

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Christmas 2009

New Interview with Bo Lozoff, December 16

The Exceptional Wisdom Radio program, *Living and Working on Purpose*, hosted by Brad Swift and Ann Swift, will broadcast a conversation with Bo Lozoff on Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2009 from 5:00 to 6:00 pm Eastern time. If you have internet access, you can hear the interview at:

http://exceptionalwisdomradio.com/shows/lwop/bo_lozoff.html

If you miss the broadcast date, you can hear the interview at the same link at later times.

ANYTHING THAT CAN HAPPEN...

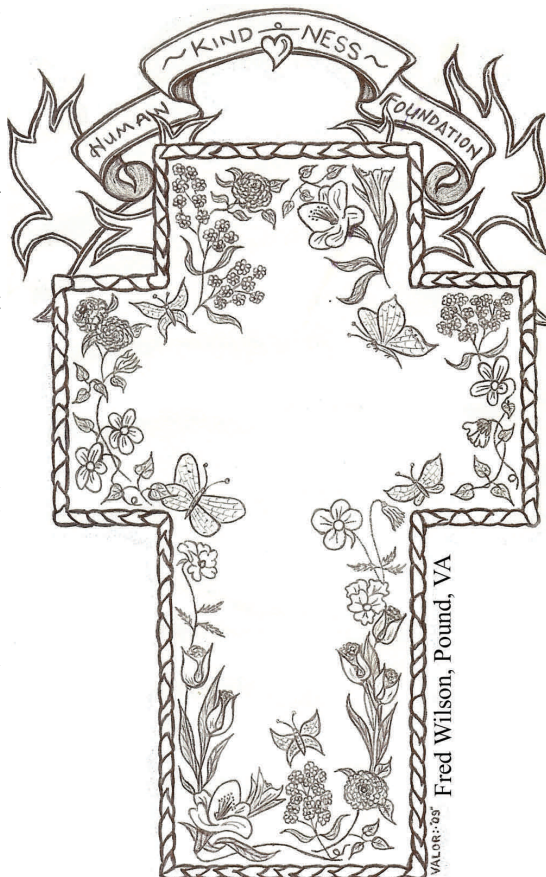
From a talk given by Bo Lozoff at a meditation center in Tallahassee, FL, December 11, 2005.

I spent three years in retreat in the early 90's, and about half of that time I worked with one particular practice: "Anything that can happen to a human being may happen to me and I accept the truth of this." I would sit and say the first part, "Anything that *can* happen to another human being" and I would let my mind run with the worst images: refugees and crack babies and people dying of AIDS, people being lynched, my own son and wife being murdered or mutilated —*anything* that can happen to a human being *may* happen to me. I would try to open every cell and every pore to just sort of melt into Life, no resistance to being a human being. "And I accept the truth of this." What happened as a result of that practice was that I was suddenly a full, willing human being. Like wow: I'm totally vulnerable to whatever can happen to a human being. Now, you see the fact of it is, you are too. We always are, but this practice helped me own up to it. I released the aversion, denial and resistance to what this life experience may bring me, including crucifixion. One friend of mine is just past his thirtieth year in prison

for a murder he did not commit. Some really horrible things can happen to a human being....

Now it doesn't mean that all these things *will* happen to me. It doesn't mean that silly New Age thing: "Oh, I'm attracting these things now." There's so much fear in the New Age thinking, prettied up with words about being positive and thinking positive thoughts. So much fear. Fear is a crippler of our divine nature. I worked with that practice so that I could just be a simple, humble human being who is unafraid to acknowledge all the things, good and bad, that can take place in the lifetime of a human being. It's quite an adventure.

Pontius Pilate says to Jesus, "I can *crucify* you or set you *free*. Bow to me. Be intimidated. Grovel a little. I want to set you free. Help me out here. Just cave in a little, please." And Jesus says, "You have no power over Me other than that which My Father gives you." And Pilate says, "Oh yeah? Well, crucify Him." And they do. And Jesus dies. Pilate was right. But



then three days later Jesus says, “See! Death is nothing compared to what I’m talking about. It’s nothing; it’s trivial. You have no power over Me. Do it again; I’ll come back again.”

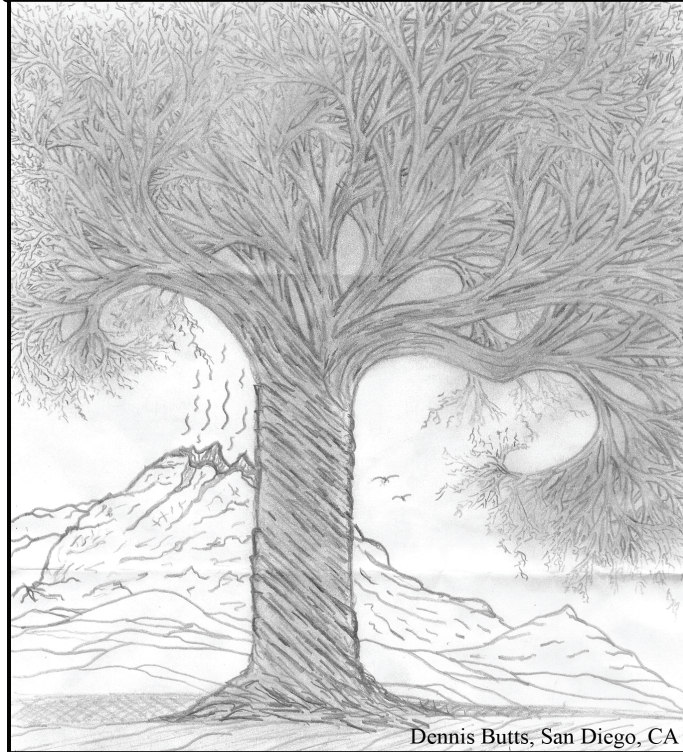
I was in a Federal prison today, and saw a sign saying, “Elevated risk of terrorist attack.” What are we supposed to do with that? Guess what? We all have an elevated risk all the time. We are all totally vulnerable, totally at risk, for an infinite array of things that can change our lives in a heart beat. Walking out of here and getting mugged tonight. Being traumatized by something. These aren’t things that are our fault when they happen. These are things in our life path. And when we let go of the fear of being fully alive, of being a full human being, so many good things happen: a compassionate heart; feeling the connection we have with every other human being who suffers and struggles, who is vulnerable and at risk; feeling our oneness as a community.

When we let go of fear and resistance things come in to our lives as the next condition or challenge. And then we have this advice from the sages that applies to everybody, independent of all conditions: don’t want too much for yourself; dedicate your energy to the common good, and spend time every day in spiritual practice. So we can say okay, I’ll do that. I’ll apply those principles to each condition that comes in my life and move through life without fear.

Think about Saint Stephen who was stoned to death for being a Christian and put yourself there at the spot for a minute so that “stoned to death” isn’t just a concept. They put somebody up against a wall and they pick up rocks of various sizes and they start throwing rocks at him. Can you imagine how awful it must be and how much time it must take to die that way? Stoning to death must be horrible. So here’s a guy being stoned to death for having done nothing wrong at all and he’s in an EXPERIENCE. Nobody’s philosophy can carry them through a reaction to being stoned to death if they haven’t radically changed their state of *being*. Saint

Stephen is in a state of consciousness that is so much bigger than the body—bigger than his own mortality. He’s not screaming, “How can you do this to me? I’m a good man; what’s the matter with you?” He looks up to Heaven as he’s being stoned to death and he says, “Father, please don’t hold this against them.” Is he nuts?? What state of mind do we need to be in to be up against a wall being stoned to death and the only concern on our minds is that God might hold this against the people who are doing it? It’s an awakened state that is so much LARGER and more compelling and more engaging than Pontius Pilate and all the crucifixions that the world has to offer that dying is rather trivial. That’s the opportunity we have, if we’re willing to take the risk.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama once told an interviewer,



Dennis Butts, San Diego, CA

“Sir, Buddha was not just a nice man.” When somebody sent an enraged elephant to kill the Buddha, the elephant stopped cold when he approached this Power, this Vibration. It’s said that when the Buddha got up from his awakening he walked toward a village and the first villagers saw him. He’s got a light around him the size of Chicago, and they’re asking, “What are you, Sir? Are you a god?” He says, “No.”

“Are you a demon?” He says, “No.”

“Well, what are you then?”

“I am awake.”

The Shakti, the power that we’ve been holding back! We suppress it through fear and self-centeredness and requirements and expectations and ambitions and concepts. We hold back all the power than can CREATE a universe. Every one of these beings who has completely awakened has let go of all personal safety and security and ambition. There is no kindness or compassion that can accomplish more than our awakening; being willing to walk through the entire potential range of the human experience unafraid, and endeavoring to be of value, of help to others; that’s all.



PRACTICE: FEELING THE CONNECTION

by Ani Pema Chodron (reprinted with permission)

Dear Friends, I just wanted to share with you that I've been working with this practice and find it very valuable—it is possible for our suffering to soften our hearts to all of the suffering people around us. I hope you'll give it a try.

— Love, Sita

When we see difficult circumstances as a chance to grow in bravery and wisdom, in patience and kindness, then our personal distress can connect us with the discomfort and unhappiness of others. What we usually consider a problem becomes the source of empathy. Recently a man told me that he devotes his life to trying to help sex offenders because he knows what it's like to be them. As a teenager he sexually abused a little girl. Another example is a woman I met who said that as a child she had hated her brother so violently that she thought of ways to kill him every day. This now allows her to work compassionately with juveniles who are in prison for murder. She can work with them as her equals because she knows what it's like to stand in their shoes.

This can be the value of our personal suffering. We can understand firsthand that we are all in the same boat and that the only thing that makes any sense is to care for one another.

When we feel dread, when we feel discomfort of any kind, it can connect us at the heart with all the other people feeling dread and discomfort. We can touch the bitterness of rejection and the rawness of being slighted. Whether we are at home or in a public spot or caught in a traffic jam or walking into a movie, we can stop and look at the other people there and realize that in pain and in joy they are just like us. Just like us they don't want to feel physical pain or insecurity or rejection. Just like us they want to feel respected and physically comfortable.

When you touch your sorrow or fear, your anger or jealousy, you can touch everybody's jealousy, you can know everybody's fear or sorrow. You wake up in the middle of the night with an anxiety attack and when you can fully experience the taste and smell of it, you are sharing the anxiety and fear of all humanity and all animals as well. Instead of your distress becoming all about you, it can become your link with everyone all over the world who is in the same predicament. The stories are different, the causes are different, but the experience is the same. For each of us sorrow has exactly the same taste, for each of us rage and jealousy, envy and addictive craving have exactly the same taste. And so it is with gratitude and kindness. There can be two zillion bowls of sugar, but they all have the same taste.

Whatever pleasure or discomfort, happiness or misery you are experiencing, you can look at other people and say to yourself, "Just like me they don't want to feel this kind of pain." Or, "Just like me they appreciate feeling this kind of contentment."

When things fall apart and we can't get the pieces back together, when we lose something dear to us, when the whole thing is just not working and we don't know what to do, this is the time when the natural warmth of tenderness, the warmth of empathy and kindness, are just waiting to be uncovered, just waiting to be embraced. This is our chance to come out of our self protecting bubble and to realize that we are never alone. This is our chance to finally understand that wherever we go, everyone we meet is essentially just like us. Our own suffering, if we turn toward it, can open us to a loving relationship with the world.



LETTERS

Inmates' names have been changed to protect their privacy

Bo,

Peace + Blessings! First, I think you are great and your mission even greater. I have personally seen your books help dozens of people over the years. I've had "We're All Doing Time" now for three years and it has given me guidance on many "Dark Nights." My name is Joey, I'm twenty-four and have spent almost eight years in prison since I was fourteen. I would probably still be "Doing Time" if not for you.

I have a few questions for you that are giving me a lot of heartache. When I first started out I had twisted views of Enlightenment. I soon understood that it's all about just being at peace. Understanding that mind is conditioned and that we can overcome attachments and emotions and just dwell in peace. I've achieved that. I know why emotions come up and I don't let them control, no major mood swings. No matter what they've (inmates) done in the past to others or myself. I can love and joke with them still. Major focused in life and just at peace.

But Bo, is that it? Is this what I've been struggling for, for so long? Just to grow up and be a mature well rounded human? I mean where is the "Out of body stuff" or "Union With the All" or "Kundalini Rising"? I mean, I know and understand that any of that stuff would be just something more to get attached to. It would just let me know that I'm still moving on "The Path" and then I would just keep on keeping on. Take a breath, thank The Beloved and melt deeper. But I've had nothing but a tingle in my back and a few lights and colors pop up. I know and understand that no matter what mystical experience I have that I still have to live in the now I just wish I knew where on the path I am?

Should I just be content with this state, a state that millions would love to have, and just call myself enlightened and move on with my life? Build homes, get married, kids etc...or should I put in more work 'cause I've only just begun?

Once again Bo, I think you are great and what you are doing is well needed. Thanks for what you have become. And may the Beloved Bless you and yours in everyway possible. We as Mystics are a rare group. Blessings of light, and I feel very close to you, Sita and Josh and hope to meet you all one sunny day.

Peace + Blessings,

Joey

Hey Brother,

You ask a lot of questions! But they really all boil down to one issue – "is this all there is?"

One rule of thumb you could use is this: If you wonder whether you're enlightened, you're not! That "you" who is wondering, that "you" who is enjoying peace after so many years of turmoil, is not the enlightened state. It is a nice state of mind, a great relief from years of addiction and anxiety, but it is still a limited state of mind subject to change. Enjoy it fully, you've earned it. But be humble and realize you have a long way to go. We all do.

Enlightenment is an egoless state. Here's an example of what that means: Right now, you are reading this letter, which means your eyes are performing amazing actions to recognize these words and send signals to your brain which then performs even more amazing actions to interpret the words and "think" about them. But there is no one saying, "Oh, eyes, you're doing such a good job, now focus the retina, go to the next word on the page, that's it, that's it..."

The eyes, ears, brain, heart, stomach, lungs, etc., are entirely egoless. No pride, no shame, no ambitions, no thoughts of the past nor hopes for the future, no "self" at all. Yet they function brilliantly without being the slightest bit aware of themselves.

Now picture your personality being just like that – functioning naturally, spontaneously, with *zero* ego-awareness of being a personality. Do our eyes know they are eyes? Does our brain know it is a brain? Well, a saint does not know he is a saint. He is just here, doing perfect and brilliant things like our eyes and ears,

without noticing himself at all. Because there is no longer any sense of separation between being and doing, it is all One.

For me to know I am Bo is to feel I am separate from you. So I want to be the best Bo I can be, but I must humbly understand I have a ways to go before the sense of "being Bo" is gone. Our spiritual pop-culture often encourages people to think they are farther along than they are, and this is a disservice to spiritual seekers. It is healthier to realize we have no idea where we are on the path, except that it feels better than when we used to be addicted, selfish, confused, etc. But we have no idea how much further there is to go. That's the best attitude for a life of spiritual practice and service to others.

There are plenty of mystical experiences, awesome powers, and miracles on this journey to Enlightenment. But when a devotee asked my Guru, "How can I see God?," my Guru replied, "Feed people." Then the devotee said, "But how can I raise the Kundalini?" My Guru replied, "Serve people." My Guru certainly encouraged people to do daily practices like meditation, but He wanted to make sure we also realized the way we treat the most "insignificant" person, the way we brush our teeth, the way we treat the earth and its resources, everything we do and even the things we *think* about are as much a part of our practice as the formal techniques like meditation or yoga.

Embracing this is an important step of the journey. It helps you settle in for the long haul, instead of doing some intense practices for a few years and then being frustrated that you aren't yet enlightened.

When we are actually enlightened, there is just spontaneous goodness with no self-awareness of its own goodness. The enlightened state does not wonder "about" where we are or how much we understand. It IS the state of wonder.

I know I have used a lot of words here, but they have mainly been about just two ideas: First, the enlightened state is not just feeling calm or peaceful, and second, that we don't know how far along the path we are. If you just take in those two points, all your other questions will eventually fade. A disciple once asked

Ramana Maharshi, "Will meditation answer all my questions?" The saint answered, "No, but it will destroy the questioner." That's my point.

All Love and Blessings for your Great Journey,

Bo



Dear Bo,

I just want to write to thank you for being the single most influential spiritual teacher to ever enter my life. I did several prison terms and used your teachings every time. I guess I just never got it right, but you changed my perspective on life in every detail.

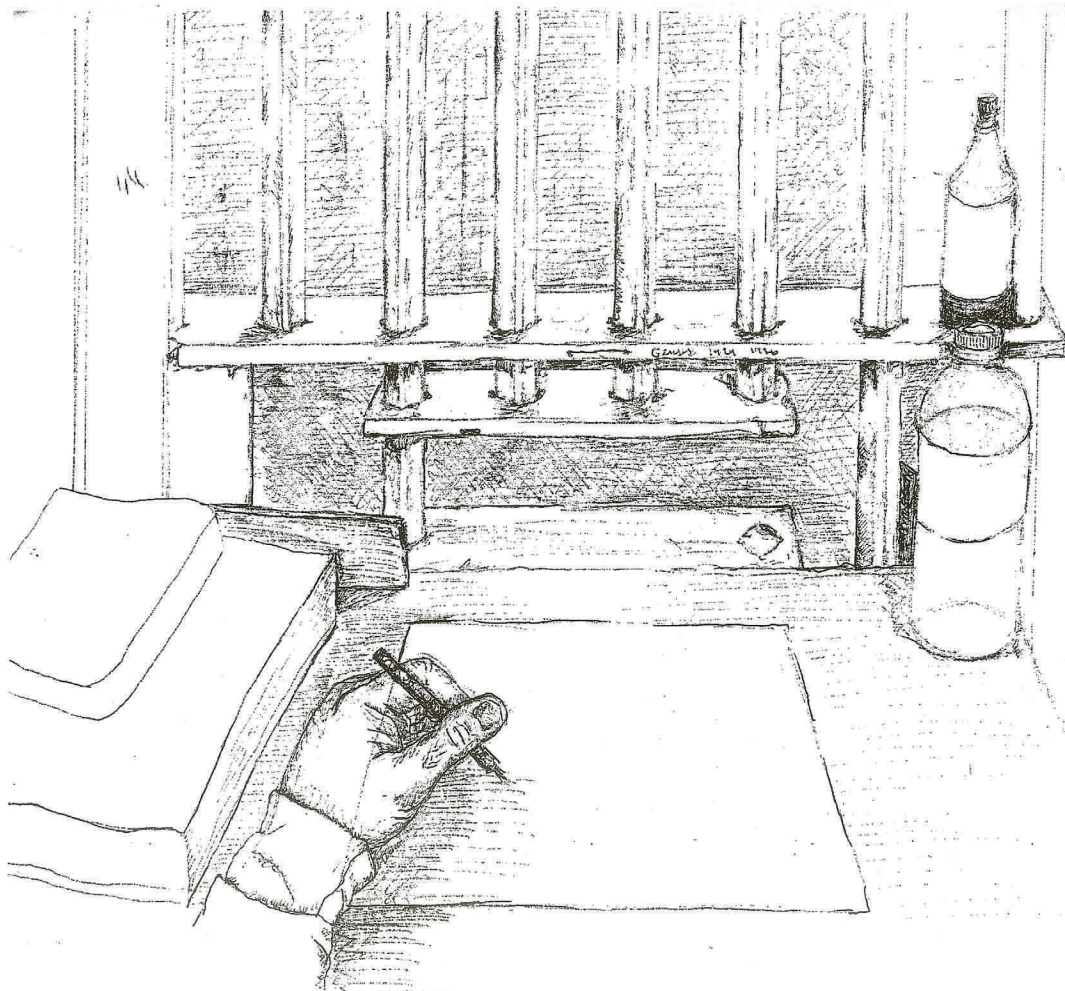
I was spoon fed Christianity growing up and could never quite grasp how it was

supposed to make sense. You cleared that up for me. Now I sit in the hospital with acute leukemia—I was near death at one point. It's been knocked down for now, but I'm awaiting a donor for a bone marrow transplant which is very risky. Only a 50% success rate. My sister's boss just died here from the exact same procedure. So, yes, I'm scared and even as I'm convinced it's B.S. I have all these alarm bells and whistles going off in my head that I need to believe in Jesus as the only way or go to Hell. I just can't bring myself to buy it even on my possible death bed. But this letter isn't really about that as much as I just want to thank you before it's too late for helping me thru the years and to see a broader view and what I believe is the truth. Give my love to Sita and all the staff. You've been a great help and huge influence. I love you.

David

Hey David,

It's certainly understandable that those old fundamentalist tapes ("Believe in Jesus or go to Hell, boy!") would start playing in your head at a time like this, so try not to be too annoyed by them. In fact, you could consider it a blessing to be reminded so often of Jesus, just toss aside the part about going to Hell. Jesus is indeed a beautiful and powerful spiritual presence for the whole world, not just Christians. And His power comes from Love, not fear. Jesus doesn't punish you if you don't believe in Him. He believes in you. He has no problem with Buddhists or atheists or Hindus or Muslims, and He actually *appreciates* open-minded skeptics. When a Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim experience the mystical state of pure Love, it is not different from the Christian experiencing the heart of Christ. Oklahoma is still Oklahoma even if you call it Chicago, or even if you don't believe it exists. Divine Love is like that



My first drawing in jail. I decided not to finish it, because it did not reflect how I feel inside since discovering your various books and message.

~ I am not trapped behind these bars in my mind, and to everyone at the Human Kindness Foundation, I offer you my many thanks and blessings. ~ I have not yet been sentenced and do not know my future, but does anyone? I do know I feel peaceful and free in my mind!

With love,

Brian D. Hindson
April 14, 2008
Indianapolis, Indiana

— it is real, it is beyond description, and it is a singular reality. It does not differ from religion to religion.

John Prine, one of my very favorite songwriters, says it lightly in an old song:

*I heard Buddha and Allah playing at the Savior's feast;
while up in the sky, an Arabian Rabbi ate Quaker Oats with a Priest.
Pretty good, not bad, I can't complain.
'Cause actually all them Gods is just about the same.*

I've had the good fortune to be with Holy Men and Holy Women of pretty much all the great world religions, and I can tell

you from personal experience, they all feel the same. They embody that presence of Divine Love. That's why the great religious scholar Joseph Campbell, when asked who he thought was the greatest living Christian on Earth today, replied, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet." And Mother Teresa, a lifelong Catholic, never tried to convert dying Hindus or Muslims to Christianity. She knew they did not need to utter the words "Jesus is my Savior" to receive Jesus' Love. She was bringing that Love to them herself, without making any demands at all on them.

So try not to be bothered by all that old

fear-based stuff crammed down your throat as a child. Turn instead to anything at all that helps you connect to the presence of Love. Jesus is Love. Fear is a distracting little demon, and you need to just patiently keep telling it to bug off.

All the best to you, my friend, for this big chapter of The Great Adventure. Spend your days reasonably dissolving into Love, kindness, compassion, etc., because life or death, that's what we're here to do.

Bo



MONITOR LIZARD INVADES SUBURBS!

Tom Dodson, or "Tall Tom," as he's known, has been featured in our newsletter several times. He paroled in 2008 and continues to focus on spiritual practice and service in his daily life. We recently asked him to talk about his experience with his GPS monitor.

I was released from prison on parole to my Mom's house three days before Mother's Day in 2008. After 20+ years of incarceration the GPS monitor seemed like it would be a minor inconvenience. Yet monitors are interesting; inanimate objects..... that parolees and their friends imbue with magical qualities.

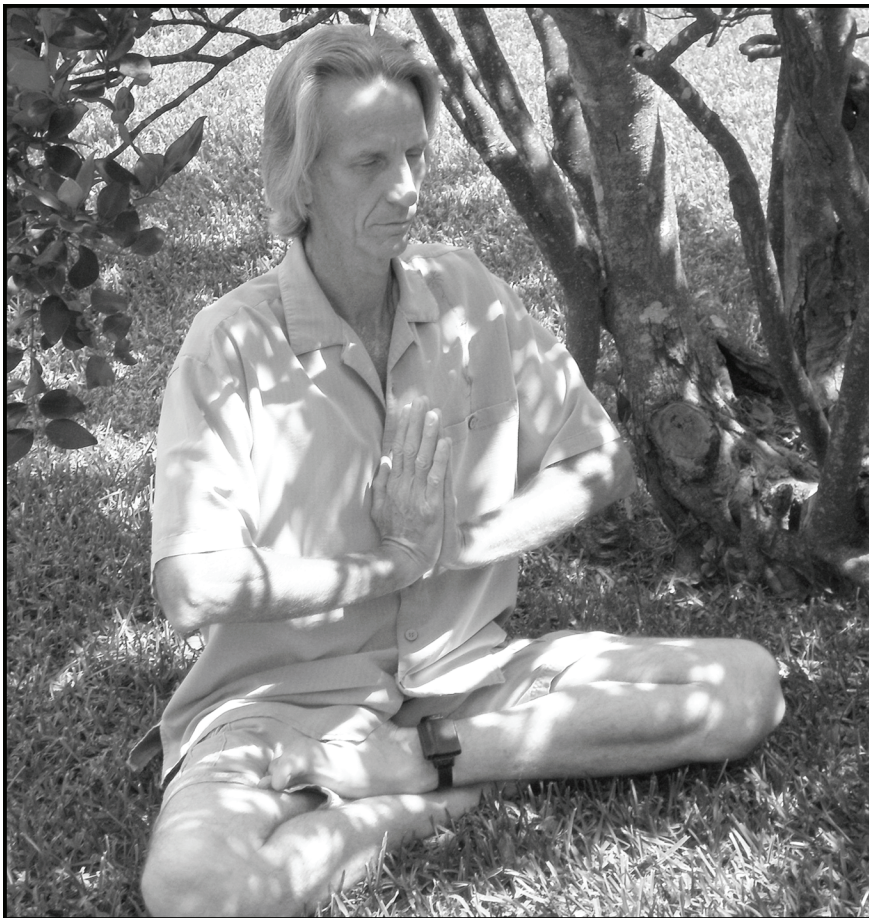
Initially it felt like I had a monitor lizard gripping my ankle. I got scared time and time again when the monitor beeped and flashed "GPS warning" for no legitimate reason. A lion's roar in my ear could not have spooked me more. In time the fear became another spiritual experience proving to me that relying on the skills I developed in

prison would serve me well outside.

I utilized those skills I learned during my transformational period inside to deal with my fears of the monitor and to readjust to the free world after my long absence. Those skills are: do not drink or use drugs, do not steal, do not raise my hands in violence, keep my mouth shut when I am mad, and pray and meditate daily.

After 14 months they removed the monitor and I am still leading a very disciplined life by choice. I believe that my actions make a difference and I strive to do the next right thing as often as I can. Being a responsible human being is a very different experience, yet ever so rewarding.

Peace, Tall Tom



A "Monitor Lizard" grips Tall Tom's ankle during meditation

DON'T GET DROPPED OFF OUR LIST!

!! Please look at the back page of this newsletter !!

If we have not heard from you in the past several years, you will see a % sign next to your name on the address label.

If you have a % sign next to your name on this newsletter's mailing label, you must send back your mailing label or YOU WILL NOT GET FUTURE NEWSLETTERS!

Please print any name or address corrections above the label very clearly but do not scratch out the label. We may receive thousands of responses, so please do not include letters with this reply. We love you and are always sending you our blessings and prayers. You'll receive next newsletter in April.

NOW AVAILABLE FREE TO PRISONERS:

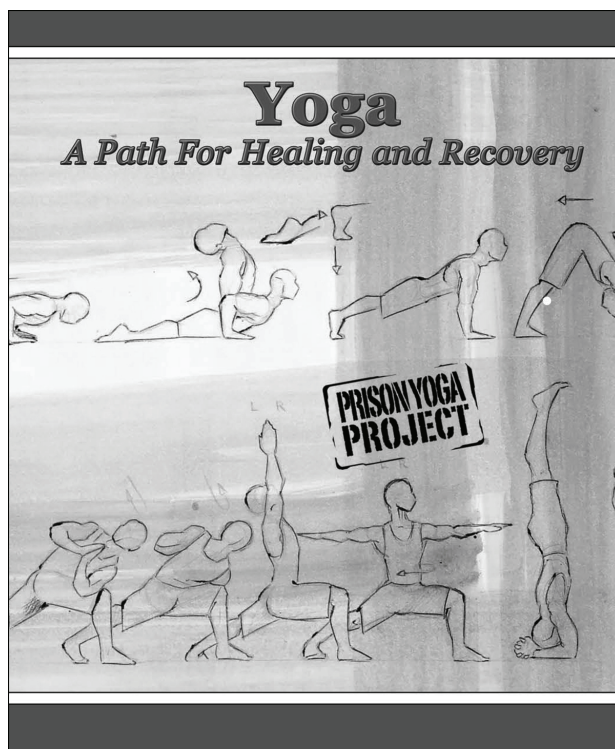
New project publishes its first book:

The Prison Yoga Project recently published this 67 page, soft-cover book, which includes instructions and illustrations for yoga and meditation practices while incarcerated. It will be sent free of charge if you write directly to them at:

**Prison Yoga Project
P.O. Box 415
Bolinas, CA 94924**

Include your full name, ID number, and complete address. Please be sure you are allowed to receive books before you send your request. It will be shipped directly from the publisher.

The book is also available for sale to people who are not incarcerated (\$12.50 postpaid). Order directly from Prison Yoga Project.



HOLIDAY SHOPPING AT OUR WEBSITE !

Support HKF and find a few wonderful and meaningful gifts at the same time.

If you have access to the Internet, please visit us at www.humankindness.org. We have a great selection of books, music, t-shirts, DVDs, and artwork. Just perfect for the discerning spiritual seeker on your gift list.

Purchases from our online store are an important source of support for the free books we distribute.

Order by December 18 for delivery by December 24.

Human Kindness Foundation
PO Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Durham, NC
Permit No. 205

SPONSOR OF THE PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT

Return Service Requested

if you see a % next to your name, you must reply – see page 7

ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ

Upcoming interview with Bo Lozoff — see page 1 for details



recycled paper

