many countries and centuries. Instead, I have been given years and conditions under which I could undertake my renovation, if I so chose. And, I did so choose.

I have a wife. We've been married for 14 years. A letter from her is attached. If released I will live with her, near my sister, Katherine, and her husband Michael. Both Michael and Katherine have written you letters on my behalf.

I am a teetotaler. I have never been interested in drugs or alcohol. My father abused both. I took it in my mind at an early age not to imitate those behaviors.

If released I will not apply for any form of government assistance. I come from a poor family but my family has become wealthy. Again, the letters from my sister and her husband corroborate this. I have been offered a job at Ananda, my church. I plan on being productive. When I was 18 I passed the certified public accounting examination. I can make myself useful but need not do so to put bread on the table.

My heartfelt and sincere thanks to you, and also to Governor Brown, as well as the staff members who have assisted each of you. I know that your schedules are full of important matters. I appreciate the mercy you have shown other life-without prisoners. Several of those commuted were among my friends at New and Old Folsom State Prisons.

Respectfully, Joe Hunt, D-61863

*/s/ Joe Hunt*