

Reader Question: "Have you changed your relationship to 'Time' since entering the system?"

Q: "Have you changed your conception of, or relationship to, 'Time' since entering the system?"

(Question asked in a letter from Lansing, MI.)

Time is a rather large concept, wherever you may find yourself (in a prison or not). Generally, people don't approach it much. It can be daunting and confusing. So it makes sense we don't ponder it that often.

When it comes to prison, time gets a good deal scary when you are awaiting your sentence. There's usually a while between your arrest and receiving your sentence. For me it was 2.5 years, and I spent much of my time thinking about how my life was over. It's a very exhausting experience waiting for a judge to hand down your sentence. 2.5 years was a long time to live in a constant state of unknowing about an imminent disaster that was coming for you.

So when the judge read off my sentence (nearly 5 years), there was a feeling of relief. Finally I knew what I was up against. I felt ready to begin, to move forward and get passed my nearly 5 years. But soon after, you must face the reality that a new kind of time is beginning...Time away from everyone you love and know, time away from a familiar life.

In prison there is a sense of disconnect and disorientation as time and timelessness seem to blend together. Some days it creates a deafening silence that hollows out my chest. When you're in here you can never forget you have "time" to serve. I try not to think about it constantly, but my sentence is always lingering in the back of my mind. You can be having a bad day, or someone does something annoying and it jumps to the front of your mind...it reminds you that you have two more years of dealing with this sentence and all it entails.

Sometimes I sit on my bunk in moments of defeat and say to my self, "What the fuck am I doing here? I can't take two more years of all this." This is why we don't think about it too much in here. It can really bring you down. Even our release date isn't thought about much until the time for it is closer. It's just too draining to acknowledge the long passage of time.

This approach of avoidance creates an interesting dichotomy with time. The days you pay more attention to it, the longer it drags on and seems like an eternity. A minute can feel like an hour. But if you don't think about it much, a week can pass in what feels like a few hours.

There's a very accurate saying that you hear in prisons: "The days go by like years, and the years go by like days." It's such a great way to describe the experience of the passing of

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time in here.

Sometimes it can feel like you are at battle with time. In an attempt to avoid this I have been practicing meditation. This is something I made a point to learn before I started my bid, because I knew I would have to face time in a very new way.

There's long stretches of time where I feel like I am in a healthy relationship with time, but then the simplest thing can throw that off. Like the other day, I had finished my bottle of vitamins and had to buy more. This empty bottle of 100 vitamins made clear that I had just spent another 100 days in prison.

I placed the empty vitamin bottle on my locker and stared at it. I then began to calculate the remainder of my sentence by figuring out how many more vitamin bottles I would need to buy until I could return home.

So even an empty bottle of vitamins can dramatically alter your relationship to time when you're sitting in a prison.