

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Fall 2009

GOD IS REAL

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

I see meetings like this as just this very classic, traditional situation that's been going on since the beginning of time: there's a world that's gone mad, and small pockets of people meeting here and there to talk about the Great Rumor. There's something incomprehensibly real and wonderful at the heart of everything **and** the ugliest stuff going on. Governments and societies and cultures have always been sort of going mad and falling apart at the seams. There's enormous suffering and cruelty. Enormous. This isn't new. The stakes may have increased since we have the capacity to destroy the planet, but we always knew the planet wasn't eternal anyway: the sun is going to go out. So we have this situation that has always been going on. What we call civilization has always been about self-protection and self-gratification and aggression and fear, and we're all raised into that, pretty much. Our parents want us to be safe, though it's impossible to do in the world as it has always existed. It's not safe. It's not safe out there. It's not even safe in here, I promise that.

And they've wanted us to have stuff to make us happy and comfortable, although stuff has never made anybody happy or comfortable for more than a few minutes. American children are statistically the unhappiest children on the face of the earth: the most suicides, the most homicides, the most drug addiction, the most antidepressants. And American children have more stuff and more comfort than any other kids who have ever existed. Denial is an amazing thing.

So against this backdrop of total illogic and futility, there's this dream: have a nice little place and a little picket fence and maybe a boat. People will like me and I'll get raises and all that. Meanwhile there are children being sold into slavery to make the shoes that we're wearing. So the dream has never been real or true and it's absolutely impossible to sustain. What we call the "American Dream" is unsustainable, and has never been real for anybody. So against the backdrop — "Well then, life doesn't work" — there have been small pockets of people getting together

saying: "Have you heard also? I have."

"Did He really rise from the dead after being crucified?"

"Did He really sit under the Bodhi Tree until all illusion and ignorance fell away?"

"Did He really receive the revelations of the Koran in a cave from an angel?"

Are these just rumors or is a single one of them literally, precisely true? If one of them is true it doesn't matter whether we decide that all of them are true or not. If one of them is true then it means YESSSSSS! GOD IS REAL!!!

Now I know that at least one or more of them are true and I can't explain or defend how I know. It doesn't matter because if you don't know, you have the age-old, wonderful, traditional decision to make of whether you believe somebody who says "I know."

Many people know. Many people have known. It's faith until it becomes knowledge. Once it's knowledge, you can be crucified and not give up that knowledge.

There is a reality that doesn't just offset this world of duality and struggle. It is impossible to describe how much bigger it is — how much bigger is good than evil, how much bigger is union than separation, how much bigger our divine nature is than our temporal nature. It's like a mountain and a pea — there's no balance at all.

And we have the opportunity, without looking away from those who need us and all the suffering that goes on in this world, to open into that larger realm and learn how to be in both at the same time,

in a way that works, in a way that is sustainable. And that, to me, has always been what Dharma practice is about, what meditation and yoga are about, what scriptural study, spiritual study, and studying with a guru or teacher are all about. Every one of the beings who has broken through has said, "And this is your nature too; it's not just me." The Buddha said, "Don't follow in my footsteps: seek what I sought." Jesus called



Art by Russell Lindsay, Lewisburg, PA

The Three Principles of Human Kindness Foundation:

- 1) Live simply
- 2) Dedicate your life to service
- 3) Spend some time every day in spiritual practice

Himself the Son of *Man* as well as the Son of God. The Dalai Lama honestly refers to himself as a simple Buddhist monk. I've spent a fair amount of time with the Dalai Lama and he really is a simple Buddhist monk and simultaneously he's a

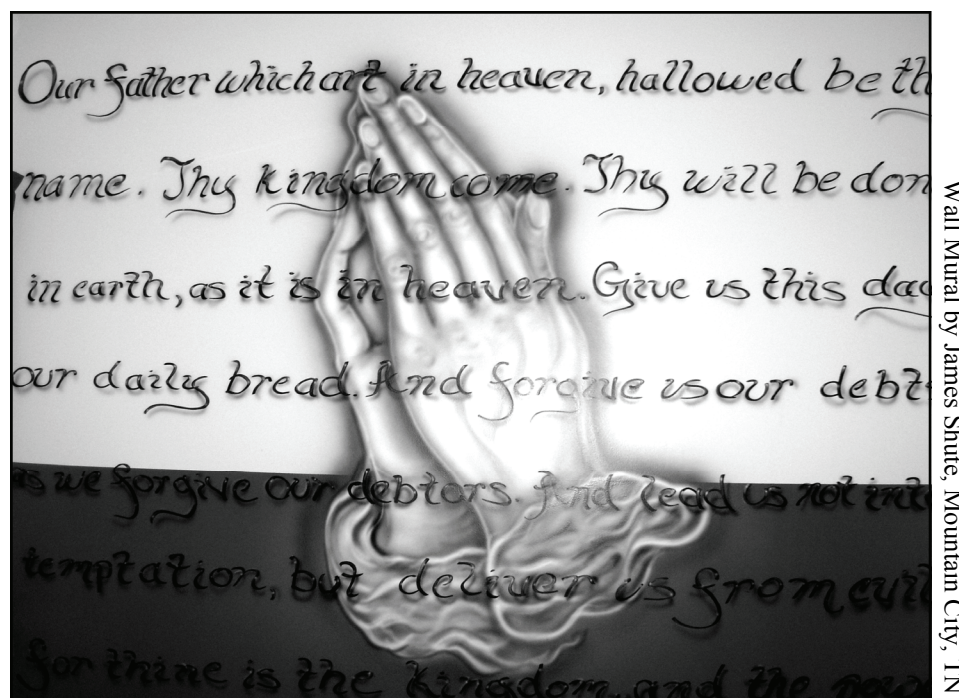
genius, a very rare person and the repository of all the Tibetan traditions which are incredibly complex and esoteric.

The Human Kindness Foundation was founded upon three principles. After reading the scriptures of most of the great traditions of the world, I saw three principles just singing off the pages of the *Bible*, the *Koran*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, *The Mahabharata*, Greek mythology and the writing of the Greek philosophers. I saw three principles that were just indisputably identical. If you distill any of those great philosophical or religious traditions down to some practical advice, one thing they all agree on is: don't want too much stuff—it'll get you in trouble. It puts you into a dynamic of wanting and acquiring and protecting and defending and repairing and replacing. And all this precious divine energy, this mysterious energy that can move mountains and raise the dead, winds up paying off a BMW. So all the great traditions have said live simply, live modestly. You have an inefficient use of your energy when you spend too much of it around your comfort and your toys. Live simply.

The second principle they ALL agree on is, for your own sake, don't devote your life to your personal success. Devote your life to the common good. If you devote your life to personal success, you will never ever have enough to satisfy you. There's always more. If you devote your life to the common good, you'll have plenty of personal success, and you'll be in tune because you'll magnetize toward the part of the common good that draws you and you were created for. Each of us was born with an individual nature as well as being born with a universal nature. And our individual natures, like magnetic shavings, get drawn by certain stimuli: working with the environment or

working with prisoners or working with the elderly or working with children or selling shoes with a great deal of compassion. I don't have as much skill talking with children as I do with convicts so I gravitated toward a life with convicts. By the end of this tour I may have been in a thousand prisons. I haven't been in a thousand day care centers. It's not my pull. I'm glad there are people who go there. So we naturally gravitate toward our individual Dharma and here we are, that little thread in this enormous tapestry that we can never see the whole of with these eyes. So dedicate yourself to the common good and you'll find your niche.

The third principle they all agree on is: spend at least a little time every day being humble, alone and silent before the Great Unknown. I'm always telling people it takes time to be deep. If you're not willing to spend time to be deep, you know what's going to happen? You're not going to be deep. You may philosophically think you're deep. You may intellectually believe in being deep. But it's not free. It takes time — especially in as noisy and agitated a world as we live in today, where multi-tasking is a positive thing. If we don't commit ourselves to some time, even if it's ten minutes, of truly humble spiritual introspection every day, we're not going to become deep. Don't think that you're above this, because that would be really arrogant. Don't think, "Oh, not me." Every good person who has ever been caught by the world is just as deep as you and me by nature. And we have to give some of our time to reminding ourselves that we really are like children before the Great Mystery. And we submit ourselves to the intelligence, the beauty, and the profundity of Life. ॐॐॐॐॐॐॐॐॐॐ



Wall Mural by James Shute, Mountain City, TN

PRACTICE: EDIFICATION OR DEMOLITION

by Walter Wangerin, Jr

*Reprinted by permission from **Ragman and Other Cries of Faith**, published by HarperSanFrancisco. Walter Wangerin is a faculty member at Valparaiso University in Indiana, an Evangelical Lutheran Church pastor and author.*

Two gas stations attendants. One I met at a self-service pump; the other at her desk. The first in rain on a chilly night. The second in the afternoon, but there was no sun in that building.

What caused their differing attitudes, I won't pretend to know. There may be a host of reasons why the latter attendant was so bitter, but that isn't the point right now. Edification is the point, a Latin way of saying "building up." The power to build up other human beings, or else to tear them down, no matter how menial the circumstance or how quick the meeting—that is the power possessed by each member of the body of Christ, and a mighty power indeed.

I had my collar up against the rain. I hunched at the rear of the Nova, had screwed the gas cap off and was running gas into the tank. My hand was numb. Beside me, suddenly, stood the attendant, his hands in his pockets. His presence was not rushing me because it was at peace. He said, "hello," and a smile flicked across his face. When he spoke he looked directly into my eyes—without fear, without embarrassment, with neither judgment nor haughtiness nor threat. I was there for him in that moment.

He was lean. Dark hair streaked his forehead with the rain. He shook his head slowly when he saw the brown face of my kid looking out the window, and raindrops flew off his chin. I think he laughed. The fill-up seemed to take a long time. I hit \$20 on the penny, capped the pipe, handed him the bills and watched while he folded them into his roll. He did not solve some terrible trouble of mine. Nor did he save me from disaster or fix something I couldn't fix. Nevertheless, this attendant did the extraordinary. He shook my hand. He smiled one more time, and to me he said, "Thank you."

I admit it: This is a minor and nearly forgettable incident, except that when I slid back into my car, I stopped a moment before turning the key and my son said, "Why are you smiling?"

The fellow had built me up. He had edified me. I never saw him again.

Neither did I ever see the other attendant again. But I remember her too. She kept her separated seat while I filled my thirsty car. Most attendants don't pop out of the station for every person that jerks the handle. But when I entered the building, still she kept the seat, her eyes downward, gazing at the top of her desk. No book to read. Just staring.

I held out my money. "*Whadda-ya want me to do with that?*" she said. "*Well, to take it,*" I said. "*I'm paying for the gas.*" "*So how much was it?*" "*Twenty.*"

There were lines from her nose to the corners of her mouth. Sullen lines. Anger, for some reason or other. And I was, it seemed, an intrusion in her life. She snapped the bills from my hand and bedded them in the slots of her register. I stood there too long, I think. She said, still without looking at me, "*Your car stuck? You waiting for something?*" "*No.*" I slid disquieted into the car and sat awhile.

Demolition. Sadness had made me sad. The day had been torn down utterly.

You say: "But how can I serve the Lord? I'm not important. What I do is so common and of little consequence. Anyone can do what I do." But I say to you: "Every time you meet another human being you have the opportunity. It's a chance at holiness. For you will do one of two things. Either you will build him up, or you will tear him down. You will create, or you will destroy. And the things you dignify or deny are God's. They are made, each one of them, in God's own image."

And I say to you: "There are no useless, minor meetings. There are no dead-end jobs. There are no pointless lives. Swallow your sorrows; forget your grievances and all the hurt your poor life has sustained. Turn your face truly to the human before you and let her, for one pure moment, shine. Think her important, and then she will suspect that she is fashioned of God."

How do you say "Hello"? Or do you? How do you greet strangers? Are you so proud as to burden the people you meet each day with your tribulations? Even by attitude? Even by crabbiness or gloom? Demolition! Or do you look them in the eye and grant them peace? Such are the members of the body of Christ—and edification in a service station.



LETTERS

Dear Bo & Sita and HKF Family,

I've known about you guys for over ten years now; have received your newsletter for about the same, read most, if not all your books. And there were times that I thought I was "advancing" as a spiritual person—whether it was the meds I was on that had me feeling this way or a true "change" in my personality, I don't know. All I know was that I was meditating regularly and praying. My swearing had completely stopped also. But now, going into my 15+ years in here, I've recently become an extremely bitter, hateful person. I no longer meditate nor pray. I've become resentful towards life, my life. I'm angry that my father and younger brother both committed suicide—this has been over 20 years now! Angry that the rest of my "family" no longer write nor care if I'm alive or dead! I'm really pissed that the Dept of Corruptions took out tobacco from our store list. But most of all I'm fucking pissed that I'm still in this fucking hell hole! I've lost my faith, Bo, and it feels terrible. Life just does not seem to make any sense anymore. I've asked God every day for the last 10 years what my purpose in this life is. All I've gotten is silence. In your Christmas newsletter, you speak about how one must go through the crucifixion before resurrection. Why? Didn't Jesus take care of that for us? Why is it so fucking hard? Why is there so much fucking hatred? Not only in here but from what I read in the papers, out there as well? All the greed, bullshit lies of war. And you say life is good? I've asked God to put someone in my life I can love, have a relationship with, someone that cares for me, you know—but my prayers have fallen on deaf ears! I really wish I had the courage to take my own life but for some dumb ass reason, I don't. Tell me Bo, after 3 years in retreat,

over a year in total silence, fasting "almost to death" and months in total isolation, what have you discovered? I sure as hell would like to know.

Sincerely, Doug

Dear Doug,

My name is Catherine, and I've been working with Bo and Sita for 10 years. Bo is not reading or answering any mail at this time, so I can't send you an answer directly from him, but I've known him for over 20 years, and I hope I can tell you some of what he'd want to say to you if he were here.

One thing I know he would **NOT** tell you is that he's found a way to make life easy, constantly joyful, pain-free. That's not what Bo's life has been about, and he's been through some very painful things. The pain of living has softened his heart.

Like you, Bo gets angry sometimes. But his faith is that God is in charge, and that God loves us, even when it seems like our lives are worse torture than Hell itself. Because of that faith, he doesn't stay angry. He accepts that "anything that can happen to a human being, may happen to me." Sounds obvious, but many people still walk around with underlying beliefs: "that could never happen to me." Maybe they believe "I could never get addicted to drugs," or "My family could never stop writing to me," or "I could never end up with a long prison sentence." Bo accepts that life is a bigger mystery than that, and it isn't always a joy ride. All lives have suffering, and many have very intense, on-going suffering. And God is in charge, and God loves us. As Bo puts it, "God knows, and God cares."

So of course all this doesn't make clear sense to the rational mind. If God is in charge and loves us, why does He let us

suffer? I think we've all asked questions like the ones in your letter. Why? How could He? The rational mind may never be able to answer those questions, Doug.

But the heart can find some answers. You've expressed how awful it feels to have lost your faith. How awful it feels to be living with so much anger and resentment. So, are you willing to step out just a little, and start meditating and praying again? You don't have to have faith in anything complex. Bo and lots of other elders tell us spiritual practice and unselfish living are keys to inner peace. While your own faith is weak, you could choose to simply believe those elders enough to give it a try. Or you could look at His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who typically spends 8 hours per day in spiritual practice, and the rest of his time devoting his life to helping others, and has the most joyful laugh I've ever heard even though his people have been persecuted and nearly wiped off the planet in his lifetime. He has suffered as much as anyone, yet he is a shining example of practice and service. And if that laugh tells us anything, I'm betting he'd agree with Bo's statement that "life is good."

I've heard from many people who have had times when they felt as down as you are in this letter, and then moved through that, to a better time. They chose to have a little faith, just enough to follow the standard advice of practice and unselfishness. I can't explain it completely, but I've seen people go from the meanest, most bitter despair, to a state of peace and love. That's enough to keep me practicing and serving. Enough to give me the confidence to ask you to try again. There are reasons not to take your own life, and I believe you can discover those reasons. With your heart first, not your mind.

Peace and blessings, Catherine

For now I focus on the journey just putting one foot in front of the other. I don't do it day by day, I do it moment by moment, living in the moment. I did a lot of harm in my first 30 years on this planet and I'll spend the rest doing acts of human kindness. I believe in what Jesus taught about the new birth or being born again. It is a transformation like a caterpillar who turns into a butterfly. I can take all of my crap and all of my brokenness and turn it into something beautiful. Yes, broken and beautiful."

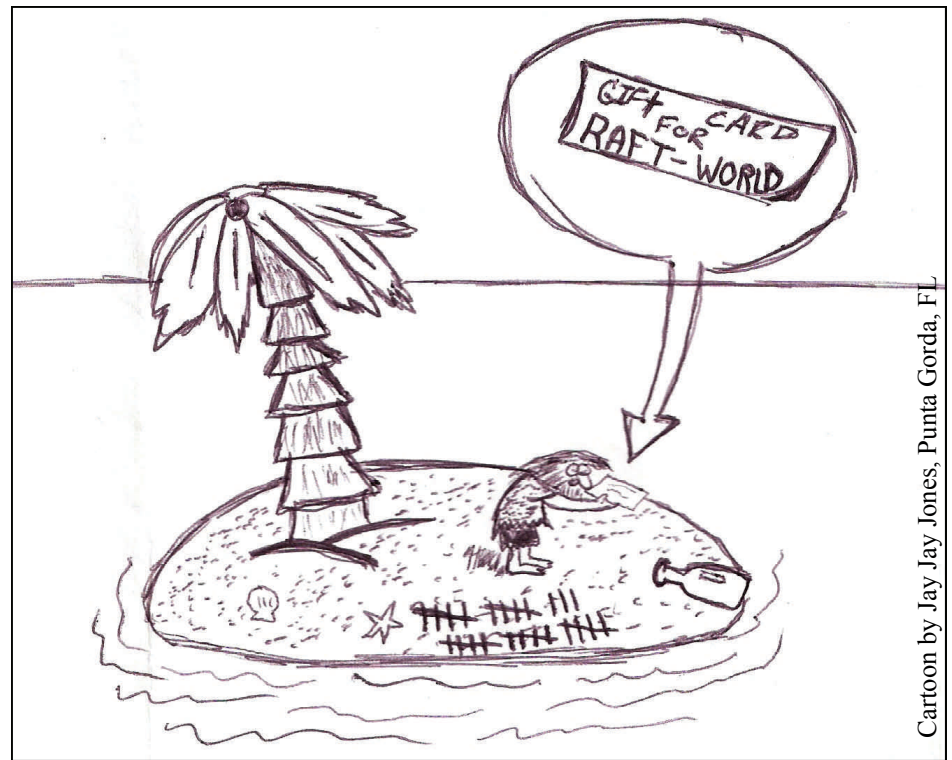
Written by a friend who was a member of the Aryan Brotherhood before he began working with the practice of "no harm." Now, he tells us, he doesn't even swat insects that land on him.

Friends, please note that Bo is away from our office, and not able to personally answer any letters. The following correspondence took place in 2008.

Dear Bo,

I am hopefully on the last leg of my bid. I have four months left on my sentence here and barring extradition to another state (probation violation) I will be released in May. I would like your help pertaining to my meditation as of lately. I was locked up in relative isolation for four months in late 2004 and early 2005. During that time I was introduced by your books and others to formal meditation. Without going into all the details, I, through much practice, was able to enter into wonderfully deep meditative states. I would sit for a hour or so twice a day counting breath or doing mantra but it was in the evening while lying flat on my back that I would meditate without form; that is I would just focus my mind on one pointed concentration and hold my attention until through much persistence and effort I would enter into what I now believe to be true communion with God. I look back at these times as transformative liberating experiences. My consciousness changed for the better. I was much more self-aware, calmer and freer.

I was released however and my meditation ceased altogether. I did however continue to reap the fruits of these meditations for some while. I was more at ease in the world and in myself. My anxieties seemed diminished and I became, I feel, a more confident less troubled person. But alas the siren song of addiction slowly (but surely) called me back into a world of drug use, then abuse, and finally full blown chaos so after six months of freedom I was once again in captivity. Since then I have made repeated attempts to once again tap into this life changing, life giving force that I had so briefly been privy too. I've come to realize that it was largely grace and that my best efforts to attain such a state are only part of the process. I cannot help however clinging to those experiences and desiring the experience again not only for it's own sake but also for the wonderful benefits manifested by them in my life. I have tried and tried and only have I, on one or two occasions, come close both times, each almost a year apart, I felt my awareness concentrating



to a single point and coming just to the point of "merging" or of dissolving into the infinite. At that point my heart rate went haywire, tripp hammering as the fear, I assume of loss of ego prevented me from letting go. So I feel on those occasions I reached the gate so to speak but was denied entry. Other times in meditation I have calmed and quieted my mind to a certain degree but "I" was always still there. There is no experience of merging. No awareness of being one. I suppose had I not had such strong experiences in the past that my present ones wouldn't fall short, but in comparison they do. Bo I have done lots of drugs and I sometimes wonder if I haven't destroyed my faculties to the point of preventing true meditation. Also I fear that all the selfish, dishonest, hurtful things I have done are keeping me isolated and separate from God. I know this letter can't quite articulate all I wish to say and the help I hope to get but I do hope that you may somehow read between the lines and maybe in return be able to offer some insight. I feel all the meditating I am doing is not the true, transformative meditation that I need in order to benefit from it with true and lasting change. I feel as if I'm close but somehow being denied. Anyway man, enough about that. I really do hope that you get this letter and that you are still

feeling the whole prison Ashram thing. I know that it has been, in many ways, my salvation. I hope also that you are doing well, feeling good and altogether blessed. Thank you for the work you have done and continue to do.

Sincerely, Dan

Hey Dan,

The experiences you had early on in meditation were wonderful, but don't miss the point of them. The point was certainly not to give you one more attachment to cling to; it was to catch your attention and show you the highs you'll never get through drugs or anything else. It was to open your mind and heart to the spiritual realm within you. No one has any guarantees of always having such experiences, because they are not the focus of your journey. The focus is to become a little less self-centered and a little more compassionate every day. You're still approaching meditation for what you can get out of it, which is still the old self-centered Dan.

You're absolutely right that those experiences come through Grace, not by our own efforts. It's natural to have a little part of our minds that always hopes for another one, but don't allow yourself to go so far that the quiet hoping becomes a constant frustration. Then it's just one

more attachment keeping you bound. Meditate without demanding anything from it. Let go of Dan a little more in each sitting, just do the practice because it's the right thing to do. And the rest of your day, be looking for ways to be an unselfish and compassionate presence wherever you are.

The road to freedom or awakening is not just sitting in cosmic absorption. It is giving up the small self throughout our everyday lives. Every act of kindness, every little struggle against vanity and selfishness, is as meaningful as meditation. Meditation and whatever experiences we have are only one part of the spiritual life. Be grateful for those experiences, but don't allow your self-centeredness to make them the center of it all. Just keep doing the work, brother. That's all we can do!

Love, Bo

Dear Bo,

Thank you for your response to my letter. It was quite the experience for me to get a letter from you, having been a student and admirer of your teachings and works for so long. And I must say your letter was very beneficial to me in that it allowed me to see clearly how attached I have been to having the "perfect" meditative experience. In fact even in writing you the letter I began to see how fiercely I was clinging to my practices. I have, believe it or not, lightened up considerably since sending you the letter. I do want to address the issue just a little bit further and perhaps get your take on a few things.

When I spent those few months in a cell meditating and studying I emerged from the experience different, and I feel that I had begun to embody those qualities you spoke of in your books when describing the benefits you had achieved from meditation. Not so much self monitoring, not all the social fears and a spaciousness that was unlike any thing I'd known previously. It was this ease and freedom I felt that has since eluded me and it is that calm and centered state of mind that I've wanted so much to re-discover. I realize now that I can't compare my past meditations which were achieved in what amounts to virtually a retreat to the ones I now have. I am in a dormitory and am constantly faced with distractions. I am going to school and

involved in friendships and associations. So it is only natural that I won't be able to achieve the focus and concentration I was able to when all I had to do was go to chow three times a day and nothing else. I also realize now how desperately I was trying to re-create these experiences and seeing anything less than as having no benefit or worse, as failures. I must admit that I still aspire towards that spaciousness and equanimity that I experienced earlier. But you reminded me of what's most important in your letter. The simple day to day and moment to moment kindnesses and letting go of all of my self centered motives and desires. This is the highest practice. Bo do you think it would be crazy or selfish to get out of prison and sign up for a retreat or Hermitage for a month or two. Would it be a cop-out or an avoidance of my responsibilities? Would it be more attachment to meditation and what I could get out of it? I have been away from my family for a few years and I also need to find employment and some stability but I also feel very fragmented and uncertain. I have long had a problem with drugs and alcohol. And I also have a lot of difficulty with anxiety, which is another thing I feel meditation, from my initial experiences, helped considerably. I don't want to get out and, out of fear or perpetual unease, turn back to using. I guess this is my biggest fear. Anyway, man I gotta say that writing you and in turn getting your reply has helped me considerably and even as I write this I know that I've already attained some new perspective and insight. Thanks again for all your support and guidance.

Much love and respect, Dan

Hey Dan,

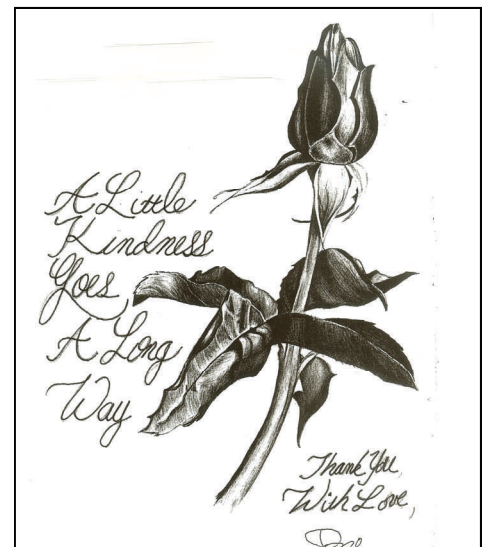
You ask about whether it is selfish or avoiding responsibilities to do a meditation retreat when you get out. The balance between inner work and outer responsibilities is definitely not a one-size-fits-all formula. It is a shifting line that requires us to make our best intuitive guesses when we feel a pull in the direction of retreat. What does the motivation FEEL like inside – does it feel like avoiding the world, or does it feel like following inner guidance? I have spent years in retreat, including over a year in silence. Many people felt I was copping out or doing something selfish (I usually replied, let's see you spend a year in silence; then tell me you think it's

selfish!).

My point is, we all have to honor our worldly responsibilities and also make time for spiritual practice and occasional retreats. The timing is the challenge. If you are broke and need to get a place to live and a job to pay the bills as soon as you get out, then that is your spiritual work. If you are able to go to a meditation retreat first without shirking responsibilities, great. If you can plan it all out beforehand so that everyone is on the same page about what you are doing, even better.

The one reality check I want to give you, though, is your comment "I don't want to get out, and out of fear or perpetual unease, turn back to using." That is sheer bullshit, Dan. There is absolutely no excuse, no reason in the world, for you to turn back to using. No fear, no unease, no difficulty. Because if you think that way, then you may as well use the day you get out, because life is hard, and you will find plenty of reasons for fear and unease if you want excuses to use drugs or booze. The only people who stay out of prison are the ones who say "I AM NEVER AGAIN GOING BACK TO DRUGS OR CRIME, NO MATTER WHAT!" And mean it. You have been given mighty gifts in your meditation practices, gifts to help you turn your life to the Good. I don't want to hear this "poor me the addict, I hope I stay straight" nonsense from you. Stay straight and be committed to staying straight. Period. You're done with drugs and alcohol. Period. No "trying" is involved.

Love, Bo



Art by Dane Woodson, Susanville, CA



CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE !

If you have access to the Internet, please visit us at www.humankindness.org. We've updated our website with information, newsletter archives, photos and more!

While you're there, please take a look at our **HKF Store** (It's time to start thinking about holiday gift-giving...). Purchases from our online store are an important source of support for the free books we distribute, and the other work of the foundation.

Books, music, DVDs, art... All support the work of Human Kindness Foundation.

Our best-selling "be love" T-shirts come in all sizes and lots of great colors...



... And for the first time: a ladies-style tee !

Other great HKF store items include:

- ♥ BO's music CDs, including the acclaimed *Whatever it Takes*.
- ♥ *You Can Do This*, a DVD including segments from concerts, public talks, and prison workshops during Bo's 2006 tour.



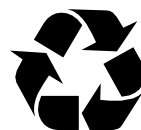
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— His Holiness the Dalai Lama



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