To many of you getting this newsletter, Sita Lozoff needs no introduction. She has probably read your letter and maybe written you a note. Certainly she has held you in her heart with love as she put together a package for you or showed a volunteer how to get your address right. You may have read Bo’s descriptions of their life together and how they began the Prison-Ashram Project not long after they began their marriage. Still, you have not read a lot about Sita’s journey in Sita’s own words. In December 2017, an online magazine called The MOON featured the following interview with Sita, and they have graciously given permission for us to reprint it here.

Sita is the Spiritual Director of Human Kindness Foundation and she is hands-on involved in every aspect of answering the letters that arrive from prisons and jails all over the US. She hopes to continue in both roles for many years to come. The rest of us here at HKF hope she will, too.

The MOON: How did you and Bo meet?
Sita: I was a student at the University of Miami in 1965. Bo was recovering from a head-on car collision that almost took his life. He’d fallen asleep at the wheel and driven head-on into a Mack truck. He attributed his survival to the fact that he was a healthy bodybuilder; nevertheless, it took him years to recover and he had lifelong back pain as a result of that accident. His family was from Miami, so he was living there while he recuperated. On this particular day, he was driving by and saw me. The rest, as they say, is history. (Laughs.) He was 19 and I was 21 when we met, more than 50 years ago! We married a year later.

The MOON: How did you come to devote your life to the work of redeeming convicts?
Sita: In 1973, Ram Dass was sending his famous spiritual book, *Be Here Now*, into prison libraries all over the country. That same year, our brother-in-law was sentenced to the minimum security farm at the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana for smuggling marijuana from Jamaica. When Bo and I visited him in prison, we realized that he was leading an ascetic life rather similar to the one we were living at an ashram in North Carolina. We encouraged him to use his sentence as an opportunity for spiritual growth, and we gave him a copy of *Be Here Now*.

Bo and I had been so inspired after reading *Be Here Now* that we invited Ram Dass to speak at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. That was in December 1973. Ram Dass told us he was getting letters from men in prison who had read the book and that he was overwhelmed by the prospect of responding to them all. After visiting our brother-in-law, Bo said that he felt drawn to serving inmates, so Ram Dass said, “Why don’t you take these letters?”
That’s how the Prison-Ashram Project was born—as a project of Ram Dass’s foundation. By 1987, we’d grown so large that we formed our own foundation, Human Kindness Foundation, and focused solely on responding to letters from inmates, teaching yoga and meditation in prisons, writing spiritual books and sending them to inmates, and preparing inmates for leading a life of service—whether they ever got out of prison or not.

We’d come to North Carolina when we were a young family—our son was a year old—and were looking for the place we felt called to settle and begin our life’s work. Bo had written a letter to Dr. J.B. Rhine, who’d coined the phrase ESP for “extra-sensory perception” and whose research foundation was located in Durham. Bo was interested in ESP so when Dr. Rhine wrote back suggesting we join his community here, we moved to Durham.

Prior to that we were basically hippies—traveling the country, looking for a home after we were married in 1966. Bo’s brother Mike worked in northern Georgia, organizing women who worked for Levi Strauss, which had a factory there. It was mostly a company town that exploited its workers. Mike invited Bo to join him with his work, which is how we came to be in San Francisco for the Summer of Love in 1967. We went to ask Jefferson Airplane, who had just done a commercial for Levi Strauss, to consider supporting our work and to make an anti-Levi commercial in solidarity with the women who were organizing in Georgia.

That didn’t quite work out, however. [Laughs.] Nevertheless, it got us to San Francisco in 1967, where we came very taken with the whole peace and love movement. We brought it back to Atlanta, Georgia, opening the first head shop in the South. Hippies were not very welcome or treated very well in the South, which prompted us to become a little more political and a little more spiritual.

The MOON: Will you tell us a bit about your spiritual journey?

Sita: Bo and I were both born Jewish, but I was essentially raised without religion because my parents felt betrayed—as did many Jews—that God could have allowed Hitler and the Holocaust. But during the Summer of Love, Bo and I both had the profound experience that there is more to life than material reality; that there is Consciousness underlying all that we typically perceive as real.

So that was the context in which we read Ram Dass’s Be Here Now. Ram Dass, we felt, put our own experiences into words. He became our first spiritual teacher.

I just want to say that, at this point in my life, fifty years after beginning the Eastern practices Ram Dass introduced to us, I feel as connected to Christianity as I do to Eastern religions. I love Christ. I believe in the resurrection. I love St. Francis. I just finished reading Kazantzakis’ St. Francis, which I’d recommend to anyone, of any faith. It is deeply moving; I’ve read it three or four times now. Kazantzakis says, “God is an abyss. Jump!” I love that. To me it’s a reminder to have the courage to take that leap of faith when appropriate.

The MOON: What draws you to Christianity at this point in your life?

Sita: When my guru, the Indian saint, Neem Karoli Baba, was asked how Christ meditated, with tears rolling down his face he replied: “He lost himself in love.” When I was leading a workshop at San Quentin a couple of years ago, and an in-
mate there asked me what I thought was Bo’s favorite saying of Christ’s, I could easily reply, “Love one another as I have loved you.” I experience Christ as love, and I think that about sums up the heart of our work and my life’s calling which is to share that divine love with people who feel unlovable.

_The MOON:_ Please tell us more about your prison experiences.

_Sita:_ The first time I ever went into a prison—accompanying Bo at one of his workshops—I felt as comfortable as if I was in my own living room. I’m a middle-class Jewish girl from Philadelphia who has now been in hundreds of prisons, and I’ve always felt safe and comfortable. The only way I can account for this is through reincarnation. I have no other explanation for why I instantly felt at home. Bo and I surmised that we may have shared a cell together in one of our past lives. Why else would we both be so moved by prison work that it became our life’s calling, almost immediately?

The Human Kindness Foundation has printed and distributed almost half a million copies of Bo’s main book, _We’re All Doing Time_. Because of the way books are shared in prisons, I feel confident that at least a million inmates have read the book. I know from the letters we receive and the work we’ve done inside prisons that there are people inside who want to change, and a great many who succeed. I don’t know whether these inmates will continue to meditate when they get out, or go to church, or continue with some kind of spiritual practice, but I would say that most of the people who have been touched by our work are going to stop hurting people. If they can do that, after all of the abuse and pain they have experienced in their lives, that is tremendous progress for one lifetime. You cannot even imagine the suffering of some of the stories I’ve heard. But people want to change. They want to feel good. That comes from changing your heart and learning to be kind.

_The MOON:_ I’m always blown away by the accounts you share in your newsletter, “A Little Good News,” of Bo calling upon inmates to “be love in action,” despite what it might cost them personally in the violent environment they’re living in.

_Sita:_ Years ago, in the mid-90s, the Dalai Lama invited us to Dharamsala to talk about our prison work. Bo had received a letter from a young man in a dorm situation asking whether he should risk his life to prevent another inmate from being raped. Bo didn’t feel comfortable taking on the responsibility for this young man’s decision, and so he subsequently wrote to three spiritual leaders, including the Dalai Lama, who was the only one who wrote him back. His Holiness invited us to India for a conversation.

That was my first trip to India, although I’ve since been three more times. The Dalai Lama never definitively answered that question for us, although His Holiness does feel deeply that happiness comes from being kind and helpful to others. A very recent book of his, _The Book of Joy_, consists of conversations between himself and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. They say over and over again that kindness is the key to any religion.

_The MOON:_ What is it about your own spiritual path that made you want to recommend it to others?

_Sita:_ What has worked for me are three core principles for a happy and fulfilled life. The first is simple living: taking only what you need; not being caught up in the endless wants and “must haves.” The second is a commitment to some kind of spiritual practice—whether that be prayer, meditation, yoga, reading spiritual books, whatever inspires you. And the third is a commitment to service—finding some way that you can help ease the suffering of this world. I personally have found that this formula works, which is why I’m comfortable recommending it to others.

_The MOON:_ Even though this service to others has put you in contact with people whose suffering you share because you care for them, or who are in horrible circumstances you’re not able to change?

_Sita:_ Particularly in the beginning, it was difficult not to become caught up in the others’ suffering. Ram Dass
Sita: If you walk that line?

Sita: I try to practice and teach what the Buddha called “The Two Bright Guardians”—Hri and Onappa. Hri means taking responsibility and feeling remorse for the harm one has done in this world, and reconnecting with our goodness and decency. Onappa means making a commitment to not doing any more harm. This is something we talk a lot about with inmates.

One of our volunteers who responds to inmates’ letters is a man who served 19 years for murder and who has been out of prison for almost eight years now. He clearly lives and practices Hri and Onappa himself, and he writes to inmates in a way that I never would be able to because he’s been in their situation. He knows how they can make the transition from doing harm to being of service because he’s done it. He reminds them that “we’re all doing time,” whether we’re behind bars or not. We all have the same
task here on Earth: to grow spiritually; although admittedly some of us are doing harder time than others. The way he communicates with inmates is unique. When he tells inmates that they can make the change— because he has—it has power and credibility!

The MOON: Will you talk a bit about the spiritual work of forgiveness and reconciliation?

Sita: For the last three years, our executive director, Catherine Dumas, and I have been meeting monthly with about a dozen men on death row. When Arkansas executed four men recently, these men living on death row came in and sat down with us, angry and fearful, but by the end of our meeting we were sending love and forgiveness to the executioners and to all the people who were suffering as a result of the executions. So this is profound, powerful, and healing work. There’s nothing I’d rather be doing. These men have found that forgiveness has the power to change their own hearts. They forgive because they realize how much better it is—for them! It’s what the Dalai Lama calls “wise selfishness.” As a result of their ability to forgive, all of their relationships have been transformed. Their relationships with their families, with other inmates, with the guards. Forgiveness has become a key to their own happiness.

But it’s hard work. There are 150 people on the death row that we visit and about a dozen who are willing to do this work with us. It takes a lot of courage to take a course of action that is counter to the conventional wisdom— especially in a prison environment where people are constantly being assessed for any potential weakness. But as Kazantzakis says, “God is an abyss. Jump!” and they courageously are choosing to take that “leap of faith.”

These men have found that holding onto anger and bitterness is toxic. We all know that. What does anger and bitterness feel like in our bodies? It’s horrible. And what does love feel like, bodily? It’s heaven. So it takes a bit of courage to try, but the rewards are worth it. That’s why these guys keep coming back to our group. And although there hasn’t been an execution in this state in more than 10 years, one of the men in our group, who’s a Buddhist, was scheduled to be executed very soon when executions stopped in that state. He told the group that when the warden came to him with his execution date, he felt compas-
sion for the warden! Imagine that! Like the other men in
the group, he has found peace and happiness even though
he’s not likely to ever see the outside world again.

There was a situation in my own personal life where I
can honestly say that walking through that door of active
forgiveness gave me the opportunity to grow in ways that
have impacted my own spiritual journey, as well as the
people I come in contact with. Forgiveness doesn’t mean
excusing behavior or letting someone get away with
something. My guru used to say, “Do what you will with
people, but don’t put anyone out of your heart.” So we
can forgive and still stand up to people when necessary.

The MOON: I’m trying to understand the specifics of this
practice that has helped you and the death-row group to
understand the benefits of forgiveness.

Sita: God gives us all the lessons we need to work out;
we don’t have to go looking for them. So for the men on
death row, there may be a guard who is giving them a
rough time, and maybe alone in their cell they picture
this guard and send him kind thoughts. Or perhaps they
have lost their temper with another inmate. They might
bring the experience to our group meeting, and the whole
group will then discuss how the situation might have
been handled differently—so that they each leave with an
expanded repertoire of options for dealing with the situa-
tions that present themselves. They are willing to exam-
ine themselves and their behavior and sincerely work at
being better people going forward.

Mindfulness practice can give each of us a second or
two before reacting so that we can respond more skillful-
ly. [Check out the “Two Sec-
onds” practice on the follow-
ing page.] God brings them—
brings all of us—opportunities
to examine ourselves. To me
the answer always has to do
with love; how do we bring
more love and kindness to ev-
ery situation we encounter in
our lives?

The MOON: That brings me to
a personal question. Over the
years, Bo has always been the
more visible member of your
team. Since his passing, you’ve
stepped up to take on some of
that role. Will you tell us a bit
about being the invisible part-
ner? Do you feel that was part
of your traditional role as a
woman, or just your personal
style and comfort zone?

Sita: I think our division of
labor was completely appropri-
ate. Since Bo’s passing I’ve
felt even more strongly,
Dear Friends,

As a result of our sending Jarvis Masters' wonderful book, *Finding Freedom*, into prisons when requested, many of you have asked us for an update about him. Jarvis is still living on San Quentin's death row—this is his 28th year—and we ask for your prayers for our dear friend. I’m including here a practice he gave us when I visited him at San Quentin a few years ago. I still use it myself, and I strongly recommend it to all of you. —Sita

**Two Seconds, by Jarvis Jay Masters**

If we can learn to give ourselves two seconds to pause, 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.

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**Long-time volunteers retire from Human Kindness Foundation**

Pam Clarke moved to North Carolina in 2004 and soon became HKF’s volunteer bookkeeper, keeping our financial records accurate and up-to-date. A few years later she began serving on HKF’s Board of Directors. Brian O’Grady began volunteering with HKF in 2008, teaching yoga and faithfully showing up on Wednesdays to load up large sacks of mail and take them to the post office.

Pam and Brian are both retiring from their volunteer positions. Their hard work and loving generosity will be missed tremendously. Each has contributed enormous numbers of hours to the nuts-and-bolts work required to keep Human Kindness Foundation operating. Paying the electric bill, filing our tax forms, or hauling sacks of books, Pam and Brian have shown their compassion in practical ways for many years.

Thank you, dear friends.
Now available free! *The Untethered Soul* by Michael A. Singer is now available free to people who are incarcerated.

If you'd like this paperback book, please write to us with your name and full address including any numbers or location information your facility requires. It might take up to 4 weeks for your book to arrive, so if you’re at a short-term address please wait to request the book at your next address. Send your request to: Human Kindness Foundation, PO Box 61619, Durham NC 27715.

“Instead of being encouraged to feel completely protected, loved, honored, and respected by the Divine Force, you’ve been taught that you’re being judged. Because you’ve been taught that, you feel guilt and fear. But guilt and fear do not open your connection to the Divine; they only serve to close your heart. The reality is that God’s way is love, and you can see this for yourself.”

—Michael A. Singer

After receiving this book, Alvin T. says "It confirmed some things I had experienced in my recovery process. When you're given the truth, it's tremendous! I'm going to keep re-reading it."

“Life itself is your career, and your interaction with life is your most meaningful relationship. Everything else you’re doing is just focusing on a tiny subset of life in the attempt to give life some meaning. What actually gives life meaning is the willingness to live it. It isn’t any particular event; it’s the willingness to experience life’s events.”

—Michael A. Singer

Many thanks to the artists: photos on pg 1 and pg 4 by Satsuki “Sunshine” Scoville, Durham, NC; pg 2: drawing by Mark E. Howard, Chattanooga, TN, photo by Morgan Siem, Raleigh, NC; pg 6: drawing by Duane Raymond, Delano, CA; pg 7: drawing by Michael Sloan, Grafton, OH; pg 8: acrylic painting by Bryan Sneed, Coleman, FL.
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My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.

—His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet

Painting by Bryan Sneed, Coleman, FL