

# Ask Akhi

*Akhi, the beggar-sage of Damascus, sits in the market square gathering coins and wisdom and instructing all in the dance of life.*



Oh, it has been lonely in Akhi's post office box. Yes, I should have grown mushrooms in that dark empty space. But, by the grace of Allah, there was a legitimate letter from out of state just a few weeks ago. "Curious" from Champaign, Illinois writes: "Dear Akhi, why are green olives sold in jars, but black olives sold in cans?"

First of all, you must remember that Akhi never buys olives. Indeed, by the grace of the God of the harvest, all of Akhi's needs are met by those who share their bounty with me. I have always been able to help myself as I move through the market place. Such treasures come to those who beg.

But, for those of you who use money in exchange for goods, some wise man has put some olives in glass so you can see the color. They happen to be green. It is good that you can see the color. If you say the black olives come in cans (Akhi cannot see inside the cans), perhaps they turn black because no light can reach them. Is Akhi correct? Is he joking with you? If the truth be known, Akhi cares little whether the olive is green or black, for he cannot taste the color. He is so grateful for the texture and the flavor, he cares not at all about the color.

So there, my friend from Champaign, is that an answer? Has Akhi helped you? Do you know your olives? Do you know your path? That is the more important question. Please write again. Akhi loves to hear from those who would otherwise pass by.

Peace to you all.

*Seekers of wisdom are encouraged to send their questions to "Ask Akhi" c/o Beacon Street 3750 Rocky River Drive Cleveland OH 44111.*

## WHO ARTED?

by Jean Hulseman

On June 13, four members of Beacon Street arrived in federal prison. Rev. Dave Schmidt, formerly of the Cleveland Diocese and a part-time chaplain, had invited us to spend some time with the women at Alderson Federal Prison in West Virginia. His intention, as I understood it, was to shed some light within prison walls.

Beacon Street had planned a program of familiar pieces, a mixture of gospel message and light entertainment. As we rolled onto the grounds in a secure vehicle, I was surprised to hear six women singing gospel songs in several harmonies. There were more surprises in store.

As soon as we began our program, we were overwhelmed by the response of the women who had seen more of life than we had. In the middle of a short gospel narrative about Jesus and John the Baptist, the baptizer sings in prayer: "Please don't bring me into conflict with government or authorities!" The ladies went wild. We had never encountered a response like *that* before.

There were tears of joy and sadness throughout the presentation. By the end of the song sung by Steve and a puppet, all the women were singing the refrain: "You're not loved because you're beautiful, you're beautiful 'cuz you're loved." When all was done, Bob applauded the ladies: "You are a great audience. Can we take you with us on the road?" "YES!!" came the response without a moment's hesitation.

Beacon Street looks forward to going back to prison. The women requested we return on a weekly basis. Even a seven hour road trip seems worthwhile now. Our visit destroyed many of the stereotypes we had about prison life and felons. All the walls were down by the time we arrived. There was a great deal of freedom there as well. There was freedom to sing, to cry, to laugh, to stand on their feet and cheer.

We have added another verse to a simple little song we sometimes sing to cover a prop or costume change. You can hum along to the tune of "You Are My Sunshine:"

*The other day, dear, I went to prison.*

*I went to have a laugh or two.*

*When it was over, my sides were achin',*

*But my heart was broke in two.*

Beacon Street now knows more intimately the meaning of the words from Luke 4:18 that we have used many times before: "He has sent me to bring liberty to captives." Beacon Street witnessed a liberating Spirit that day that we shall never forget.

The Beacon Street Beacon is published just about quarterly by Beacon Street — Performing Arts in Ministry. Beacon Street Performing Staff: Jean Hulseman, Maria Livers, and Bob Kloos. Associate Staff: Erika Bodnar, Kim Manning, and Steve Rico. Office Manager: Jim Pipik. Publisher: Rev. Fred Krause, OFM, CAP. If you are not on our mailing list and would like to be, or if you know someone who would enjoy receiving The Beacon, please let us know. Or if you have any comments, questions, or suggestions, we want to hear it. Write us at BEACON STREET 3570 Rocky River Drive, Cleveland, Ohio 44111, or give us a call at 252-5650. We hope to hear from you soon.