

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Christmas 2007

47,000 MILES AND I NEVER LEFT HOME

Dear Family,

Well, my longest-ever lecture & concert tour has ended. Forty states, over 47,000 driving miles plus a dozen or more flights, several hundred prison workshops, over a hundred public talks, church sermons, university lectures, scores of concerts, and meeting tens of thousands of great people who are just trying to figure out how to live spiritually in this crazy and complex world. I left on December 8th, 2005, and now I'm back in NC for at least a few months catching up on other work and building a new little place for me and Sita to live.

One of the most frequent things I hear these days is, "Hey Bo, isn't it great to be home?," or "How does it feel to be home, Bo?," and I never know quite how to answer, because my sense of home changed very deeply from

being on the road so long. **In my heart, I know that my Life is my only real home.** It's true for you too, isn't it? Is there any



other place or environment or person or group of people we can count on as our absolute "refuge"?

Certainly there are places we like more than other places, that's natural. And people we'd rather be around than others, and people we have history with and ties to. But in the first few months of living on the road, I noticed how deeply ingrained was this psychological sense of being "away from home," and I began to observe just how much it held me back from being fully wherever I was. Like some sort of internal magnet, this sense of being "600 miles from home," and then "1100 miles from home," and then "1500 miles from home" drew not only my attention,

but also part of my power, to a distant place and distant people instead of to the place and people that my own Life was placing in front of me.

The ancient mystic poet Kabir once wrote, "**The whole world is my home, all are my family.**" Around the third month of living on the road, I started to work with that poem as a daily practice, tried to really take it seriously. **The whole world is my home. All are my family.** In any family, there are your favorite relatives and least favorite, there are those you know far more deeply than others. So this practice didn't mean I must pretend not to have great love for Josh & Melissa,

Sita, my oldest friends, etc., and yet it did mean I needed to look inside myself to find that little mechanism we human beings use to allow people in or to keep them at a distance.



The word "family" is related to the word "familiar." When we travel, we tend to be surrounded by the unfamiliar – unfamiliar

people, places, situations. But deep in our guts, is there anything about people, places or human situations that is *really* unfamiliar to us as fellow humans travelling the same paths to freedom, wisdom, and compassion?



Many years ago Sita and I had the good fortune to spend time with a holy man named Swami Chidananda from India. We were with him both in the US and in India, and it struck me how he was “at home” wherever he happened to be. In Maryland, it was clear to us that the Swami did not feel 10,000 miles “away from home;” that in fact he seemed to be more *present* than we were able to be. He was relaxed, “familiar,” fully belonging to the spot he was sitting in and the people he was surrounded by. Nothing was incomplete, nothing was a fleeting transition from one location to another, no one was a stranger. In fact, I noticed even all those years ago that it wasn’t as though the Swami was “homeless,” but rather that he was the most “homeful” person I’d ever met.

My impressions of the Swami helped me to see that I needed to make the same leap. It is actually *within our choosing* to feel familiar or unfamiliar, to feel at home or “away,” to allow ourselves or not allow ourselves to fully belong to each moment of our life wherever we are – even in prison. My Life is my home. My Life is my home. Everyone is Family. That may sound like just playing with words, but for me it has been a serious shift in deep ways of seeing who we are in this world.



And it has been a shift of very practical value as well, because during the time I was on tour, things changed quite a bit for Human Kindness Foundation, and our longstanding community, Kindness House, was sold! The cabin Sita and I lived in, the twenty buildings I had built with my own hands and the help of volunteers, the two-acre lake we had dug, the

gardens and orchard that supplied so much of our food, the seventy acres I knew like the back of my hand, our cows and chickens and horses and sweet little miniature donkey – all gone.

We thought we’d be there forever. We had already spread the ashes of community members in various special sites. It never occurred to us Kindness House was not our “home.”

But no place is home unless every place is home. I hope I have really learned that lesson during these past two years. I am building a new cabin for me and Sita to live in, but it is hard for me to call that structure “home.” It’s a place to live, and I hope it’ll be a beautiful and happy place to live, but who knows for how long? Who knows what comes next in this great adventure we call Life?



I have many friends doing life without parole in prisons around the country. Most of you reading this newsletter



are in prison. You are home, try to see that. If or when you are released, your home will shift to hopefully a much nicer place and sweeter people, but if you don’t understand that you are always home, then you will not



feel at home when you get out either. That’s already happened to many of you when you’ve been released in the past – you expected to feel so wonderful being “home” again and being with family again, and it didn’t turn out wonderful because you never felt like you belonged. You felt out of place. The only place to feel a *sense of belonging* is here, right where we are today. When we do that, then we will continue to feel at home anywhere we go.



All my love to my
Endless Family,

PRACTICE – MAKING YOURSELF AT HOME

This idea of being at home wherever we are, like virtually every other part of our spiritual journey, has a lot to do with faith. It's easy to say "I'm a person of faith." But what does it mean to us in a practical way? How does it affect our experiences and our state of mind all through the day? Are we just using empty words when we talk about faith? Do we put any time into it? We may believe in food, but we still have to take the time to eat!

It's a very popular sentiment these days to say things like "I'm a spiritual person, a person of faith, but of course I have all the same worries, stresses and fears that anyone else has." I even hear meditation teachers, ministers, yoga teachers say the same thing: "I'm just like everyone else, I have all the same worries, stresses and fears of anyone living in these difficult times." Well, then I say *shame on you!* Why would anyone ever be inspired to be a person of faith if it doesn't relieve the worries, stresses and fears of our daily lives?

We can choose to have *zero* worries, stresses, and fears. Because one thing faith means is that we trust some sort of plan, some sort of intelligence behind our lives; that Life is not just a bunch of random, meaningless situations that come because of bad luck or good luck. This is what it means to be at home wherever we are. Home is a sense of belonging – belonging not just to a place, but belonging to our lives; even the hardest, worst parts of our lives.

This, then, is the practice: Just to spend a little time every day reminding ourselves that we belong to our lives and our lives belong to us; that we are at home right here, right now, everywhere we find ourselves. Reminding ourselves that we consider ourselves a person of faith, and it is beneath our dignity to feel like worried little creatures at the mercy of an uncaring world.

I like doing these practices in bed, because that is when we feel the most childlike and simple, and when our thoughts are the most private. As you settle in to go to sleep each night, first bring your breath into a nice, smooth rhythm, relax your body, and bring to mind such simple thoughts as "I am a person of faith, and I am at home right now." When you bring these thoughts to mind, make sure you take the time to *feel* what you are saying. Let go of your resistance to being where you are, being who you are. Let go of feeling "far away" or abandoned or alone. Think "My heart is my home; my Life is my home," and again, *feel* the experience of what you are thinking. Feel the profound familiarity you have with your own Life and your heart's own struggles, and realize no one can ever lock you away from that sense of being home.

When you wake up in the middle of the night, as you turn over to go back to sleep, spend just a few seconds doing the same thing. And do it again when you wake up in the morning, before you get out of bed. If you make it a habit to remind yourself of your faith and your sense of home for just these few minutes in bed each day, it will quickly become much easier to remind yourself of these same things in the middle of the day when you get overwhelmed by all the crap going on around you.

God knows and cares about you like a mother for her infant. The Hindus say when we call on God, God comes running like a momma cow to her calf. Yet life is mysterious, and we suffer greatly even though God loves us. Christ suffered, Krishna suffered, Buddha suffered, Mohammed suffered, Moses suffered. The Great Traditions don't promise us a life without suffering, but they do promise us a life without stresses, worries and fears. They don't promise us a life where everyone will love us, but they do promise us that we can open our hearts to the point where we love everyone, even those who "persecute and despise" us. They don't promise a smooth ride through life, but they do promise a "peace that goes beyond understanding." All of these promises are fulfilled when we begin to feel at home in our lives. When we arrive at a friend's house they are likely to say, "make yourself at home." God is saying the same thing to us twenty-four hours a day. Make your life your home. Give it a try.



LETTERS

Dear Bo and Sita,

Forgive me for not writing during the holidays. I was in solitary confinement without stamps or paper or envelopes. It seems I've spent most of the past 11 months either in solitary confinement or seg. Why they single me out I don't know—but I'm the flavor of the month every month. I've got cuts on my ankles from the ankle cuffs and cuts on my wrists from the handcuffs. I defy the COs on a daily basis—they know that I have no fear of them or what they may do to me. I feel much like Maury felt.

I get out in June. I only hope I don't see any cops. I have nothing but pure hatred for all COs and cops. I might even make the national news, who knows? I don't know if I can control my hate and anger for these pigs. They locked up everything but my dignity. The pigs have taken all my books. I'd love to read your books. Would you please send me another copy and put me on your mailing list? Right now I need to read the book every day.

K

Hey K,

You say you are filled with hate and anger toward cops, and when you get out, you may even make the news for killing cops. Oh, come on, man, why would you write that stuff to me unless you wanted me to talk you out of it? You certainly didn't think I'd say "That's great K; sounds good."

So I will certainly do as you wish – try to talk you out of it. Life is deeper than the junior high school game of cops and cons, each side hating the other and trying to make them suffer. You say you value my books and try to read them every day, but what is it you value? My books are about growing up from that juvenile bullshit, growing up from all that violence and hatred that you and I were exposed to for so many years in our lives. Junior high, man, junior high. You want to be a tough ninth-grader all your life, or do you want to join the Great Spiritual Adventure and be a strong, calm, quiet, kind and humble man who helps others and has deep values?

K, you are cut from the same cloth that I am. We all have a good dog and bad dog inside of us. The one that wins is whichever one we feed the most. It's not

up to the guards and the cops, it is up to you and me. You say they've taken everything from you but your dignity. Hell, K, the moment they succeed in making you hateful and violent, you have given them your dignity. They can't take it, but you can give it.

You've been a screwed-up human being in your ways, and they are screwed-up human beings in their ways. You are violent to people you hate, and so are they. They are struggling just like you, and making some bad choices, just like you. If you really want to be different from them, then be different from them. Be kind. Be calm. Be generous. Be loving. Otherwise, it's only the clothes and weapons that are different. Your hearts are the same – small, fearful, uptight little creatures missing out on the beauty of life by a mile.

How'd I do in talking you out of it?

Love, Bo



Dear Bo,

I'm new to your books and teachings, but have already learned a lot. I'm here on a violation for absconding. I got scared about serving time of any length and left state for two years. I found myself helping others in New Orleans after the storm. Like many I thought I'd never get caught. Well I did and here I sit. I know what I did was dumb! Now I sit here to pay for it!

The reason I'm writing is for your input on a few problems I'm having with the mind. Here goes! When I was in New

Orleans I met a guy who needed his house finished 'cause of the flooding and I needed a place to stay. It worked out for both of us! Well nine months later the worst came down on my head. We were best friends after about one month, always hanging out and going out places. The morning of July 20, I was awakened by police banging on the door. I about shit myself—I thought they were there for me. They asked where was R, my friend. We looked in the house and in the FEMA trailer and nothing. We went to look in the garage and the door was locked so I went to the garage door and when I opened it, I witnessed my best friend hanging from the rafters. As you can imagine, I lost it. Since then I've been locked up. The cops ran my social security # that day and picked me up five days later and extradited me back to PA.

But I can't get those images to suppress even a little. It makes it difficult to meditate. I've tried so many things that are mentioned in We're All Doing Time, like different breathing techniques, but I see my friend and can't continue.

I'm also having a hard time with being in and watching day after day people go to court and go home. Time seems to go by soooo sloooow. Now I've been locked up four months, and I still have no court date and I think I'm going crazy. My depression sets in more and more when I see people go home and I sit not knowing what's up. What can I do to help ease my mind and depression? They have me on anti-depressants and this is the third different one—none have worked.

I would also like to ask for more literature from your foundation and anything else that may help me. I appreciate any wisdom you can give me.

Love P

Hi P,

So sorry to hear of your rough few months. It's times like these that force us to go deeper, though, and make some choices that every human being needs to make at some time or other.

For example, do you have faith in your life? Even a little bit? That's one choice to make. Do you choose to see life as a random, meaningless bunch of gifts and

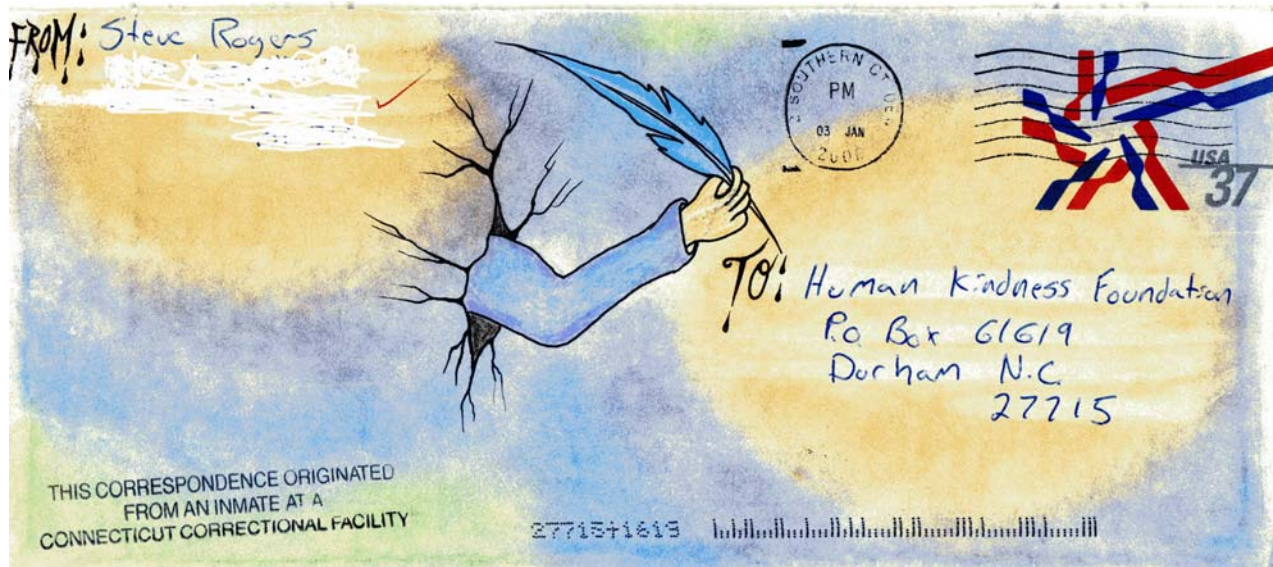
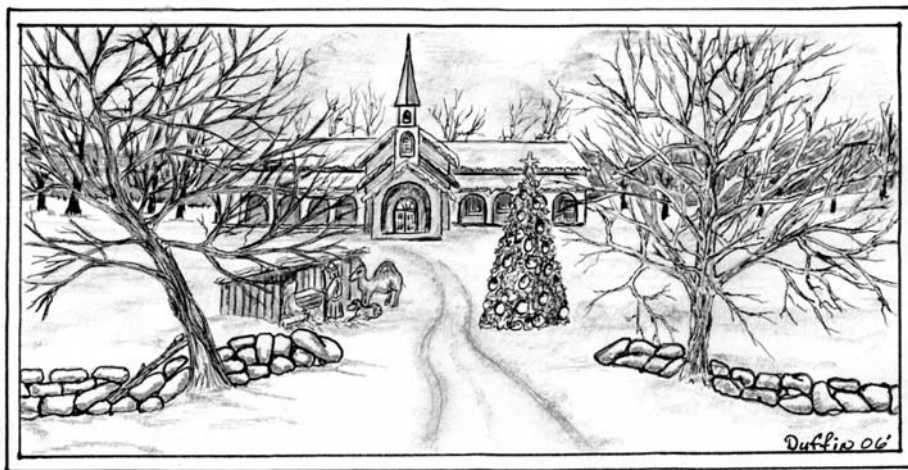
curses, good times and bad times, or do you choose to see life as a path – sometimes a very hard path – but a path all the same, which has meaning and purpose even on your worst days? Where everything – even seeing the dead body of your friend hanging from the rafters – has purpose in helping you grow as you need to grow and become who you need to become for the good of the world?

If you choose to have faith in your life, you may not necessarily *understand* why you had to see R like that, or why so many people are getting their trials and being released while you're still sitting there, but whether you understand it or not, you will remind yourself to trust that life is moving you through some necessary, rough times. "Life is good even when it's not great."

A lot of your depression comes from not accepting the reality of what's happened in your life this year. Life happens, man. Anything that can happen to a human being may happen to any one of us, including discovering the dead body of our best friend or being locked up for old crimes. It's not fair or unfair. It just is. Trust your life and work with what you have been handed, and you won't be so depressed and resentful. You are on a spiritual path and being moved along it. Work *with* it, not against it. Make peace with what has happened, as painful as it was. The images of R's body will fade as you accept your life exactly the way it is.

Use my books to accept reality and make peace with your life, not to try to "get rid of" the bad thoughts and images. Give it another try, okay?

Blessings to you, Bo



GOOD WORKS – TIM CUTTER (NIRMAL)

Nine years ago I was using heavy drugs, living in the streets with only one hope: that my life would end soon. I was miserable. I continuously wanted to stop using but just would not. I spent some time in jail. I will always be thankful for that experience because it was in jail that I got the opportunity to read *We're All Doing Time*. Bo's book completely changed my life. For five years now, I have been a professional Bikram Yoga teacher, and offer free classes for people in recovery.

Sitting in jail with *We're All Doing Time*, I started doing the yoga exercises, I started to learn how to meditate and I learned how to pray. Through these three disciplines that I still practice daily, a new door to life opened up! The amazing thing is that I did not even know who or what I was praying to; I just followed some of the prayers that were offered in the book.

Yoga has helped me tremendously in my recovery by literally "cleaning" me from the inside out. I taught meditation and a gentle form of Yoga in recovery homes for about two years. I am currently organizing a way to send over a hundred inmates Christmas cards from our Satsang here in San Diego county. I do NA service as well and go to two different jails to bring the NA message of recovery.

Three years ago I was introduced to a fully realized human being known as Ammachi, "the Hugging Saint," and took her as my Guru. It is Amma who gave me my spiritual name, Nirmal, which means "the Pure One" (imagine that!?!). I volunteer with Amma's "Circle of Love Inside" program, sharing with prison inmates the beauty of life and the beauty of God within them so they, as well, may have the opportunity to free their own minds.

My life is of service now, and this is how I get fulfillment. All of this because a book called *We're All Doing Time* came into my existence. I honor every person in this world for who they are and for who they are not. I am eternally grateful to Bo and Sita for giving me back my life. Nine years ago I was a hopeless, wanting-to-die addict. Today I give back to society.

Love to you all, Nirmal



NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

BOLETÍN DE NOTICIAS EN ESPAÑOL

Si prefieres recibir nuestro boletín de noticias en español en vez de en inglés, por favor avísanos. Hazlo por favor en una nota breve que diga: "Boletín de noticias en español, por favor." Te pedimos que seas breve en esa nota porque por lo general no tenemos a nadie regularmente en la oficina que lea en tu idioma. Gracias.

PRISON EXPRESSION PROJECT

You are invited to submit your original **poetry, artwork, or short story** (1000 words or less) to be considered for a book about childhood trauma. The purpose of this book will be to help readers understand the powerful connection between a person's experience of abuse/violence as a child, and his or her later adult behavior.

With your submission, please include: your name, age, where you're from, length of sentence(s) and what you've been convicted for, and your greatest hope for your future. If you don't want your name used, please tell us.

We cannot return submissions, but each will be carefully considered, and we will contact you if your work is selected for publication. Send poetry, artwork, or short story to:

**Prison Expression Project
Box 369
Cary NC 27512-0369**

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OPEN SECRETS

Open Secrets, The Letters of Reb Yerachmiel ben Yisrael, by Rabbi Rami M. Shapiro, is available free to inmates. This is a booklet of fictional letters, exploring Hasidic philosophy. If you would like a copy, please write to us at Human Kindness Foundation. We get LOTS of mail, so please be patient. It may take us up to 6 weeks to respond.

A NOTE FROM SITA LOZOFF

By the time you're reading this newsletter, I'll be in India. This will be a very different trip for me as I'll be travelling on this spiritual journey all by myself for about seven weeks, visiting different holy men and holy women in ashrams throughout the country. Please keep me in your prayers, dear friends, and I'll keep you all in mine.

ART IN THIS NEWSLETTER – Artists in this newsletter include: Louie Rize, San Jose, CA (pg 3); Donald Duffin, Ridgeville, SC (pg 5); Steve Rogers, Uncasville, CT (pg 5); and Joe D. Thomasson, Rosharon, TX (back flap). We're sorry that we don't know who drew the portrait (pg 4) or the rose/chain (pg 5).



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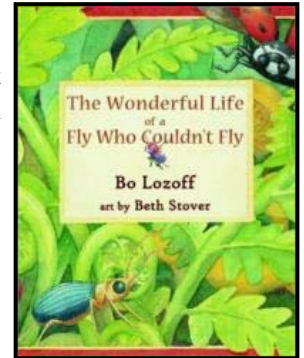
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On-line orders can be placed on the 18th. If you are ordering or paying by mail, we must receive your check by the 18th.



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Season's Greetings & Happy Holy Days



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*HAPPY HOLY DAYS, DEAR
FRIENDS OF EVERY GREAT
TRADITION. MAY YOU BE
RICHLY BLESSED!*

Original artwork by Joe D. Thomasson, Rosharon TX

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