

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Winter 2014

THE GREAT PUNCHLINE

Beloveds,

Here we are at Christmas 2014, and a couple of months after my 70th birthday! It's so hard for me to believe that our dear Bo passed on two years ago. As I said when I first wrote you about his death, I believe that he's with us, guiding us through the beautiful books he left for us all. I find that I read them over and over again, and each time, I'm touched by how his love and wisdom just gets deeper and deeper as I get deeper.

With that in mind, this Holiday Season we're reprinting a newsletter article that Bo wrote for us in 2005. My guess is that you'll be as moved by his message now as when he first wrote it.

My deepest love to you all. I hope you have a joyful and meaningful Holiday Season,

Sita

The Great Punchline

By Bo Lozoff

Dear Family,

My deepest Christmas wish for you all is to discover even a shred of the Divine Reality. A shred of that is bigger than this whole world with all its hurricanes and earthquakes and planes and bombs. The whole point of our lives – and I really mean the whole point, the only point – is to touch this Divine Reality, whatever we may wish to call the Ultimate Truth, Ultimate Intelligence, Ultimate Love, that exists within, around, above, below, and throughout everything else. We can touch It. We can know It directly.

This is not just sweet mystical poetry. It is the only true success that is possible in life. Everything else gets ripped away from us in the end. Nothing is complete and lasting, nothing is final, except the transcendent reality that most of us call God.

A prisoner in Corcoran wrote me recently that his life sucks. I wrote him back that the key is learning the Mystic's Way to move through this world where life frequently sucks, learning how to "suffer gracefully," how to groan good-naturedly like you do when a friend tells you a really bad joke that ends with a great punchline. That's life on Earth: A bad joke that has a GREAT punchline.

What do I mean by the "bad joke"? Well, there's cartoonist Gahan Wilson's classic remark, "Life essentially doesn't

work; that's why it's the basis of endless humor." Or the fact that cooked

carrots are better for us than chocolate. Or the old German saying, "Too soon old, too late smart." Or my brother's saying, "No good deed goes unpunished." Or "nice guys finish last." Or why the girl you're in love with says "I just want to be friends."

Countless ironies could be written to illustrate why it's accurate to call life a bad joke. Not just the cute stuff, either. Racism and poverty and injustice and fear—a joke often not funny at all, a joke not in good taste. For countless millions of people, a sick joke, a cruel joke. The joke is Jesus up on the cross in what seems to be total failure, misery, broken idealism, shattered hopes. And then—The Punchline: He comes back three days later and calmly says "Even death is not final in my Father's Kingdom." Not death, or imprisonment or any of the rest. Jesus really did die on that cross. Yet that death wasn't lasting. Nothing lasts except His Father's Kingdom.

So what's the deal about this Great Punchline? Well, the Ultimate Goodness, the Divine Love, that exists within, beyond, above, below and throughout everything else, is SO good, SO wonderful, SO impossibly joyful, that by



Yao Chen, Corcoran, CA

comparison, even the worst, most horrible suffering we can imagine seems small, trivial. In his book *The Great Divorce* (the separation between Heaven & Earth), C.S. Lewis uses the imagery of size to make this point.

Standing on the ground of Heaven, he shows a newly arrived soul a tiny crack in the ground near their feet, and says that all of Earth and Hell, all negativity and suffering and problems and ambitions and limitations, all our wars and famines – everything in the world of time and humanity – exists in that tiny little crack in the ground. Life in this tiny crack is compressed and stifling. The ground of Heaven is expansive and unlimited. The worst sorrow in worldly life only takes place in that tiny little crack in the ground of Heaven. It's part of the compressed world; it's contained entirely in that world. In that crack, we cannot even conceive of the vastness of the Divine Goodness, the Divine Joy.

One moment's experience of that vastness is millions of times more positive than the negative on Earth is negative! It's like the size of a planet to the size of a pea. It's not like a "balance" to it or anything like that. What's positive is infinite and unceasing, and what's negative is compressed and constantly changing. Goodness is an enormous mountain, and evil is no more than an annoying mosquito with a life span of a few hours.

That's why, when some of us directly experience that mountain, or "Promised Land" as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called it, there is nothing – NOTHING – in the tiny world of the mosquito that ever holds much fear for us again. Dr. King knew he was going to be assassinated, and it didn't change his mission at all, because even assassination is trivial after seeing what he saw. Once we have seen the Larger Reality, it is SO much larger than the compressed world of all our hopes and fears, it holds no power over us anymore. Pontius Pilate screams at Jesus, "Don't you know I can crucify you or set you free??" and Jesus replies calmly, "You have no power over me at all."

Don't you want that to be true for you?

And so He gives us instructions: Don't focus all your time and energy, hopes and dreams, on the world that does not last. Focus instead on what does last. It may be very frustrat-

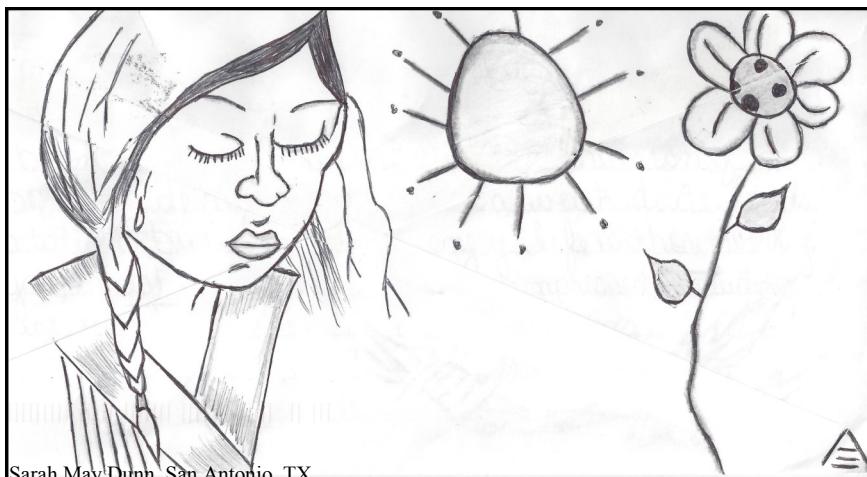
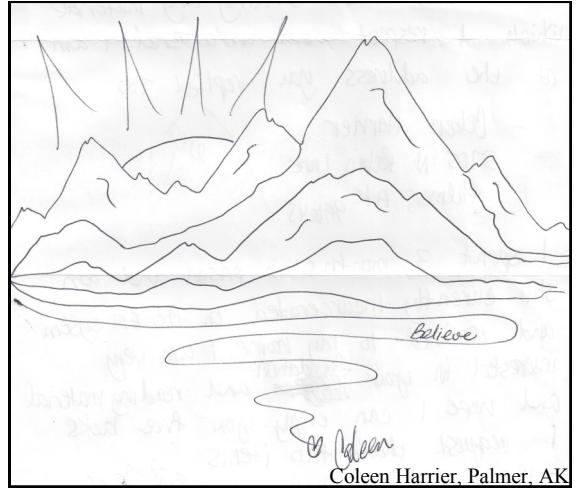
ing to want to touch that Divine Reality when it just doesn't seem to be happening. For some reason, that's part of the bad joke – God doesn't necessarily reveal Him-

self the moment we say, "Okay, I'm ready!" So when our patience wears thin, whether that takes a day or fifty years, we tend to give up, and go back to focusing our main energies on the stuff that does not last. We think, "I'm just going to be a realist from now on! Enough of all this spiritual crap. It doesn't work!"

But is it realistic to look for our keys under the streetlamp, because it's brighter there than in the dark alley where we actually dropped them? Dark or not, even if it takes all night, the alley is the only place we have a chance of finding the keys. It doesn't matter how bright the street is under that lamp, the keys will not be found where they do not exist. Our joy, our peace, will not be found in the mundane world, even if we become the wealthiest or most powerful person in the world, or head of the world's largest charity, or the new Gandhi who brings peace to the Middle East. The eternal will not be found in the mundane. The absolute will not be found in the relative.

There is a Treasure awaiting each and every one of us, closer than our own breath. We're getting sick and tired of the Bad Joke within and around us, but it is vitally important not to lose faith in the Great Punchline. We have an opportunity to live in this world, but not of it, as Jesus advised. We have an opportunity to respect and deal responsibly with the problems and limitations of this worldly life, without being run into the ground by them. And that's the only value of separating "worldly" and "Divine," or as Jesus put it, "Mammon" and "God."

So let's not let the world's ills make us completely lose sight of the Positive, of the Great Punchline. If we make it a high enough priority, we have an opportunity to walk through this valley of the shadow of death with a rod and staff that profoundly comfort us, that empower us. We can be in the world of bad news and decay, but not of it. We must function in this world, it is our sacred duty. We're supposed to help and comfort and solve problems and make peace and feed our families and all the rest. But we do not belong to any of that. We belong solely to God. None of that can



Sarah May Dunn, San Antonio, TX

harm whom we really are, it can only affect the material world, it can only affect the part of us that is physical and temporary. That's why Jesus said that what is born of flesh must die of flesh, and we need to be born again in Spirit to find our eternal nature. It's right here, always waiting for us to awaken to it.

And until you experience it for yourself, my dear family,

hold firmly to your faith in the experiences and advice from the sages and saints who have directly experienced it. As one of my favorite elders, Father Murray Rogers, has put it, "Faith is not the most important thing; it is the *only* thing." This is not just wishful thinking, or using religion as a crutch to help us cope with hard times. This is the only thing that really matters.

—Bo Lozoff, 2005

PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

From *Deep & Simple: A Spiritual Path for Modern Times*, by Bo Lozoff

The Presence of God

What would you do, how do you think you'd behave, if you could see God or feel God with you right now—literally, physically, right here? The Sacred One. The Holy. Right here, right now.

At the very least, you'd probably feel hushed, humbled and grateful. Every complaint would vanish from your mind. Your actions would probably be unselfish. If somebody offended you, you'd likely forgive them. Out of respect, you'd take good care of yourself. If you had to stand up against corruption or evil, you'd courageously do the right thing, because you would see that God knows, and God guides you, even when things seem horrible, scary or sad. God's sacred presence would bring you peace and comfort, even if you were dying of AIDS, or losing your job, or being executed by the state.

Well, the scriptures of every religion tell us it's literally true: God is here with us at every moment. They also assure us that by Grace, each one of us can actually experience God directly; we can know God first-hand—what I call touching the Sacred.

This experience was the way of life in most Native American faiths. Walking Buffalo, a Stoney Indian, said, "We see the Great Spirit's work in everything: sun, moon, trees, wind, and mountains. Sometimes we approached him through these things. From this we have a true belief in the Supreme Being."

The actual experience may be a ways off for most of us, but we can practice this presence of God to develop an awareness and lifestyle more in keeping with how holy everything really is. Try it yourself and see the difference it makes in your life.

The Practice

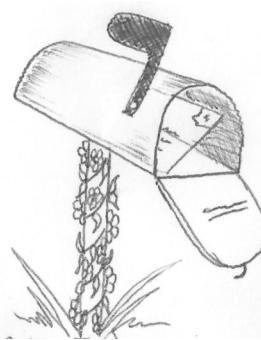
Remind yourself dozens or even hundreds of times throughout the day, God is here, right now. The Holy Father, the Divine Mother, the Messiah, is with me. Everything I think, do or say is in the presence of a loving God. Nothing is unimportant. No one is meaningless. Everything counts. I want to act accordingly.

Recognize that the same is true for everyone else, whether they know it or not. Even when you're struggling with another person, remember that God is here, watching and loving us equally. So respect the conflict without wasting energy rejecting it, like, "This shouldn't be happening." God knows what is important for us to experience. God knows.

That's it. Simple, huh? The presence of God can be practiced anywhere, anytime, because nothing is excluded. Look around you right now. You're on hallowed ground. God is here. Our spiritual journey is not to make anything more holy, but only to drop every barrier, every addiction, every bit of pettiness, gossip, greed, pride, and delusion, which blocks us from seeing how holy everything already is.



Letters



Dear Friends of the Human Kindness Foundation, I was so glad to receive the latest edition of "A Little Good News." Thank you for taking the time and investing the money into such a useful and encouraging newsletter. I read it many times, share it with others and practice the lessons it teaches, always benefitting from the knowledge and encouragement it brings.

I also want to thank you from the very core for your gracious gift of books and the truly compassionate letter. The timing of these things was perfect, because I was really in a slump from the anniversary of my daughter's death. She was killed by a school bus while I was fighting my criminal case in county jail in 2012, and my incarceration prevented me from attending the funeral and burial services. I have struggled tremendously with the denial and grief associated with the loss of my baby, who was 7 years old, my first born child and my pride and joy. Around the same time, I stumbled upon a copy of Bo's *We're All Doing Time*. I give the teachings and support of this book, and the timely compassionate responses by your foundation, all the credit for helping me get through such a tragedy. I truly believe that without your encouragement, I would be a very bitter person, or I would have given up in the face of such obstacles and taken my own life. You should know that your hard work and prayers have saved my life and allowed me to turn the greatest obstacle in my life into the biggest stepping stone in my spiritual growth and my pursuit of peace. For that, I am eternally indebted and grateful.

The Human Kindness Foundation and Bo Lozoff's books have equipped me to handle the emotional fluctuations known to all prisoners, during a very

difficult time, with confidence and knowledge that the grief I experience can become a path to greater compassion and love than I have ever experienced before. Thank you for your compassion. It means so much to me. One of the greatest things about the pursuit of peace is the way that it changes your perspective of those around you. When I began to see that suffering and dissatisfaction infect the entirety of "ordinary" unenlightened existence, I began to cultivate the insightful wisdom that all of the bitter, selfish people around me (in this prison) were experiencing different forms of pain in their hearts. Instead of seeing someone who is loud and boastful as "obnoxious," I could see in them the insecurities that they may not even be aware of in themselves. Instead of the angry person being "rude," I can see the broken heart of a troubled past, bleeding through their words. This perspective has opened a path to great compassion and has allowed me to love the unlovable, be patient with the impatient, and helpful to the selfish. As I'm sure you can relate, helping others find peace is a great way to achieve your own inner peace and deepen the capacity of love you may have for others. After all, isn't this the purpose of every religion known—to love your neighbor as you want to be loved?

By giving up my own selfish thoughts that led me to suffering and dissatisfaction, and replacing them with their opposites, I have been able to cultivate the intention to bring happiness to others. What a joy it has been!

Your foundation has really encouraged me to seek peace in miraculous and profound ways, and I want to pass on these traits to others around me. What greater place to attempt such a thing than in a prison full of hurt, suffering, lonely and miserable men? Already you have changed my life and the lives of a handful of others around me. I look forward to sharing the love and compassion you have showed me, with others. I thank

you sincerely, dearest friends, and I pray you may all be abundantly blessed. With love, T

Dear T,

I send you my deepest condolences on the loss of your daughter. What a miracle from God that you were open to His healing presence. You confirm something I have always believed: the only way to heal from suffering is to reach out to others who are suffering. How glad we are that our books helped you in this horrible time of your life. I thank God you did not harm yourself. Very sincerely yours, Ann



Dear HKF,

In a book I'm reading, it says that the seeker can reach enlightenment by doing a complicated practice that makes energy travel up the path of the chakras until it reaches the crown chakra and bingo—the seeker is enlightened. Does this mean that there are set physical ways to open the gates of heaven? I've done a lot of studying on chakras, and it seems like some bodies are naturally more able to reach enlightenment this way. It makes some sense, but it's not really ethical of "the powers that be." It's frustrating not to have people here who can answer my questions.

Very truly yours, M

Dear M,

I hope you'll keep working with the practices in the books, along with your reading. Sometimes our answers come over time, when we keep practicing. I'll do my best to answer you, and you'll still need to rely on the wisdom you will develop as you continue your own practice.

We do not believe that there is any set path to enlightenment. Bo used to tell the story of a Rabbi who would say, "Enlightenment is not earned, it's an accident." And the Rabbi's student asked, "Since it's an accident, why do you make me spend so much time in prayer and meditation?" The Rabbi re-

plied: "To be as accident-prone as possible."

There are many powerful practices, and it's a good idea to work hard on spiritual practice. It will have an effect on your life, but there is no guarantee that you or I will reach enlightenment in this lifetime. In fact, many teachers say that it takes many lifetimes of spiritual practice before we become enlightened. Do your practices in order to become kinder, calmer, and stronger. Don't worry about when you will be enlightened.

None of us can know that.

I hope these thoughts are helpful to you. We wish you all the best.

Catherine, and all of us at HKF



Dear HKF,

I received a copy of your book *We're All Doing Time* from an inmate. I wanted to write you and let you know I find your book extremely inspiring and refreshing. I am incarcerated and have approximately 2 years left. I was given a 7 year sentence and spent 2 years in a Transitional Work Release Program. I was shipped to my current location due

to disciplinary recommendations. I have taken this movement as a lesson. Even though I "thought" I had gotten myself together and was rehabilitated, I wasn't. I relapsed, and got lost in trivial pursuits. Now I have time to center myself a little more before my release.

Previously, I abused LSD and DXM while meditating and practicing pranayama. Although I encountered many wonderful drugs along my journey, I realized I was using my journey as an excuse for

my abuse. I can honestly say I've had stronger and more enlightening experiences while sober. Thank you for opening my eyes to these things. Maybe you could help me again.

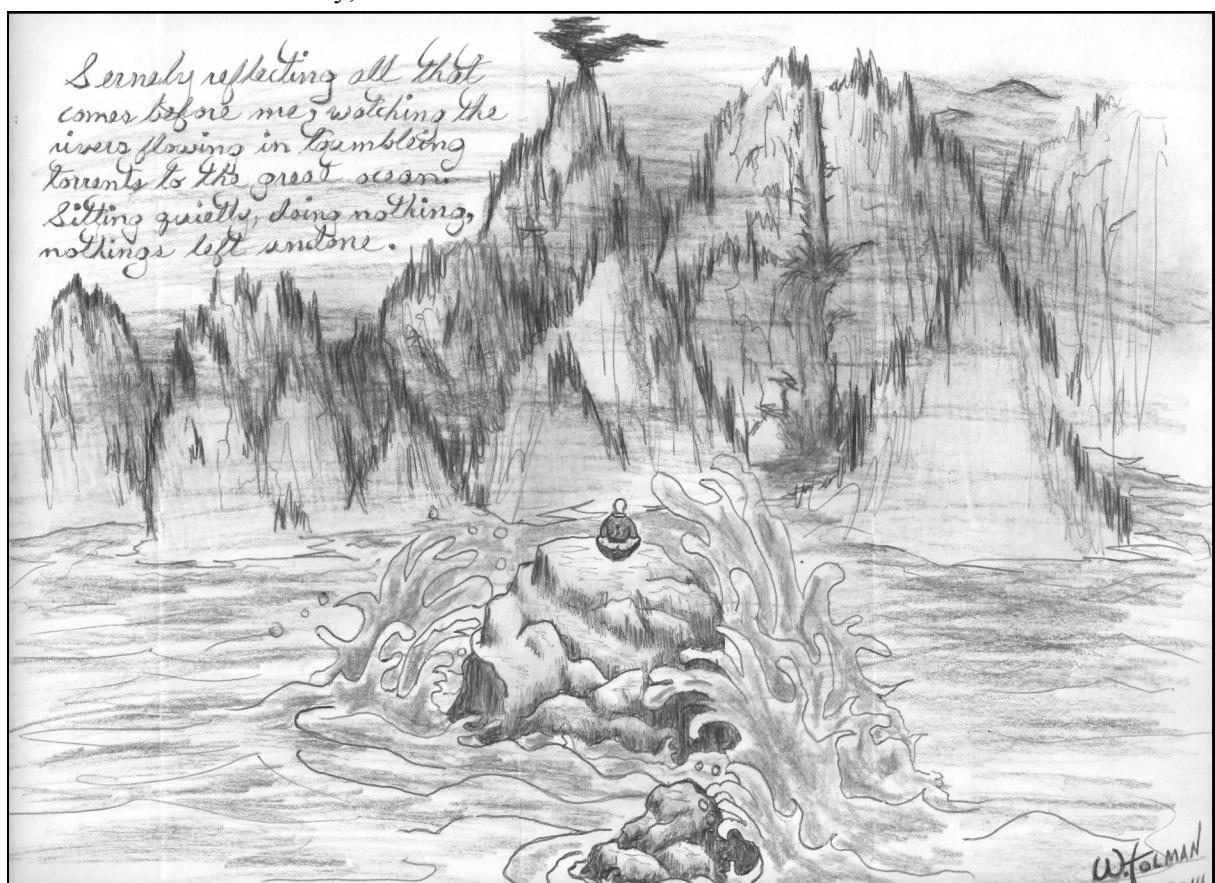
I feel I'm missing the next step. How can I love? I'm surrounded by ignorance and arrogance. It seems impossible to feel HONEST compassion for these people. I have made plenty of mistakes, yet I cannot empathize with these people. They seem to be proud of it. I've always yearned for more. This yearning has been an indirect cause for my transgressions. How can they be so simple-minded? Biased? Prejudiced? Can they not see? They won't listen. My heart aches for these people. I also feel guilty for looking at them so. I don't want to feel self-righteous or better than anyone, but what is this? Can you clarify this for me? I can't do anything for them, they must walk their own paths, but what can I do? I feel guilty. How do I share this with them? Can I help? They don't even know they are suffering, which makes my suffering even worse. I'm confused.

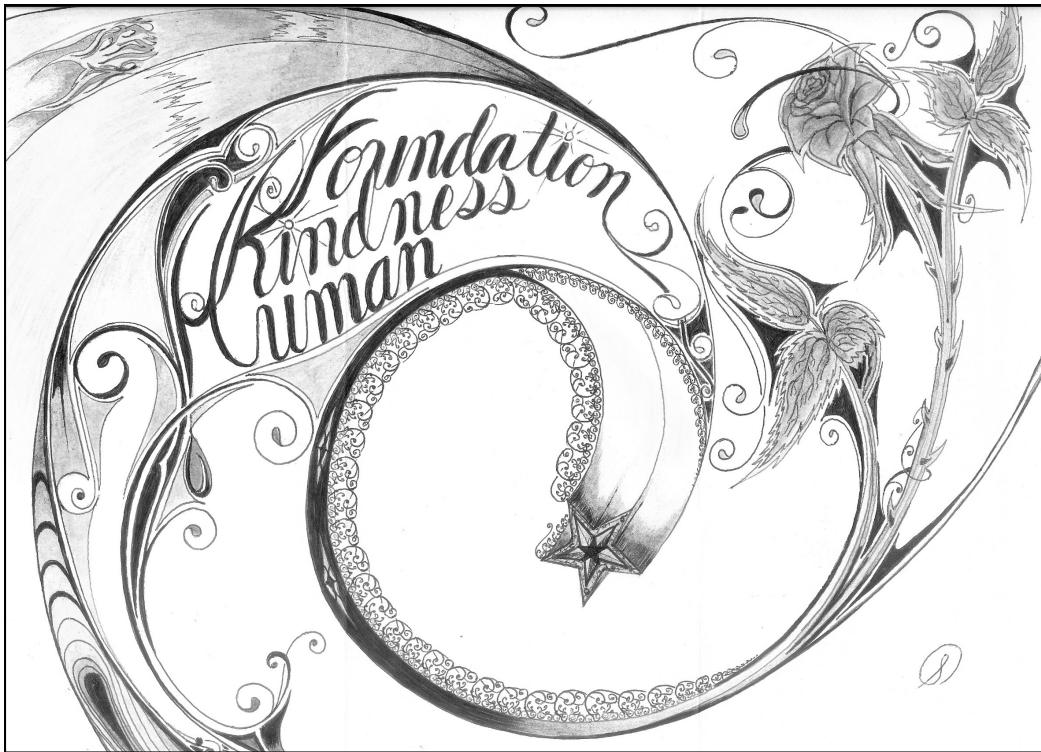
Sincerely, J

Dear J,

Hello friend, my name is Gabe, and I'm a volunteer here at HKF. Sita read and gave me your letter thinking I might be able to help in some way. I am after all an "expert" on dealing with some of the issues you wrote about. OK, well maybe not an expert, but I have had lots of practice! I did 19 years in prison for murder and have been out now for over 4 years. My practices, patience, and most of all, Bo's books, are what helped me.

By your letter, you sound like you've already got some good tools to work with, you just need some more practice. Since you asked for our help, I would recommend re-reading some of Bo's responses to the letters in *We're All Doing Time*. Man, there's some gooood stuff in there to help on this crazy journey and Bo has a way of saying it in just the right way. I always read each letter like he was talking to me, and his answer was a response to my current situation, and I didn't pay much attention to the parts of the letter that didn't apply.





Your struggle to "LOVE" others in a place filled with so much bad stuff is a struggle we all face while making some real and deep changes in prison, but where else would you get so much practice? You talk about your struggle, but you also write about not feeling good about the way you feel. Bo helped me find that, that alone is a type of "LOVE." If you were content to have these feelings, it would be a lot different—I hope you can understand what I mean by that.

So, I think it just takes time, man. You can't just change all those past years of negative thinking habits in one moment—at least I couldn't. Check out Bo's response to a letter in *We're All Doing Time* on page 290. Also p.151, 152, and 194. And all the others as well!!

When you truly open your heart up, you learn to accept that everyone is on their own path just doing what they know. Saying that and REALLY feeling that are different things. It's not our job to tell them shit, just do your thing. There

Artists: Stephen Land, Angleton, TX (top of pg 6)
Trevor Brown, Roseburg, OR (birds, pg 6)
James Ballard, Pikeville, TN (mailbox, pg 4)
Wade Holman, Pampa, TX (mountains/sea, pg 5)
Michael J. Graton (hand with ball & chain, pg 8)

were plenty of people in prison that I didn't care much for and stayed away from (it happens out here, too). But I still know they are on a journey just like I am, and I still feel some kind of respect for the part they don't show. I know when I was locked up and dealing with this, it seemed like the harder I tried to not feel anything negative towards others, the harder it was to be positive. Looking back I guess it was just the first step in realizing that, that is something I wanted to change and was recognizing it more. It's just a step on your path, brother, and shows you're on the right path. I don't say this lightly, but if I can do this, so can you—I really didn't give a damn and hated everyone in the place I was in. Lots of one-on-one talks with God and a daily meditation practice sure helped me. What else can I say, man, you know most of this, but it's always good to get some confirmation. And go easy on yourself when needed (but not all the time!), because if it wasn't this it would be something else, and when you get done with this step, it will be something else. Be sure to check out those responses in Bo's books, and write us to let us know of your progress or lack

of—either way we're here and have great respect for the work you are doing. Keep it up. You can get a lot done in two years. All that's going on now, is making you the man you want to be.

Your friend, Gabe

Hello! Nice to meet you Gabe. I received your response along with 2 books. I wanted to thank you for such a quick response. I checked out Bo's responses in the suggested letters and found they hit home. I have since been reading them daily to remind myself.

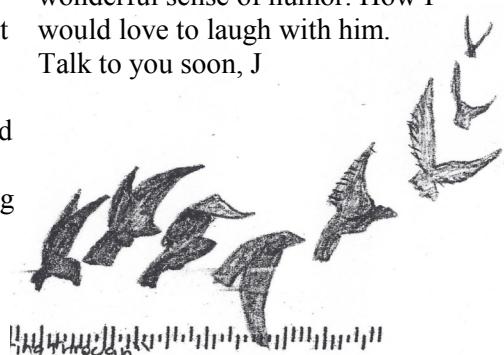
I want to thank Sita as well. I have not gotten to *Lineage* just yet, but *Deep & Simple* is, well.....so deep and simply profound. It is very inspiring. I understand I have a lot of work to do, but I would like nothing more than to devote my life to

the spiritual path. Hopefully one day, once I've bettered myself, I can volunteer for HKF and support the organization with donations. You all have done so much for me. Most of all, you've given me hope. I have so much love for all of you.

I was not aware of Bo's passing. I wish the very best for his family. Although I never met him personally, I know he was a beautiful person who touched so many lives.

19 years! Wow! What a beautiful story that must be. I am happy to hear of your perseverance. I feel I'm on the verge of tears, so much raw energy is flowing through me as I write this letter. I have so much respect for HKF's work. I hope to be able to return all you have given me and more. I am discussing things with fellow inmates. God has such a wonderful sense of humor. How I would love to laugh with him.

Talk to you soon, J



Sita and Josh Visit Illinois

Joshua Lozoff, Bo and Sita's son, is a professional magician who has performed all over the world, including at the World's Fair in Japan. In November, he and Sita visited 3 prisons in Illinois, to share Josh's magic and HKF's love.

The Prison-Ashram Project (now operated by HKF) was started when Josh was just 2 years old, so if you've been on our mailing list for a long time, you saw photos of him growing up. Sita and Josh wish that they could visit with each of you in person. We know that's not possible (there are over 40,000 people on our mailing list), but please know that we send love and blessings to you, wherever you are. All of our books and newsletters are meant to be "visits," like long letters from an old friend. We hope you use them that way, and we hope you find the deepest peace on your spiritual journey.



Sita Visits Jarvis Jay Masters

In July, Sita had the treat of meeting Jarvis Jay Masters in person. Jarvis is the author of *Finding Freedom: Writings From Death Row*. He is on the Advisory Board of Human Kindness Foundation, and he is an inspiration for all of us on the spiritual path.

Sita and Jarvis visited in San Quentin, on death row, with Jarvis in a cage. Although Sita has visited hundreds of prisons over the years, this was the first time she was required to wear a bullet-proof vest. In the midst of that oppressive place, Sita found Jarvis to be soft, loving, and even joyful. Chaplain Williams confirmed that this is Jarvis's usual state of mind.

Victor Frankl, while in a Nazi concentration camp in the 1940s, wrote that the only thing that cannot be taken from us is our state of mind. Jarvis is a living example of that freedom, which can be found even in the darkest places on earth.

Sita asked if there was anything that Jarvis wanted to share with people reading our newsletter. Below is what he offers as a gift for you. Take 2 seconds...

Two Seconds, by Jarvis Jay Masters

If we can learn to give ourselves two seconds, just give two seconds to everything we know, whether it's before causing harm to others, or before putting ourselves into situations where we find ourselves asking, "not again... what have I gotten myself into?"

When the job is nagging at you or the parole officer is on your back, or something even greater, the risk of being killed or killing someone... a death sentence.... All of these experiences are just two seconds away from determining the outcome of your life. Give yourself those two seconds to put yourself in check... knowing not to do harm to yourself or to others. That ability to hear and think about what it is that makes us go down one road and not the other in those two seconds. To ask: "what if?" "Nah, my family, my kids, where again will I be? Where has their father gone this time?"

Two seconds can bring the peace we have been longing for, or the situations that we may regret for the rest of our lives. Allow those two seconds to keep us true to our hearts, the heart that can give all of our lives a chance.

HKF offers free copies of Jarvis's book, *Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row* to people who are incarcerated. If you want a copy, please write to: HKF, PO Box 61619, Durham, NC 27715.



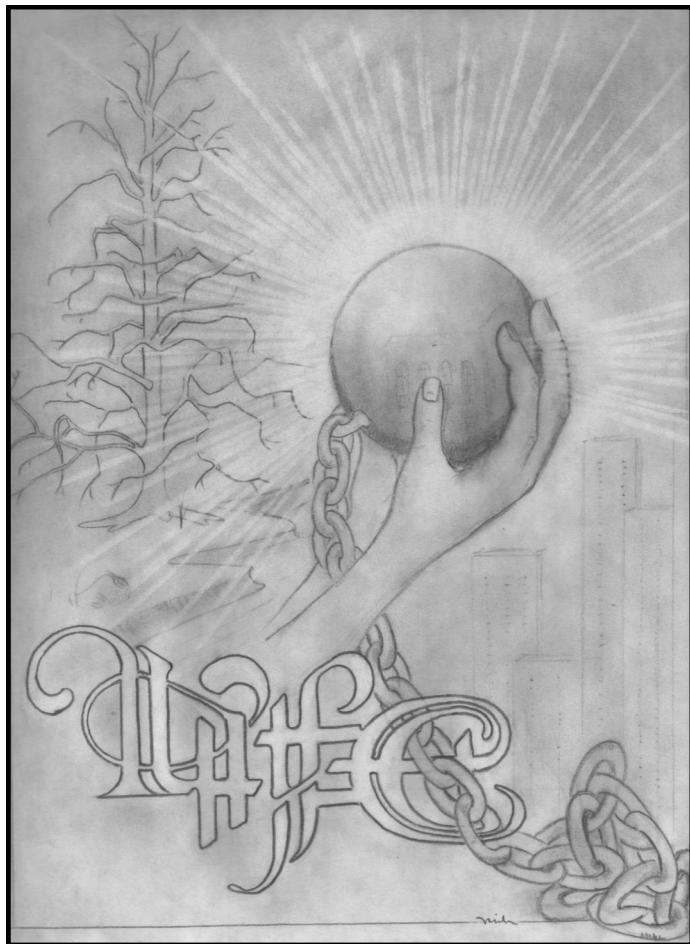
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Even
After
All this time
The Sun never says to the Earth,

"You owe me."

Look
What happens
With a love like that,
It lights the whole sky.

Poem by Hafiz, a 12th century Persian poet whose given name was Shams-ud-din Muhammad. The term "Hafiz" is used by Muslims to mean someone who has completely memorized the Quran.