



Lockdown: Hard Times and Helpers



When threats are coming at us, from the age-old sickness of racism to the new illness of Covid19, hope is a radical choice. I do not mean a weak and idle hope. *"I hope it will all be ok"* is not radical. What I mean sounds more like *"I know I might die from this virus, or from our country's devastating racism. I choose to take a step toward something*

good anyway. I have hope that it makes a difference, so I will do my part."

I'm holding onto two things my elders taught me: Bo Lozoff said "You can do hard" and Mister Rogers said "Look for the helpers."

"You can do hard" was Bo's simple reminder that we don't have to give up when things get hard. Mecca (see pg 2) said: "I went through the fire. You don't know what you're made of 'til you get burnt real bad." I'm pretty sure

Mecca and Bo are telling us the same truth. You can take your next right step even if it's scary or painful or boring or

horribly hard. If you want to be a force for good in the world, it isn't always going to be comfortable. You are stronger than you might think.

We've shared a few reports from people doing hard time during the pandemic, like many of you are. We're listening, praying, caring, and encouraging you to stay strong as you "do hard."

Mister Rogers, who was a great friend to Human Kindness Foundation, told us to "look for the helpers" in times of crisis. I find it easier to hold onto my hope when I see people making a difference. We've shared news of a few helpers who are inspiring us.

Friends, it has been a terribly difficult year for so many people. We hope you're well; we hope your families are ok. We know it's a big hardship to be away from your families and communities that need your help while the twin crises of coronavirus and racism do so much damage.

Give yourself one breath, as full as your lungs are able to do right now, that welcomes in the friendship you share with this HKF community. Right now, before you go on to the next page, breathe in the knowledge that your HKF friends inside and outside of prison care about you and you care about them.

If that felt a little better than the moment before, that's a start. If you have just enough hope to believe that the next breath can be a little better, take that breath.

Do it for George Floyd and every other person who has died from racism for the last 400 years. Do it for the people who have died from Covid19 all over the world. They couldn't get that full breath. Breathe in honor and memory of them.

A newsletter called "a little good news" can't make these recent months look good. But we love you. Take a breath with us. —Catherine

A Change is Gonna Come By Sam Cook

Then I go to my brother
And I say, "Brother, help
me please"

But he winds up
Knockin' me
Back down on my knees
Lord, there been time that
I thought

I couldn't last for long
But now I think I'm able to
Carry on

It's been a long
A long time comin', but
I know

A change is gonna come
Oh, yes it will



HKF Board Member Aaron Turner

Sam Cook sang those words in 1964. He was a successful Black entertainer with a mostly white audience. He wrote "A Change is Gonna Come" because of the treatment he and his band got.

It has been a long time coming. But maybe we've finally gotten the attention of the masses. Our yelling, kicking and screaming—behind bars and on the streets—is maybe now being heard. Now is the time when it's especially important to feel—the anger, the frustration, the sadness, yes, but also the hope and the love.

(continued on page 2)

As we all witness one of America's greatest wounds laid open, exposing her original sin to the sun, important questions arise. While thousands march to supply fresh air and oxygen for healing, deep questions come to my heart and mind.

How do I make sure that when my brother comes to me and says, "help me please," I am there to pick him up, not knock him down? Do I have the kind of spiritual practice that allows me to know I am able to carry on, no matter what lies ahead? The onus is on each one of us traveling on this spiritual journey to search our hearts for the answers. These times are beckoning all of us, no matter who you are or what your life experience may be, to have empathy for the other, no matter who that other is.

I offer the spiritual practice of listening to assist in the healing of our country. Listen with your full attention and do the best you can to understand with love. When you practice deep listening, you help each other breathe. And isn't that the least each of us should want for the other? The chance to breathe—peaceful, healing breaths.

It's been a long time coming, but I know, a change is gonna come. —Aaron

HKF Board Member William "Mecca" Elmore

We asked Mecca, HKF's newest board member, how he was doing during the coronavirus shutdown. Here is his response.

It's excruciating.

It's shocking to suddenly be confined.

I endured 24 years in prison to come out to another type of confinement? That's pouring salt in my wound. When I hear someone say they're enjoying being home, I grit my teeth. But I need to know that everybody's different. It's a fantasy that everybody understands each other's way of suffering.

A guy like me, I grew up in a city—full of energy, outgoing, crowded trains, always a lot of people around you. When I found myself in prison, I felt like *I'm gonna wither away and die*. Now with this virus, just knowing I've been "sentenced" or just advised to sit inside, even if my house was a palace and I know it's for my own good, I feel the trauma in my bones, the memory of having to sit still. I'm a trainer—I know your body holds memory. It's there, it affects me.

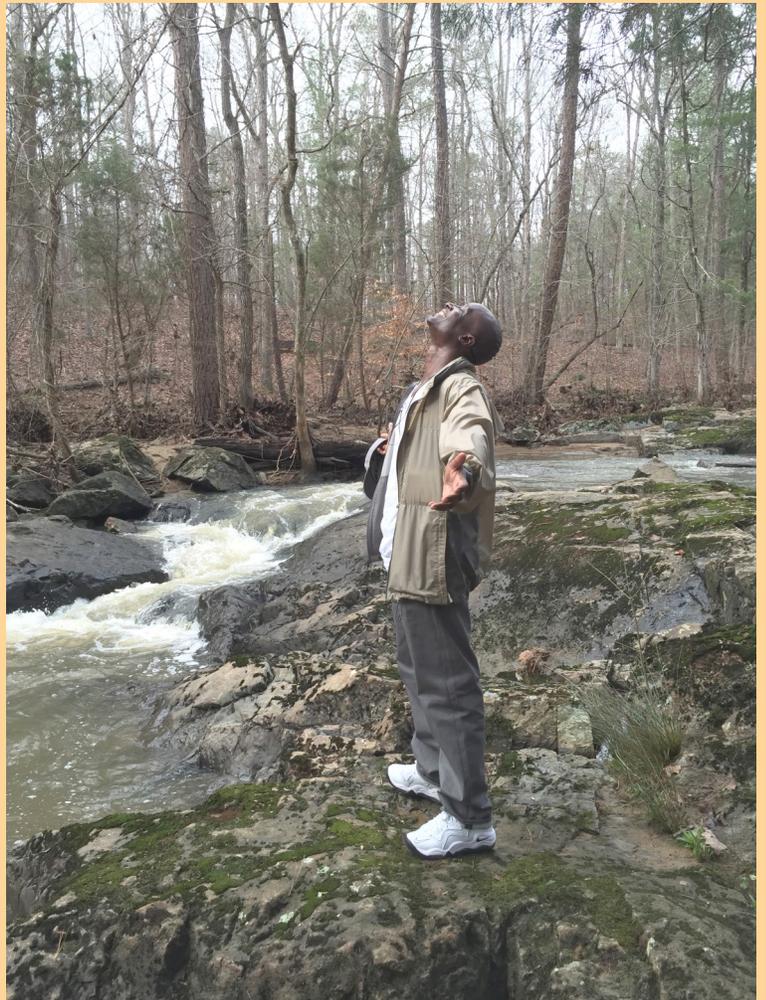
I have to have a strategy. For me it helps to talk about it: you ask the right questions and my therapy session begins. I also need to *do* something to remind myself I'm not in prison, something active that I can do without infecting anyone.

Even if a person is not aware of themselves as spiritual, being aware of time and space is such a spiritual experience. In prison I became more aware that the lack of space took the air out of the room. During gym hours the gym was so crowded it was a fire hazard, could be 600 people for gym call. I would leave if it got that crowded. Some days if it rained there was no yard call so the gym was the only exercise. I would look ahead at the weather, go to the gym early if it was going to rain, and feel better with way less people in there. I felt freer.

Now during this shutdown, I go for a run outside when there won't be any people around. It feels sort of like I'm sneaking in my run. Getting my space.

It's excruciating now, but I have strategies for getting through this, just like I did when I was in prison.

—Mecca



Mecca savoring the natural world. Photo from the book about his time in prison, soon to be available at: www.PrisonFromTheInsideOut.org

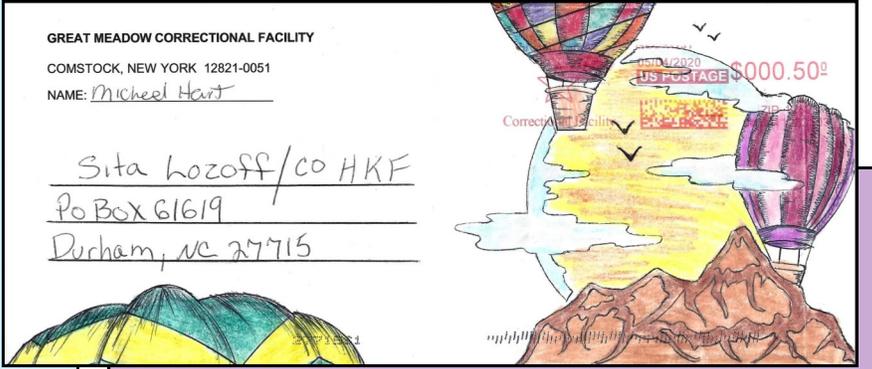
We're all in this together they say;
 but I can't tell.
 I am packed up, piled up, and unprotected
 as frequent fliers pack out.
 Another day I wake up striving to breathe
 beyond Buchenwald.
 I go hungry with hunger to live; go hungry to forego
 being herded to chow for my state portion
 with a side of Covid.
 Society sardonically sanitizes its hands while hearts remain infected.

Six feet apart outside—six inches inside.
 Masks for those outside—none for those inside.
 Sanitizer outside? Not for those inside.
 Ten or less outside—ten times five inside.
 Global effort outside: S.O.L. inside.
 Net connected outside—disconnected inside.
 Out of sight outside—out of mind inside.

We've been washed from society's hands like Corona—
 but we are them; not some experiment gone viciously viral.
 Cleaning the surface never cleanses the system.
 Masking our maladies don't mitigate their existence.
 In the end, we breathe what we breed.

Now we're all locked down.
 No one is safe for real.
 In a world gone Wuhan bats, they now know how we feel.

—Sandra Brown,
 Logan Correctional, Lincoln IL



This morning i woke up and thanked god for letting me see another day but for the rest of the day i lived in fear. Am i really being thankful that God spared me? I'm afraid to go outside of my cell to even use the washroom because in my mind this "monster" is everywhere!! I watch people move around the unit with no masks or gloves. I hear staff saying that the virus danger is being blown out of proportion. I'm a woman of color with high blood pressure, arthritis and diabetes. I'm afraid that after all of the things i've been through this silent killer will take me out!! I've already written my good-byes to my children and let them know that i've never known unconditional love until they came into my life.

I've been locked up for 16 years from my children and now grandchildren and i'm innocent but coronavirus doesn't care about that.

The only hope that I have is the ladies from Women's Justice Institute that i've met. One in particular told me that she helps people because she was taught that the world is broken and it's her duty to try to repair it so being righteous don't make you a good person it's

just what you're suppose to do!! I will carry that with me always, but coronavirus don't care about that!!

—"V," Logan Correctional



From our friend Helen to each of you spiritual warriors: "I send you my admiration for continuing your spiritual practice. You're healing yourselves, you're healing me, and you're healing the world. We all need you. May you each be blessed by the Light of Love."

"In the midst of winter, I found there was within me an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, there's something stronger, something better, pushing right back." —Albert Camus, 1953

In Memory

One of many hard parts of the pandemic—with echoes of the experience of incarceration—is the inability to gather and mourn our losses together.

Although you may not have access to the internet, we hope it helps to know that the people at Mourning Our Losses care enough to make this effort.



MourningOurLosses.org is a website created to honor and remember those who have died while living or working behind bars during the Covid19 pandemic.

From their website: “Mourning Our Losses was launched by a volunteer group of educators, artists, and organizers—many of us formerly incarcerated. ... Mourning Our Losses was also born out of personal grief and anxiety over the fate of our friends, students, and colleagues marooned inside, many of whom are now ill, some of whom have died. For those of us who were formerly incarcerated, our pain is amplified by the knowledge that a few months or years are all that have separated us from these horrors. For those of us who have had the incredible privilege to teach or run programs behind bars, we fear that we have been forced to abandon our students at the moment of their greatest need and peril.”

Memorials of people you knew and loved, including a photo if you have one, may be submitted to:

Mourning Our Losses
C/O Texas After Violence
Project
PO Box 15005
Austin, TX 78761

****Please note, they cannot return any items to you or answer letters. They will post memorials on their website. With your submission, please include the name of the person being remembered and directions about whether your name can appear on the website.****



Sikhs Practice Seva

Sikhism, a religion practiced by more than 25 million people worldwide, teaches followers to engage in selfless service, which they call seva.

On June 8, 2020, *The New York Times* reported: “The Sikh Center of New York, in Queens Village, has served more than 145,000 free meals in the last two months. *The Times* says

that providing these meals is part of Sikhism’s “centuries-old faith tradition of nourishing anyone in need.”

As demonstrators filled the streets in early June, volunteers from the Center took meals to the crowds. “‘Where we see peaceful protest, we are going,’ said Himmat Singh, a coordinator at the World Sikh Parliament.”

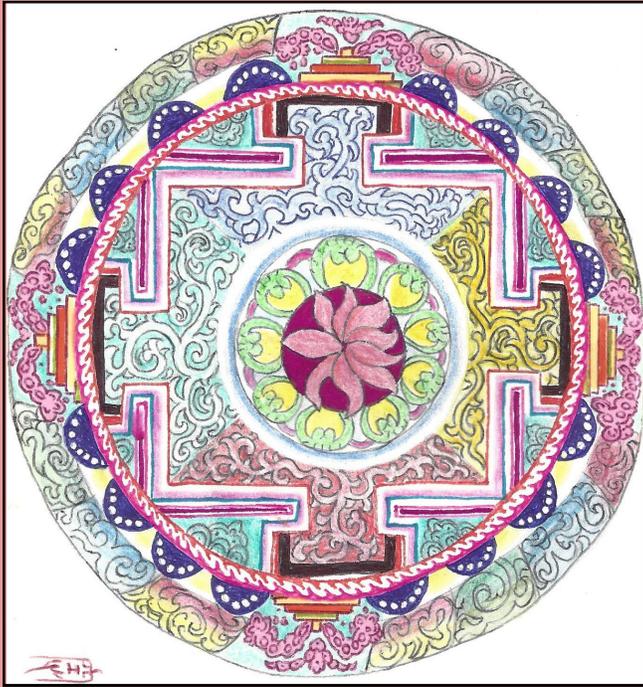
Because they regularly practice the *seva* of feeding large numbers of people, this Sikh community and others around the world are well prepared to help during this time of extra need.

Small Gifts to say “We Care”

Benevolence Farm employs formerly incarcerated women to make natural body-care products while participating in programs to help them make a healthy transition back to their communities. In June, the women of Benevolence Farm made all-natural hand-made soap to be given to people at a prison in their area.

Kristen Powers, interim Executive Director of Benevolence Farm, says of the project: “we hope to send a message to those who are incarcerated that someone does care about you and wants to make sure you are safe and healthy during this incredibly stressful time.”

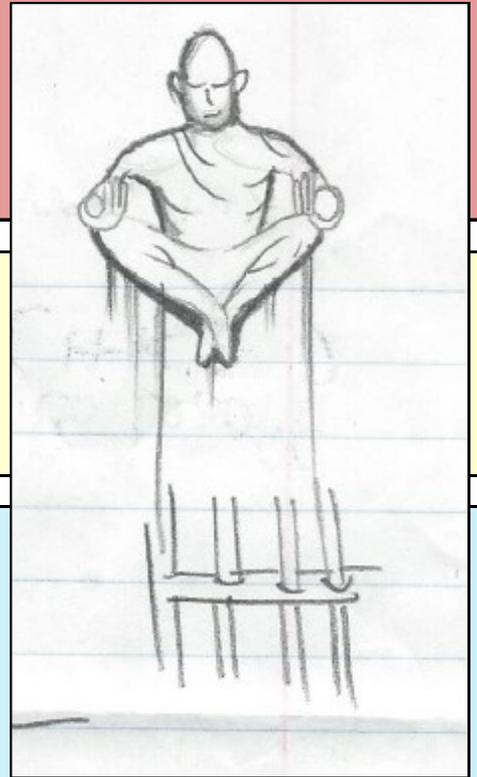
Sister Jerilyn Hunihan, Chaplain, Hartford Correctional Center



Sister Jerilyn chose to continue working inside a jail even though it puts her at risk of getting Covid19 and it means she cannot live in her home community during the pandemic. We asked her to talk about that decision.

I would describe my ministry with those who find themselves incarcerated as a 'Ministry of Being With.' I try to practice 'reflective listening' with others. When Covid19 began I chose to come to the jail because, for me, it was the right thing to do. In my community we live in *Love, Service, and Reparative Love*. Reparative love is not fixing the way things are for the other person, but rather, being with a person in his time of anxiety, fear, anticipation, and sadness—listening and not judging.

So many times I am present when a gentleman comes to a realization, a decision, or a hope unto himself. I am blessed—I was graced with witnessing this discovery by simply being with him.



Jeffrey, Boise, ID

Music is so spiritual and powerful. Here in County we take turns singing songs and lifting each others spirits. I am doing mantra practice, and "I Am Loving Awareness" has helped me. I was able to refocus on helping others.

Father George Williams, Chaplain, San Quentin State Prison

The murder of George Floyd at the hands of police has sparked outrage and protests. The struggle between good and evil is becoming more

visible. It's clear that the virus of racism continues to infect the soul of our society. People are tired of being treated as less than or as second-class citizens. We are all in need of healing, of justice, of real freedom from fear and oppression.

The pain is real and palpable: the fear of coronavirus, the uncertainty, the pain of separation from our loved ones, the loss of work and the anxiety over how to survive as the economy tanks. The unfairness of our economic and our justice system is exposed by both Covid19 and the tragic events unfolding in our cities.

Yet as a person of faith, I know we are not completely helpless. We have God's grace all around us, even in this frightening time. We still have hope and light, even in a world that seems to have gone crazy.



Letters

Dear HKF,

I would like to start by saying thank you for all the good you do for people who are incarcerated like I am. I got the book *We're*



All Doing Time about two years ago. I had been down over two years and was in a very dark place knowing I may die in prison for something I did not do. I would pray for death every night or beg God to let someone kill me. Finally, after a few years of living a miserable, unhappy life, I came to realize that I would not kill myself, and I started to read *We're All Doing Time*. At first, when I was reading it, I was thinking that it just wouldn't work, but then when I read the letters and could feel that these were written by people who

were originally as miserable as I was, but were now happy, I made myself a deal: I would try to meditate 30 minutes a night.

So now, I meditate for an hour in the morning to get my day started and an hour at night to reflect on the day. I still don't know what I believe in. I just know that when I take time to clear my head, my day is a lot better, and life is good on the inside today.

Thank you for everything you do, J



Dear HKF,

I wrote you before, but not like this. I came into prison with little to no education. It was there in the box that I first heard of Bo Lozoff and *We're All Doing Time*. A man next to me in another cell had the book.

Although he was willing to loan it to me, I couldn't read it. He wrote to Bo for me and I got the book.

When I got the book, the man next to me would read page by page of his book while I would follow him in mine. After doing this in the box for two years, I was able to read and write. My very first letter was to Bo thanking him. If not for him sending me *We're All Doing Time*, I would not be able to write today.

I read your newsletters now and I send them home to my daughter. I know one day I will go home and my story will be told. Love and thanks to all of the rest of you who are keeping Bo's work alive. Love, B

"...And if one day, trekking across some vast open field, despair should take hold of him, he would stop in his tracks and shut his eyes and he would think of the falcon feather Pari had found in the desert. He would picture the feather coming loose from the bird, up in the clouds, ... twirling and spinning in violent currents... to finally land, of all places and against all odds, at the foot of that one boulder for his sister to find. It would strike him with wonder, then, and hope too, that such things happened. And though he would know better, he would take heart, and he would open his eyes and walk." *And The Mountains Echoed*, Khaled Hosseini

Hello my friends,

Oh man! This is some crazy shit that we are living through. Sita, I hope that you are safe and well. Chris, Catherine, and all the rest of you who work so hard to keep the Human Kindness Foundation going, I thank you for being there for all of us in here.

Being in here, while the world seems to be going nuts out there is in many ways very surreal and somehow, "safe." I know that in other prisons, in other states, Covid19 is running rampant. However, in here, there is no virus. The directives of the Governor's office are being strictly enforced inside these walls.

I am both freaked out and comforted. Freaked out because I am stuck in an impotent position. I am not there to help my sisters take care of our mother. I can do nothing to ease anyone else's pain. And I am comforted by the fact that those who are responsible for my well-being are taking the threat of this disease very seriously.

I am experiencing more opportunities for despair to enter my life now than ever before. I find my thoughts going to feelings of impotence, sadness and fear. I find my thoughts going back to concern for my family, my 80ish mother, my sisters who live in an area that relies heavily on tourism for its economy. Are they going to be ok after this initial shock is over? Will my friends, many of whom are in their 70s and 80s, be alive in a few months? Will I?

But then, I "take heart, open my eyes and walk." I let myself take hold of a feather and, recognizing the inherent goodness in the world, the goodness that is in me ... I am able to pick my head back up and move forward.

I wish you the best and hope that one day I am able to give you the hugs that you so deserve for having such a massively beneficial impact on my life. Each and every day that I am alive and able to be of use, I thank you.

—Mark D., lone, CA



Sita's Pilgrimage at Home

In our Spring newsletter we told you that Sita and Gina would be taking a pilgrimage trip to Italy, walking 125 miles on the Saint Francis Way.

As you probably guessed, that didn't happen. Throughout April, the coronavirus news coming from Italy was terrible. Travel was not allowed at all.

Of course Sita and Gina were disappointed that their plans were cancelled. They had been looking forward to a beautiful time together, meeting other pilgrims on the Way, and challenging themselves to walk those miles in mindfulness and dedication. But they quickly recognized that the purpose of a pilgrimage is spiritual, and a spiritual journey can happen anywhere. Sita's doctor sent these words when he heard the news:

"This is a pilgrimage and as such allows for more uncertainty and vulnerability, which are two essential ingredients in a pilgrimage that allows for the expansion of courage, the Latin root of which is 'cor' which is the heart." He told Sita that her walk had already begun even though she couldn't leave home.

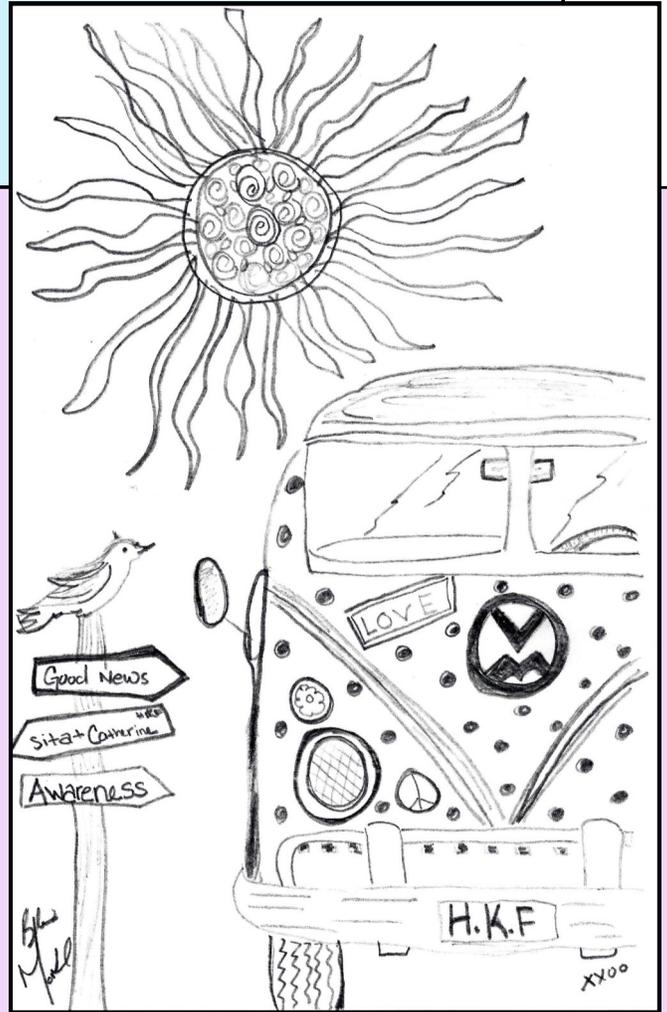
Of course you know the virus didn't stay in Italy. We've had several months now that volunteers have not been able to come to the HKF office. Sita's pilgrimage took a different form: staying close to the HKF office, working hard to make sure your letters are answered and the books you request are sent, even without the volunteers who usually work with us. Starting in March and continuing now, she packages more books, reads more letters, enters more addresses in the computer so labels can print.

What makes that a pilgrimage instead of just a lot of hard work? Here's Sita's answer:

"I have always loved my work at Human Kindness Foundation and I love the people who write to us. It touched me that my doctor who recommended this pilgrimage says that courage is about the heart. My heart effortlessly opened to this work the first time I stepped inside a prison with Bo in the mid-1970s—that never felt like something that required courage. I felt as comfortable as though I was sitting in my own living room with my dear friends.

So my pilgrimage is to stay peaceful and be patient during this time of staying home and working alone. Each moment that is filled with Loving Awareness is a step on my pilgrimage."

So my pilgrimage is to stay peaceful and be patient during this time of staying home and working alone. Each moment that is filled with Loving Awareness is a step on my pilgrimage."



Many thanks to the artists:

pg 1: drawing by Michael Turner, Gunnison, UT; pg 2: photo by

Thomas McQuiston from the book *Prison From The Inside Out*; pg 3: Michael Hart, Comstock, NY (upper) and Jose Cisneros, Ft Stockton, TX (middle); pg 4: both drawings by Travis Magash, Waynesburg, PA; pg 5: Stephen Stoeltje, Beaumont, TX (upper), Eduardo Hernandez, Los Angeles, CA (middle), and Travis Magash, Waynesburg, PA (lower); pg 6: Rakesh Patel, Graceville, FL (upper) and Tony Summers, Raleigh, NC (middle); pg 7: Bethany Morse, Niantic, CT (upper) and Mark Howard, Chattanooga, TN (lower); pg 8: photo by Dolma, Washington, DC and drawing by Robert Swainston, Rosharon, TX.



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Let's sit "together-apart"

My dear friends,

A friend of mine who lives on death row and I are sitting "together-apart" on Wednesdays from 7 to 8pm, and we agreed to invite all of our friends inside and out to join us at that time. If that time doesn't work for you, you can join us at another time during the day on Wednesdays.



The idea is to bring some loving awareness to this world during this time of so much suffering. To join us you can meditate, pray, chant, or whatever moves you, dear ones. And please feel free to extend this invitation to others.

My deepest love to all of you.

Sita

