

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Spring 2006

THOUGHTS FROM THE ROAD

Dear Family,
As I sit in a little motel in Murfreesboro TN to write this, President Bush has just put forward his new budget in which he has cut funds for Medicare and other social programs, and has increased spending to an unprecedented degree for the Pentagon and Homeland Security. In defending these cuts and hikes, the President and his spokesmen have all said that the new budget reflects our national priorities.

I'm afraid they're right. They are essentially saying that FEAR AND INSECURITY are our national priorities, not health or poverty, not homelessness or education or communities or caring for our elderly. And they have a good case. The only reason this group of mean-spirited wealthy businessmen are running the world in the first place is that they played to our fears and won, and they keep doing it. Even his most ardent supporters must know in their hearts that President Bush is not very bright and is constantly dishonest with the American people. But they are convinced that a) their children are in mortal danger; and b) he is mean and heartless enough to do *whatever it takes* across the world for America to be safe. Like the old saying goes, "we have met the enemy, and he is us." The United States is becoming a menacing figure across much of the world, because our national lifestyle uses 30-40% of the

world's natural resources, and we need to colonize other nations in order to keep consuming so much more than our fair share. NO politician, whether democrat, republican, libertarian or any other, is urging us to use less, to make a dramatic shift in how much we drive, how far away our food comes from, how much electricity we use.

This newsletter is called "A Little Good News," so where is the good news in all of this? Where it always is – in the hearts, minds and lives of each of us who dare to step aside from the fear-based mainstream culture and live more deeply. When our nation is cutting its own throat and becoming a beastly presence around the world, could there be a better or more important time for us to become real spiritual seekers and sages? Could there be a more appropriate time for us to personally become beacons of compassion, humility and wisdom? If our economy collapses under the weight of those military budgets, if China goes to war with us over oil, if the utility companies begin to schedule regular brownouts or blackouts as many countries already do to save petroleum, tens of millions of Americans are going to be seriously unstable. We don't do too well without our morning TV and coffee, without our air conditioners and hair dryers, without our personal freedom to hop in our cars and drive anywhere we like anytime we want.

Many mature and intelligent people are predicting very hard times ahead for Americans in the near future. Our entire national lifestyle is based upon an unsustainable addiction to petroleum. It would be great if you and I become more serious about our spiritual journey right now so that we can be calm and strong in the face of such worldly troubles. People are going to need some guidance and reassurance, some strength that only comes from knowing that this world of fleeting consumer happiness and political insecurity is trivial compared to spiritual joy and peace. There is never any real "security" in that material world, and there is never any real threat to our spiritual nature. It's time for us to be serious about Jesus' advice to "be IN this world, but not OF it." The world we are in is falling apart. The world we are of is still beautiful, noble and holy. Always will be.



Saykham Phouamkha

Charlotte, North Carolina

What do I mean by “become more serious about our spiritual journey right now?” I mean right now, this minute. I mean taking a look at the bottom line – less selfishness and less vanity – and deciding this very hour to commit ourselves to *living for the sake of others* from this day on. We know someday we’re going to do it, we know someday we’re going to get on board with the advice handed down by every sage in the history of the world. We just keep assuming today isn’t the day we radically change. It’s not convenient, it’s not practical. Dear friends, our civilization is descending into open madness, our children have statistically become the most violent people on Earth, tens of millions of us are taking anti-depressants just to get through the day, and so it’s hero time. It’s time to take that enormous leap of faith and live for a higher purpose than selfish pleasure, selfish security and selfish gain. Someday, it’s got to be NOW. That leap cannot always be a little ways off into the future. How about making this article the last thing you ever read as a self-protective, self-centered materialistic human being? I mean it! Don’t just read through this. I’m talking about you!!

The path is simple, though the details can be very complex. The path is living for the benefit of others, living for the benefit of all creation. Keep that idea simple. We don’t need ridiculous arguments about Salvation or Heaven or who’s going to get there. We merely need to wake up every morning and spend a few minutes in prayerful reminder that we intend to live for the benefit of others today. Then each day becomes an interesting adventure of how to do that! But at least we will have a single and clear focus for our lives. That alone will begin to dissolve our fears and bring us peace and strength.

In order to make our best guesses all through the day of how to be unselfish, we need to take decent care of body, mind, and spirit – specifically, a healthy body, a quiet mind, and an open heart are the goals of daily spiritual practice. A body we abuse through bad diet, lack of exercise, etc.; a mind we cloud with noise all day long, violent images on TV, pornography, etc.; and a heart we keep closed due to fears and desires, do not enable us to tune in very well to the Divine guidance that whispers inside of us all through the day. Every tough or confusing situation carries its own solution within it, but we are usually too unfocused to perceive it. When we start cleaning up our act, many of our problems reveal their own solutions that then seem so obvious we are amazed we couldn’t see them before.

Are you really going to find joy through comfort or false security? You know you’re not. But does that real joy exist? Is it just a great big rumor? A few words of hope to help unhappy people cope with their

unhappiness? Apparently a lot of people think that is the case. Even a lot of clergy have become little more than lay psychologists and humanists, suggesting that miracles and mystical events like the parting of the Red Sea, the virgin birth and resurrection, the raising of the dead or healing of the blind, are merely metaphors and do not need to be taken literally in order for us to have faith in the goodness of mankind. Yikes! Where do we mystics begin to straighten out such denial and ignorance?

Well, first thing: Millions of people throughout history, even some of us reading this newsletter, have experienced mystical states of consciousness, what sages would call some degree or other of “Transcendence.” We often get mocked or exiled or even executed for bringing it to anyone’s attention, but that doesn’t negate its reality. In this state – again, to any degree of it, from a tiny taste to full-blown God Consciousness – miracles abound, and are completely natural. The virgin birth or resurrection are child’s play on that level of reality. Reports of these experiences, from *every* religion and civilization, describe several qualities that are common to all those different cultures and centuries: A *union* with God, with all of existence, the *cessation* of the individual egoic identity, a Divine Awareness of the individual as a *vehicle* of God’s purpose on Earth, and an overwhelming, absolutely unconditional *Love* that really and truly has the power to move mountains or create new worlds.

These descriptions are virtually the same and describe the singular core experience that led to every religion. Religion is about a higher *reality*, not just an historical story and some dreamy poetry about rewards and punishment, heavens and hells. It’s about something that is *real* whether we choose to believe it or not. And the goal of religion is to touch that real experience ourselves. Let’s try to keep that in mind, okay? The bottom line of religion is to touch God, not to just be a nice person.

I spend a lot of time in motels these days, and sometimes I flip through the channels to find religious programs to keep me in touch with what is passing for Christianity among the general population. It would be scary if it weren’t so unbelievably silly. Fear-mongering and money-raising,



exhortations to be “loud and proud” about one’s faith. Jesus himself told us “When you pray, *don’t* pray loudly out in the streets for people to hear you, but pray in the *closet*.” Yet we have turned modern American Christianity into a loud, barking sideshow doing exactly what the Savior Himself told us not to do. Jesus also warned us not to believe everyone who comes in His name, but rather to look for those who do His Father’s work – feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoner, shelter the homeless. Yet any well-dressed snake-oil salesman can buy some TV time and launch a loud, proud, money-grubbing crusade in Jesus’ name and there always seem to be enough people to send them money for their limousines and mansions. All in the name of the simple carpenter from Nazareth who said it will be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for such a man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Yikes again. I guess it really is true that the bigger a lie, the more people will believe it.

Let’s get back to the Good News. The saints and sages encourage us to spend some time every day alone, quiet, sequestered from everything that is in the world of time and place, the world of material reality. Why? Why did Moses go up on top of Mt. Sinai, alone and humble? Why did Jesus go out in the desert, alone and humble? Why did Mohammed go into the cave, alone and humble? Why did the Buddha sit under the Bodhi tree, alone and humble? For the same reason Jesus tells you and me to go pray in a closet: To humbly open ourselves to a higher reality, the Great Mystery, what most of us call God, what Buddhists call Bodhi Mind, what Native Americans call Great Spirit. All the same, all One. We go off alone and submit ourselves, present ourselves, to its presence. Not loud and proud. Not as scholars or “members.” But as children before the Lord, not knowing anything except that God is Good. You’ve heard the expression “Waiting on the Lord.” That’s what we do in the closet for those few minutes every day. That’s what we do for longer periods of time in occasional retreats. We learn to sit down, shut up, offer ourselves to that Larger Reality, and humbly wait.

No Cathedral can guarantee us the direct experience of the Holy One, and no prison cell can keep us from it. Jesus told His apostles, “The Kingdom of Heaven is *within* you.” Just sweet words? Just a metaphor? Or are you willing to consider that in some incomprehensible way, *the entire infinite, unbounded Kingdom of Heaven is actually, literally within you and me?!!* Go pray in the closet. Such simple words, such simple instruction. Go pray in the closet. He’s handing us the keys to the Kingdom and we keep building

more huge churches and holding what could only be called ceaseless membership rallies under the name of Christianity. It’s become just about membership, hasn’t it? “I’m saved; are you saved?” How about the actual *teachings* of the religion, of the Savior Himself? You know, putting others first, turning the other cheek, giving away our wealth, trusting that God will feed and clothe us, rejoicing over the reformed criminal, accepting everyone at our Father’s table – you know, all that stuff Jesus actually instructed us to do? How has the popular religion in His name become merely a loud, proud, elitist membership fraternity? That’s a real head-scratcher!



Joe D. Thomason
Tennessee Colony, TX

But you and I do not need to figure out how tens of millions of people have unintentionally fallen into a mockery of Christianity or any other faith. You and I simply need to make our own decision about where we will stand. Jesus told Pontius Pilate, “You have no power over me.” Since Pontius Pilate then ordered Him to be executed and He was indeed killed, we need to reflect on what Jesus meant. In this world of people and events, Pontius Pilate certainly did have power over Jesus. He had Him crucified. Yet three days later, Jesus came back to show us that even imprisonment, torture and execution are *trivial* next to the Love He represents. He came to show us there is this world that we are *in*, where the Pontius Pilates will always seem to have power over us, but then there is this world we are *of*, which is a Force that makes death itself trivial and reversible.

Be in this world but not of it. Hmmm. Be in prison but not of it. Be in parenthood but not of it. Be in your job, your marriage, your hopes and dreams, your achievements, your plans, your recovery, but not *of* it. As they say in the South, you and I are “not from around here...” Being both in *and* of this world we see around us would be really depressing and make us feel quite disempowered.

That world is headed toward a train wreck politically, socially, ecologically, in just about every way. Countless millions of people go through the day not believing in anything truly beautiful, noble, or holy. How unbelievably sad. Because this very same world is astonishingly beautiful, noble and holy when we view it from the spiritual realm that we are *of*.

My dear elder, an Anglican monk named Father Murray Rogers, says “Bo, faith is not the most important thing; it’s the *only* thing!” Father Murray also said “*Every* crisis is a crisis of Faith, no matter what else it appears to be.” Father Murray once defined Faith as “Believing in an Ultimate

Goodness behind everything, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.”

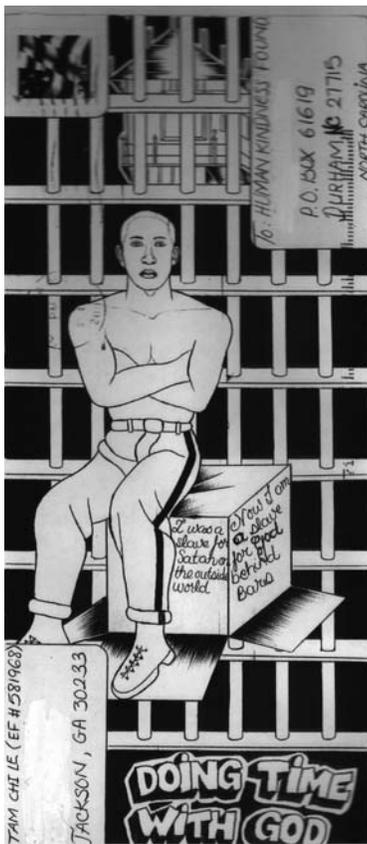
You and I can directly touch that Ultimate Goodness in the closet. I have many times. The Supreme Force is not neutral, it is Good. It is beyond our understanding, for sure, but not beyond our ability to experience it, or put more accurately, to merge into It when our separateness falls away. Don't settle for too little. Many of the “New Thought” or “New Age” churches seem to be trying to make this worldly level of reality the perfect one. They have all the right words about everything being God and so forth, but they're trying to make personal, small, egoic happiness the Big Joy. That will never happen. This world we are *in* is tiny and limited and extremely conditional. The world we are *of* is a unified consciousness that doesn't need protection from trivialities like poverty, illness, or adversity.

By knowing where we are OF, we can have less fear and more power to help in the world we are IN.

This is a time when it would be helpful for us to simplify our spiritual perspectives. “May I be less selfish today than yesterday. May I be less vain today than yesterday. I dedicate myself today to live for others.” All the practices and paths are merely to serve these simple ends. Like one of the great Tibetan teachers told his student, “What is needed now is not more teachings, but more practice, my son!” Let's really do this TODAY. Commit yourself to living for others right now. You know it's the right thing to do, so don't wait any longer. Believe me, your life will be a fascinating adventure just figuring out what it really means to put others first. And Life truly will bring you all you need if you really make this commitment.

With Love, Bo

LETTERS



Dear Bo and Sita,

My name is D. I've been locked up almost a year now. I got into reading your books for about ten months now. I was a real mess. I was a really bad person. Especially to my wife and family. Drugs, alcohol, you name it, I've spent most of my life locked up. (Very selfish)

You've been a lot of help to me. I've followed a lot of your advice. I've tried my best to be the best person I can be. A kind person. But am I really that kind?

Let me explain. I was sure this time around, I'd lost everything. Wife and four beautiful children. But then I started reading your books. I guess the wife noticed a change. She even came 300 plus miles to visit me on my b-day. She said she forgives me. She wants to try again. She is an incredible woman. Strong. Stronger than me of course. A real trooper.

I sat every day. I sat there quietly. I saw how wrong I was. I felt really guilty for the things I did. Very ashamed of myself. But my problem is, since she's told me she forgives me, and will give me another chance, I feel different. But in a bad way. I catch myself not feeling guilty any more. As if I'm just relieved I've gotten away with it (again). And I don't even feel guilty about it. I feel guilty about not feeling guilty. I now feel I just used you and your ways to get in good with my wife. Like I've always used people to get what I want.

I try to sit and find what's wrong. But I get nothing. I feel nothing. Lose interest. I can't even remember what it was that made me want to sit in the first place. As if I got what I wanted, so why keep going? The worst part about it is, I know it. You show me the good things that come from being a good person. And I am in debt to you. Thank you. But what now?

How do I get back Bo? How do I go back to feeling the wonderful feeling of being a good person, as you taught me? Have you ever gotten bored with the

whole sitting thing. Got tired of being nice?

Please help me Bo. I don't want to go back to the old me. I don't want the old me to win. You got me here doing this wonderful practice. Don't do to me what I feel like doing to you. (Lose interest) Help.

Much love and respect, D

Dear D,

Well, you really laid out your situation with a lot of honesty, which I'm sure is a result of the spiritual work you have done and the changes you have made, even if you think you've gone back to being a bad guy. It was definitely a sincere spiritual seeker who poured out his heart to me in that letter.

Listen D, all of us have conflicting voices inside, that's why there's that old image of the little angel on one shoulder and the little devil on the other. We're all in that situation. An old Native American proverb says “We each have two dogs fighting within us. Who wins? The one we feed.”

So stop being bummed that you can find the old D still inside of you, and just be determined that it's the new D you're going to feed. It may be quite a while before your mind breaks the old habits of running a game on your wife, making a farce out of meditation, etc. But your work is to make sure those ideas, views, and habits stay inside like old dying shut-ins, and that they do not influence your behavior. An old mystic poem says

“Act Great!” That’s the power we have, the power of free choice in the moment. Our minds may be thinking all sorts of ugly things, but our minds also know the way we want to be and what we think is right. So we can still choose that dog to follow.

And little by little, as we do this, we find the “new” us feels more like us, and the “old” us feels less like who we are now. It takes time and commitment, that’s all. Keep me posted.

Love, Bo



Dear Bo

I hope you receive this letter in good health, mind, body, and soul. I also hope you can shed some enlightenment on this enigma that has occurred and still is. This is hard for me to write. I can’t find the words but I’ll try. On December 10, 2004 I lost the will to live, I hung my self in my cell. The COs cut me down at 8:45 I hung myself at 8:15, it is impossible that I am alive. I flat lined 5 times for anywhere between 2 to 10 min. each. They took me via helicopter to a outside Hospital. The doc said I am only the Second Medical Miracle she has seen in 20 years on the job. That was the explanation she gave me for being alive.

The only thing that went through my mind while I was still hanging there was how I treated people that tried to help me in this life and how I always had my hand out instead of my arms open.

When I was on the ground--This is the Truth--I was also floating above me, and I was crying because I would never get a chance to show the people I gave an attitude to or did wrong how sorry I am

and do what I can to change their hostile emotions towards me and about me. I swear to this day I saw a tear hit the floor from my eyes not me that was laying on the Ground, but the one that was above all this havoc and what hurt even worse was that one of the medical staff that was saving my life, was one of the people that I treated so bad.

At That Point in Time I realized that its not what you do in this life that you and others carry on as memories but How you do it! I also realized that Death is just a rebirth so you could learn all there is to learn about Human Nature so you could achieve God hood. (I am pagan just so you know).

The reasons why I tried to take my own life became Void at that point. The only thing I cared about & now still do was showing the ones I treated so Bad in this life How Truly Sorry I am for Being the person that I was. (I can’t lie) & still am. But I can’t find the words to speak, but I can’t write personalized letters either Because a lot of them are prison personnel.

I was thinking about writing a book. Then giving copies to the ones I mostly hurt. But as you can tell I ain’t that good of a writer. What can I do?

I also know my Death is going to be by my own hands. It’s a reality I must live with, I think about it 24/7. But I am scared that I won’t be able to tell the ones that truly Hurt & need to Know That I am sorry Just how Sorry I am. Before my Death Comes.

I have told Mental Health here about me wanting to end my life. & They said if I don’t succeed they will be there to talk to me once again. & Gave me a Bunch of Nut Drugs. I don’t like drugs. & I’m afraid. What can I do?

Be Blessed, S

Dear S,

Sorry it took so long to see your letter, but we get a LOT of mail these days – like maybe 500 letters a week. So considering that, a month is not too awful long, is it?

I tried to kill myself too, many years ago.

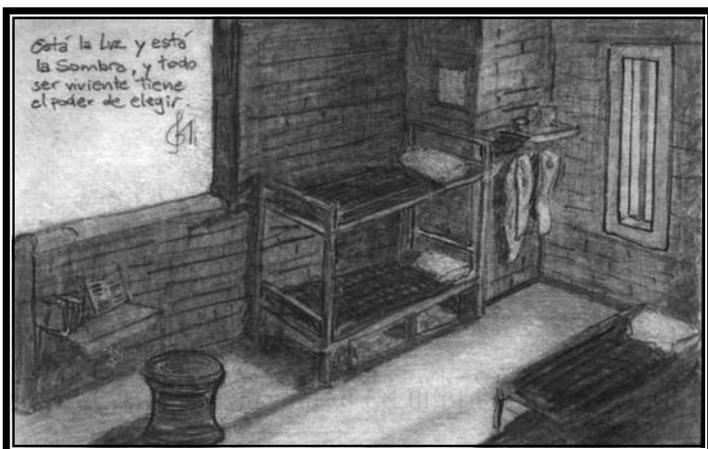
And I completely understand your experience of “floating over it” and seeing the ugly truth of your life and your attitudes and wanting to do better. That’s a great step in the spiritual journey, little brother, so be happy about that. That experience, plus the fact that God pulled you back into life, should be a pretty clear message to you to give up this idea that you have about dying by your own hand. We’re supposed to do our work and leave God’s work to God. And the exact moment and way in which we die, is definitely God’s work. Leave it alone.

Your job is living. And your experiences have given you some great insights about how to do a better job of it. You’d be missing the point if you think that you’re supposed to go around patching up the bad jobs you’ve already done. The point is to do a good job from now on. You don’t need to write a book to the people you’ve abused. Make your life honorable and unselfish and kind, and those people will gain more than any “apology” you may have ever given them.

My books are about how to do that. The mind is a wild monkey; we need to tame it a little. Our habits are hard to break, so we need to create new, good habits and self-discipline to break the old ones; we’ve been abusing our bodies and minds with all sorts of garbage, from junk food to violent movies, so we need to tone all of that down and get clearer and healthier. Do you see what I’m getting at? You’re in a great place to do the work every human being needs to do. It’s not about UNdoing all that you’ve already blown. A lot of that will take care of itself, and some of it never will no matter how much you try.

You asked which book of mine is the most suitable right now. We’re All Doing Time is a practical manual for making these changes. It’s not just a book to read; it’s a set of instructions and methods to try out in your everyday life until you make these changes. Get back into it with new willingness to devote as much time as possible to the life you want to live. You already killed yourself, and it didn’t work, just like me. So, again like me, become a fulltime spiritual student and see what God had in mind for your life. It’s been one hell of an adventure for me!

Love, Bo



Art by Gonzalo Martinez, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Translation: There is light and there is darkness, and every being has the power to choose.

TOUR

Bo began touring in December 2005, and it looks like he'll be on the road for most of 2006. He's speaking in hundreds of prisons all over the country, as well as in churches, universities, people's homes, etc. He's also giving concerts featuring his original folk-rock music. Go and meet him if you get the chance!

Bo's First Tour CDs – 'LIFE IS RISKY'

Life is Risky This 2-CD set is from a talk given in a church in Boca Raton, Florida in December 2005, and touches on raising children, living a spiritual life, and our responsibility to be holy.

Bonus Track from a prison workshop at Hardee Correctional Institution in Florida, also in December 2005. It is rare that we have the opportunity to hear Bo inside a prison, because regulations usually make it impossible for his workshops to be recorded. This bonus is approximately 40 minutes of Bo doing what he does best: talking to prisoners. Don't miss it!

Code CLR (2 CDs) \$16 + \$3 shipping

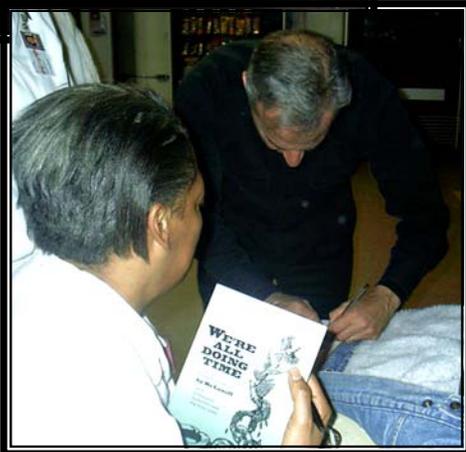
Excerpt from *Life is Risky* CD:

"Life is risky and dangerous and so you may as well take some spiritual risks and dangers, because at least you get something out of that, and you don't get much out of the risks and dangers that you take for material wealth."
-- Bo Lozoff



I had the privilege of seeing Bo at RCCWC in Marlboro Tennessee. I definitely left the meeting a better person and want to stay a better person.

Joey



Tour Dates

Check our website for up-to-date information
www.humankindness.org

May: San Francisco/Bay Area, Oregon, Washington

May 26-29: Boston – AVP National Gathering
www.avpboston2006.org

June: Utah, Colorado

June 6-9: Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association 18th Annual Conference –
www.pmhca.org

August: Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas

September: Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri

October: Kentucky, Ohio

Northeast part of the country will begin in the late Fall

NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

MY LIFE ON THE ROAD...

It's Bo again here, writing from a very seedy little motel outside of Austin, Texas. I love these places, because sometimes I find myself giving one of my best "talks" to a couple of unhappy hotel maids in Sulfur, Louisiana, or to a single mom of three who needs help carrying her laundry to the elevator and along the way just feels moved to let me know that her uncle just got out of prison. One on one, life really is still very sweet between most of us if we try to pay attention to being unselfish and kind.

And of course, I am so grateful to the many hosts, inside and outside of prison, who have helped Sita to coordinate this complex schedule that enables me to sit and talk with folks about the deepest things we all hold in our hearts. Being on the road is always a stirring reminder of how many great people there are who are doing great things in their communities. And being the recipient of their enormous hospitality is humbling, almost embarrassing. The flowers and snacks and little kindnesses, homemade granola, meeting their children and elders, being introduced as someone who has made a positive impact on their lives. Ahhh, we really do all have what it takes to be in the Kingdom of Heaven with each other.

I met a prisoner in Florida who said *We're All Doing Time* saved his life seven years ago, and so he had the cover tattooed on his back! This guy was about 6'5" tall, so the tattoo was enormous, starting with the shackle at his waist and the chain and birds going all the way up his spine to his shoulder. The next day I met a guy in another prison who

had the same tattoo starting with the shackle around his ankle and the chain and birds going up his calf to the knee. How can words describe the connection we feel toward each other when we become such dear parts of each other's lives?

At a time when the largest bodies of our common humanity – our government, the pop-culture, consumer madness, crass and shallow national values – are bringing so much harm to the world, it is deeply useful to be reminded how good people are all across the land. We humans are a mysterious lot. As Mary Gauthier sings in her wonderful song, "Mercy Now," we "hang in the balance; dangling between hell and hallowed ground." I'm happy to occupy the hallowed ground with you all everywhere I go.

CD SPECIAL OFFER

Life is Risky including **Bonus Track** (see description on previous page): Code CLR (2 CDs) \$16

Open Heart, Troubled Times This lecture, with question & answer session, is a wide-ranging conversation about the difficult times we live in, the importance of keeping an open heart and clear mind, Bo and Sita's path of service and compassion, the prison work, and more. Recorded January 2005. Code CTT (2 CDs) \$16

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a little good news

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