



Building a Better World: News of the Prout Research Institute

December 2023 - February 2024



A New World Awaits. Are We Ready?

Last summer, Nitya Prema and I moved up to the community land here in Marshall, NC. Being so close to nature has made me aware of just how quickly seeds sprout and move with undeterred resolve towards maturity.

In our community, growth is also everywhere. In the last few years, it has been startling to watch how many new projects have sprung up – the Neohumanist College of Asheville, the Rectory house at Ananda Girisuta (brother's master unit), the Lotus House at Ananda Viitika (sister's master unit), several new homes in our Katuah Community, the Catawba Meadows housing project developed by Dharma (Haiti), and the Prout Research Institute.

You don't really have to ask what's happening around here, because everything is happening. There seems to be an urgency to prepare ourselves for the larger work ahead, and it's coming fast.

Prout Research Institute (PRI) has grown from a seed idea four years ago to a building that's nearing completion today. During this time, a global pandemic ravaged the planet, armed conflicts are increasing with two major wars raging and at least six civil wars continuing with no end in sight, wealth inequality has increased, corruption and bad leadership has increased, corporate control over economies and people lives has increased, social and political polarization has

A Conversation with Bill Aires about Freedom

Excerpted from a conversation on October 7th at the Annual Prout Alliance Gathering.

I'm going to talk on the basis of a book I'm writing that will come out in the spring of 2024: *When Freedom is the Question, Abolition is the Answer.*

What is freedom? How do we get free?

What are the freedom dreams that encourage us and drive us forward? If we're blinded to the

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A Conversation with Bill Aires about Freedom

social reality we're swimming through, who benefits from that blindness? Where are we on the clock of the universe? What does the known demand of us now? I mentioned a book *Demand the Impossible*. I've admired that phrase for a long time it's a phrase that was used by James Baldwin, the great American essayist and writer. It is a phrase used by Che Guevara. Why would we demand the possible when what we really need is to unleash our imaginations and demand the impossible? We might bind ourselves then together in a collective commitment to look at the world as if it could be otherwise, and then get busy in projects of resistance and repair and yes, of revolution.

This is a good time in my mind to reflect once more on the question of freedom, to explore its history to illuminate its dimensions. The word freedom is practically applicaéd onto our American minds. We're born free in the freest country on Earth we're told repeatedly. It seems that individuals and corporations alike, people from the far Left and the reactionary Right embrace freedom as a positive force and a trumpeted value. We have the rightwing Freedom Caucus in Congress, we have the Freedom Unlimited credit card from Chase Bank, we have Freedom sanitary napkins, and The Courage to be Free book by Ron DiSantis. But we also have the Black Freedom Movement, we have Gay Liberation, we have Women's Freedom. So what does anyone mean by freedom in particular? The answer is difficult to pin down because we seem to be talking past and over each other. and I should situate us also a bit.

I think many of us feel that this moment can absolutely feel like the worst of times: a new and escalating war with China, a hot and destructive proxy war in Europe, racialized police violence, and unchecked environmental collapse are on full display. Fragile and often anemic democratic institutions are seemingly on life support. Religious authoritarianism is on the rise. Women's bodily integrity is under sustained assault. The overlapping crises start to overwhelm us.

But on a different day or from a different angle, these days can feel like the best of times: 26 million people took to the streets in 2020 in response to the police murder of George Floyd, the largest public outpouring for racial justice in history. Women across a wide political spectrum have refused to accept the medieval definition of their rights. Broad forces are on the march worldwide to resist plunder and extraction and to preserve life on Earth. I wake up every day and glance at this sign behind me. It's by the poet Mary Oliver and her words speak to me every morning capturing a sense of the universal contradiction: "Just to be be alive on this fresh morning in the broken world." That's how I feel every day, and I feel it right now.

I also think Charles Dickens would recognize our contemporary predicament at once: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." Dickens understood that life is never one thing in isolation from every other thing. I want to really push that idea. Life is never one thing. What you're enthralled with is not the only thing going on. You may see exploitation, you surely do, but there's also resistance to exploitation. We can see progress, yes, and also backlash, but more than one thing is happening at once. I get up living this contradiction. I don't want to run from it, I want to dive into that contradiction. The worst of times, the best of times.

Freedom is a living
thing and a vital
aspiration.

It is partially revealed when we look unblink-

ingly into the face of unfreedom. So if unfreedom includes being prevented from voting, then freedom must involve the act of voting. It might not be the whole answer, but it must involve that. If unfreedom is in part being forced to attend underfunded segregated miseducative schools, freedom embraces integrating into the privileged schools and fighting for an honest curriculum. If unfreedom is policies and politics of caging and cruelty, exclusion and dehumanization, then freedom must unlock the cages and abolish those heartless practices. If unfreedom means astronomical rates of infant mortality among African-American people and people of color, then freedom must involve fighting for the right of humanity to exist, to live. So freedom in my mind is always freedom in opposition, and it's why naming that what we're opposed to that's so important. If I identify unfreedom, then of course it must carry with it a moral imperative, the responsibility to act.

Freedom takes courage and authentic courage is at the heart of moral reflection and the moral instinct leading to ethical action.

*Bill Ayers is a social justice organizer, activist, and teacher. He was a leader of Students for a Democratic Society and the breakoff into the Weather Underground. A former distinguished professor of education at the University of Illinois in Chicago, he's the author or editor of more than 30 books about teaching social justice, urban school reform, and children in trouble with the law. Bill Ayers has published two memoirs, *Fugitive Days* and *Public Enemy*, and a recent book *Demand the Impossible: A Radical Manifesto*. He joined Prout Alliance at its Annual Meeting and Convention on October 7th, 2024. Find the full video and transcript at: proutalliance.org/seminars/*

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increased, and no one mentions the point of no return regarding climate change because, truthfully, we have already passed it.

Today I sit here on the deck of the Prout Research Institute, watching leaves fall as the last days of autumn lay out a winter bed for nature. It's hard not to feel the magnitude of work that lies ahead of us. As the world desperately struggles to find its balance again, there is a dire need for solutions.

The doors of the PRI need to open wide, letting in activists eager to delve deeper into the ideas and application of Prout. Its rooms need to fill up with research projects, policy analysis, and organizing activities that can shed light on and address the problems of the day. Diverse groups and individuals need to be mingling their aspirations and plans in excited anticipation of future collaborations and collective strength.

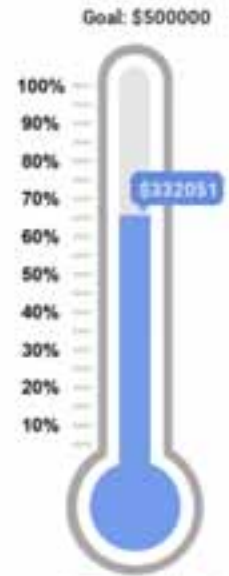
But today, the building lies silent. There are no workers nailing up the drywall, or installing the floors and cabinets. According to our builder, we are 75% complete - not there yet. We need more funds.

I feel certain that the seeds planted a few years ago will give fruit very soon, hopefully in time for the first Prout training program next summer or the annual meeting of the Prout Alliance in the fall. Nature has its reserves that keep all the plants, birds, trees, and animals growing and thriving. So must we. Help us open the doors of the PRI and start the work calling to us.



Howard Nemon is the Co-Founder and Director of the Prama Institute & Wellness Center, a holistic conference and retreat center located in Marshall, NC (USA). He is an active member of the Prout Alliance, a US-based collaborative which

promotes Prout policies and activism, and is the treasurer of the PRI Board.



Prout Research Institute Construction News

During the last three months \$41,050 was raised, for a total of \$332,051. This is 80 percent of what we need to finish the ground floor and upstairs meditation room so that we can move in. The basement with three guest rooms and two bathrooms can then be finished later. We have also received donations of ceiling fans,

a washer and dryer, a freezer, a lot of furniture and kitchenware. Donations have been received from 78 families and individuals and from three foundations.

Jiivanmukta has finished grading and cleaning up the PRI site. Insulation has been installed in all the walls and ceilings and we are waiting for the county inspector to approve it so we can continue. We have ordered 290 panels of sheetrock for all the ceilings and walls! Are you good with a screw gun?

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again in college. Later I learned that making friends who are patient enough to talk slowly with me in their language helps. Another solution I discovered was to learn songs in that language. Wherever I went, people asked me, "How do you like our country?" I always answered, "I love it here, because the people are so friendly, kind, and generous." The strange thing is that I have always found people who are friendly, kind, and generous! The truth is, I love all 32 countries that I've lived in. Each country has problems, even this country, but I still love the people and the land.

When I went to Brazil, I struggled to learn Portuguese every day. Soon I was asked to speak for two minutes at an interreligious campaign against hunger. So I wrote out my little message and my friends translated it to Portuguese. I went to the beach the night before and practiced

reading it and shouting it to the waves.

A very famous Brazilian singer, Caetano Veloso, opened the show with a couple of songs in front of 2,000 people in an amphitheater in Rio de Janeiro. I was next. Very nervously I walked up to the microphone with my speech in my hand. My first words in Portuguese meant Good evening, "Boa noite." Spontaneously 2,000 people shouted back to me, "Boa noite!" Wow! Their encouragement filled me with confidence.

How to translate the Portuguese word "saudade"? It kind of means I'm missing a place, or I'm longing to see you again. I have saudade for Brazil, just as I feel saudade for all of you.

When I was leaving Brazil 11 years later, two students asked me, how do you say in English, "Go with God"? We don't have a common way to say

PROUT Updates:

Prout Alliance Event:

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Climate Crisis. ONLINE Thursday, December 14, 2023 8-9 PM EST. Register at ProutAlliance.com <https://proutalliance.wildapricot.org/event-5492241/Registration>

While the Climate Crisis has given us much to worry about, it brings with it opportunities for systems change. Dr Pedroja has real world experience in systems change in healthcare. She has taken this knowledge, and along with her team in Lane County, Oregon, created a tabletop exercise that has inspired many in the progressive community both in and beyond Eugene.

PRI Board Update

The Prout Research Institute Board of Directors unanimously agreed to add the following sentences to our Bylaws:

Article IV: Board of Directors:

All Board positions are open to women, men and those who are gender non-conforming, and we welcome a diverse ethnic group of participants. The nominating committee should present a slate of candidates that reflects and welcomes diversity.

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that sweet idea.

For 40 years, wherever I went, I was always a foreign American dressed as a yogic monk. Seven years ago I returned to the United States. Yes, like other expatriates, I experienced some “reverse culture shock” returning to my home country. I feel like a citizen of the world, but also a bit like a foreigner dressed as a yogic monk.

In my 40 years overseas, and now back in this country, I learned so much about kindness, friendship, and generosity. By experiencing culture shock due to all our differences, I’ve come to realize that we are actually all the same.

The African Reality and Tools to Change the World
Progressive Utilization Theory courses via Zoom
August 11th to October 8th 2023
17 Classes
Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
LTC-1: 200-30 per (West Africa (GMT))
LTC-2: 200-30 per (France, Germany, South Africa)
LTC-3: 200-30 per (Italy, Egypt) LTC-3
LTC-4: 200-30 per (USA, New York, Montreal)
LTC-5: 200-30 per (San Paulo, Mozambique)
English, French, and Portuguese Interpretation
Course fees: 20 euro
Donation welcomed and appreciated!
Scholarship on request
For Information / Registration, please contact :
For Africa/Europe : *Isabel Hernandez* : +33 7 82 82 42 70
For South America : *Isabel Hernandez* : +33 30 825 2049
For North America : *Dada Maheshvarananda* : +1(704) 347 89 12 : maheshvarananda@gmail.com

African Reality

The online course, “The African Reality and Tools to Change the World”. from August 11 to October 8, 2023 had a total of 28 90-minute classes by 24 esteemed lecturers. Twenty-three classes were recorded and are available on the Amandla African Samaj channel of YouTube. This course was organized by Amandla African Samaj and the Prout Research Institute. Most of the classes have English, French, Portuguese and Spanish translations.

Interested in Volunteering?

Volunteer your labor to help with the construction for a week or more this winter or spring and become physically stronger, enjoy delicious meals, and a free room. Be inspired by spiritual satsaung company with Dada Maheshvarananda and the Ananda Girisuta Master Unit community (24 adults + 7 kids live in a one-mile radius). How can you say no to that offer? Please contact Dada: Maheshvarananda@gmail.com

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Culture Shock

by Dada Maheshvarananda

When I was 24, I left the United States for the first time in my life. I flew to India to become a monk of yoga and meditation. As soon as I got off the plane, I felt a blow to my stomach. It's known as culture shock.

You see everything is different in a different country. The people speak a different language, wear different clothing, eat different food, have different music, and art, and customs. People in different countries think differently, too, with a different psychology.

This is neither good nor bad per se, just different. But the result of my culture shock was I was nervous, anxious, and confused. I got lost a lot and robbed a few times. I sometimes got diarrhea even though I drank only filtered water and ate well-prepared food, just because the food was different.

My organization, Ananda Marga, meaning the Path of Bliss, has a policy of sending monks and nuns to work in different countries. I believe this is a wise strategy to overcome mental limitations and contribute to world peace, but it sure was hard on me. For 40 years I lived for at least a month in 32 different countries in Asia, Europe, and South America.

Because I always stayed with the people, I rarely saw tourists. Whenever I did, I wondered if they experienced culture shock. Many tourists stay in international hotels or on cruise ships, travel with other people from their homeland, and let tour guides lead them so they have little interaction with the local people.

As a new monk, I was posted to Indonesia, so I took a boat from Singapore to the small island of Tanjung Pinang. Because of religious prejudices, I had been advised to travel incognito until I reached Java, so I wore jeans and a T-shirt and carried a backpack. I had only \$20 in my pocket, just enough to pay for a deck class ticket on the weekly ship to Jakarta. I found an English teacher

who let me stay for free in his classroom if I gave free conversation classes to his students.

One day while strolling around the island, I was surprised to see a little sign for a Catholic Center in that Muslim society. Intuitively I felt that I was supposed to ask there for advice. Two Indonesian priests were talking on the veradah of the small house. When I told them that I was going to teach and do social work in Jakarta, they said, "Oh, then you want to talk with Father Wilber from the Netherlands. But he's very busy. Thousands of refugees have come by boat from Vietnam, and we're visiting them on the island camps to change money for them, buy medicines, and provide mail service."

"I just want five minutes please."

"We'll try," they said.

When I saw Father Wilber's old weathered face, I knew he was the right person to ask. He said, "I can offer you three pieces of advice."

"First, learn the language, so that you can communicate well with the people."

"Second, try to feel that this is your country. For some reason, that is easier for my European priests to do than my American priests."

"Third, you should love the people. Then again," he said, "if you love the people, you don't have to worry about the first two suggestions; they'll take care of themselves."

I thanked him and left. However his wise words have always stayed with me.

Personally, since my childhood I have always had a lot of trouble learning languages. Even though I was a good student in everything else, I failed the foreign language class I took in high school, and

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