

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Spring 2010

THE TWO QUESTIONS

A friend of mine got out of prison on the last day of 1997. He was thirty-seven years old and had been in prison since he was nineteen. Because he was on a 90-year sentence, he had spent his whole prison time in one old maximum-security facility which has a very tough reputation.

In all those years, William was never encouraged to get a G.E.D. or any other education or skills training. There were precious few programs offered at his prison because all the inmates there had such long sentences that the state felt, "Why waste the money? They're never getting out of here."

When the state did release him, they let him out the gate with a short-sleeved shirt and fifty dollars. This scenario is repeated every day all over the United States. It's an embarrassment before God and a mockery of the idea that the state is giving folks like William a "second chance." How much of a chance does he have with fifty bucks and no skills or education?

But William had practiced meditation for many years while he was inside, and after improving his reading skills he studied many spiritual books. He developed a prayer life. He became a quiet, kind person. So he had no intention, when he was released, of giving all that up and turning back to crime. He had made the Big Change. Crime was no longer an option.

William hooked up with some good people doing nonprofit work in the community, and he found a place to live and work with them for awhile. He wasn't making much money, but he got room and board and began learning how to cook, bake bread, do some light carpentry, and occasionally speak to community groups

about his own "before & after" story, which was very well received.

Because he had done so much spiritual practice in prison, William assumed he would have no difficulty adjusting to life outside. Everyone said, "After spending your whole adult life in a tough prison, you'll probably hit some hard challenges out here." But William would always smile and say he was just glad to be out, and nothing would be rough about life out here at all.

It was around February when the first wave of depression hit him. William had no idea what was going on. He slipped deeper and deeper into silence, shutting

out the people around him just like he would have done in prison. But these people were his friends, not his jailers. They had been expecting him to hit some rough spots and they were ready to help him through them. But William did not yet know how to ask for or receive such help. He closed off and became grim. Everyone would try to talk with him, ask him questions, and he would respond in short, unfriendly grunts. And being tall and muscular and prison-hard, he could be pretty intimidating when he was feeling unfriendly.

The main thing that was going on was confusion and pride. William had no idea why he was depressed, and he was too proud to admit it. He had spent

so many years fending for himself, trusting only himself, figuring everything out for himself, that he didn't know how to handle this in any other way. Several of his friends and co-workers became angry with him, taking his rejection personally. And of course, that made matters worse.



Stephen Lawrence Stoeltje, Gatesville, TX

By March of '98, William was actually saying "Maybe I should just go back to prison." And he was also saying, "Every night when I go to sleep, I pray for God to let me die before I wake up. I have nothing to live for." Here's a good-looking, intelligent, healthy, thirty-eight-year-old man with a whole lifetime of freedom opening up to him, and he just wanted to be back in prison or dead. Sad and amazing, but not surprising.

Please don't think this couldn't happen to you. Life out here is not really a bowl of cherries, like you may assume when you're aching to be out of prison in the "free world." The free world is not so free. It's tough. It's confusing. It's exhausting. People are working themselves into the grave and have very little to show for it. Everybody is incredibly busy, but few people are happy with how they spend their time. William had a lot more time in prison to pray, read, meditate and relax than he did out here. He had a lot more privacy in prison, and a lot more time to himself. I'm not suggesting prison is better, I'm just urging you not to fantasize about how easy it will be when you step through the gates.

Things got worse and worse for William, and finally I had a few talks with him when it seemed that he just wasn't going to come out of this tailspin by himself. His co-workers and I had already given him plenty of pep-talks, all to no avail. The only thing that came to me to say to him was this:

"William, I want you to think very seriously about two simple questions. If you can truthfully answer 'yes' to both questions, then I know you're going to get through this. If your answers are 'no,' then I don't know what else to say to you. Here are the questions:

Does God know what you're going through?

Does God care?"

Those two questions can be a self-test to see whether you are a person of faith or not. Pick out your biggest

problem or obstacle in life. If you honestly believe that God knows and cares, then you are a person of faith. If you do not believe that God knows and cares, then you may have some serious problems facing you.

I know that William is truly a spiritual person, and so for him, those two questions forced an undeniable "yes" on

both counts. And once he admitted to himself that he does believe God knows and cares, then he no longer felt alone and no longer felt like he was just going crazy for no purpose at all. He realized that God must be pushing him to learn something and no matter how hard it was, he felt that God would help him through it.

In William's case, what he was being pushed to learn had to do with pride and with real friendship; being able to admit that he was scared and confused, being able to accept love from the people around him; not having to be Superman. He saw a psychiatrist once, but left there saying, "If I'm going to talk about what's bothering me, I'd rather do it with friends."

We may never understand completely why William broke down so deeply after a couple months' freedom. It could probably be explained in a hundred different ways. If you think you clearly understand it, you're being foolish. It doesn't matter to understand it, as much as to face it with honesty, faith and support from friends. I'm happy to say that's what William finally did, and now he has been out for nearly two years, he has a good job and many friends.

Like all of us, he still occasionally has rough times. But he remembers the two questions. He remembers that his answers are "yes," and so he knows he's never alone or unloved. And that may be all we need to get through the rough times when nothing else seems to help.



Bo Lloyd

Reprinted from our Summer/Fall 1999 newsletter.

PRACTICE: GOODWILL MEDITATION

by Bo Lozoff

More and more of our prison friends are spending time on lockdown during this difficult age. Many of them feel frustrated that they cannot do anything to help others. But we can all help others. Praying for others is very real and, depending on the strength of our minds, can be very powerful as well. Below is one specific “goodwill meditation” you can use at a regular time each day which will benefit others during times you are unable to be in closer contact.

Sit straight and quietly, eyes closed, and let the attention focus on calm breathing for a minute or two. Let other thoughts go. Now bring to mind the image of someone or something you love in a very sweet and affectionate way (not a passionate romantic love, but more like a baby or child, a parent or grandparent, a childhood pet, or even a favorite place in nature). Breathe into the center of your chest (your spiritual heart-center) as you feel the gratitude and affection associated with this image, and quietly expand it so that you are offering a blessing to that person, place or thing which means so much to you. To offer a blessing can be as simple as thinking, “May you be well; may you find true peace in your life.” Imagine the face of that person or pet receiving your blessing and smiling.

Continuing to breathe into that affectionate heart-place, bring to mind the people in the cells around you, and don’t let the feeling of affection slip away. Picture each of them, including the guards, and offer them the same blessing. Remember, anyone who finds true peace in their lives will never be cruel to anyone else, so it doesn’t matter who this person is or what they are like, your blessing will not only help them, but help others as well. Keep expanding your images outward, including the whole building you are in, the city, region, state, nation, and finally the world. Whenever you feel your affection slip away, bring back your original image to get the feeling back again.

At the end of this practice, when you have included all beings in your blessing, “see” yourself sitting right where you are, like a shining angel, radiating light outward in all directions equally. At this moment, because of your goodwill, no one in the whole world is unloved. No one is unforgiven. No bitterness or grudges are festering in you. Recognize your power and your responsibility to pray for the world in this way, and then offer the same blessing to yourself: “May I be well; may I find true peace in my life.”

A meditation such as this can be a very powerful service practice to develop in our lives. His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said that men and women doing practices such as this in little caves in the Himalayan Mountains are part of the reason the world has not destroyed itself so far. They may never leave their caves, yet they affect the whole world by the compassion in their hearts, which is then projected outward through the strength of their minds. Hearts and minds—yours, mine—can be purified and focused to become a potent force both in our local environments and the world itself.

This is a good practice for anyone to do, and it is especially good for those of you who feel you cannot participate in service in any other way. Make a regular time each day to do this, slowly and sincerely, for at least ten or fifteen minutes. Each day, your ability to concentrate and “see” others, and “see” the light around you going off in all directions, will increase. It’s very gradual, but you will get better and better at it to the point where this will probably be your favorite time of the day. You may notice the people around you actually changing from your secret, daily dedication to their well-being. We have heard this from many people who did this practice.

If there’s a particularly nasty staff member, focus on him or her every day for a month, picturing their face softening, heart opening. You may be astounded at the change in that person. If violence breaks out in your prison, focus every day on all the parties involved, and you will be like a secret spiritual “swat team” doing your part to bring an end to the conflict. Take responsibility however you can, from wherever you are. You do have influence if you are willing to develop your skill in projecting it. If you meditate or meet with others on a regular basis, do this goodwill meditation as a group and you may see even more results. But whether you see results or not, I promise you that your efforts are not wasted. Never. So do your part.



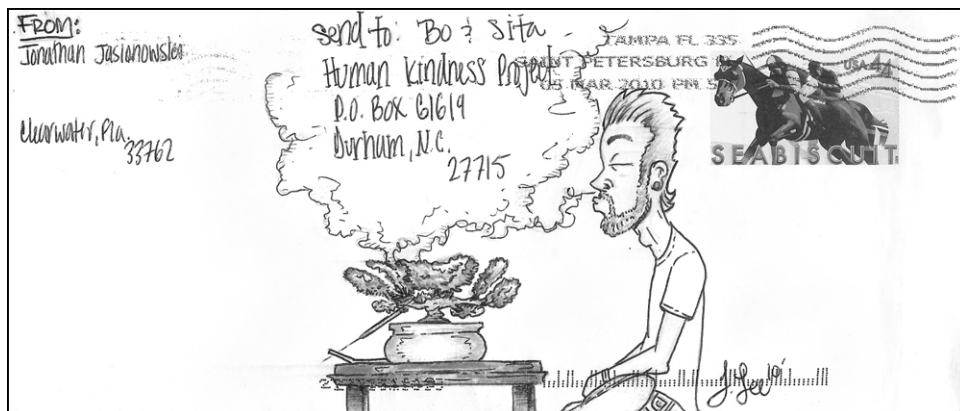
LETTERS

Dear H.K.F.,

I tell you, just when I think life is going smoothly....

Right before Christmas, I get moved from the cell I've lived in for the past 15 months, with a great cellie I must add; all the way to the other side of the jail, to a dorm block, which is a wide open cubicle with now eight cellies in one area. It's supposed to be a privilege, but it's worse than the regular blocks. So as I'm cussing at nothing in particular, and I finish packing my stuff up and start heading over there, I pass someone I know on the way who notifies me I'm going to B7 cube, which is the worst in the jail. It's right beside the bathroom so I smell piss & shit all day long and he informs me of the crazy guy in the cell. Great. I finally arrive and get to meet my 6'3", 320 lb very violent and crazy cube mate who never shuts up. The first thing he does is attempt to tell me what the "rules" are. Now I'm 6', 240 lbs of solid muscle, with a reputation from the past that often times precedes me, so right away my wonderful ego comes from around the corner and says "He must not know who I am." (My ego is a tricky one!) The first day didn't go well, by the second day I couldn't wait for him to try me, I'm mad because he bullies everyone, people give him stuff out of fear, he's got an I.Q. of about 40 and he's big, but I know he'd be no match for me in a fight. Then here comes mail call and the HKF newsletter like a slap in the face. Before I open it, I'm thinking yeah Bo, why don't you come in here and try to love! But I read it and it hit me right in the heart.

I read it a second time. Then I climbed down, got my picture of Neem Karoli Baba and Ram Dass, and hung them up. (I didn't have them up yet in my new cube.) There they are smiling down at me telling me, "The ones that are the hardest to love are the ones that need it the most." I soften my heart and approach the situation from a wider perspective. What better way to learn patience and true love than to be in a difficult situation. I decided to take this journey so here's life giving me growth opportunity, but man, does it suck!



Envelope by Jonathan Jasionowski, Clearwater, FL

Trying to be humble and kind with this asshole while breathin' in shit all day is not what I expected the journey to be—Ha! Ha! By the third day I get in a regular routine in my new cube of prayer & meditation etc.... That night he decides to tell me that when he first saw me he thought I was going to be an asshole, but now I inspire him because I'm respectful and kind and humble. Now I know I'm not any of those things, but a compliment from him seemed almost amazing! I spent the whole night listening to him talk and I started to realize, he's just as scared, hungry, tired, and wants to be loved and happy, as everyone else.

I still hate where I'm at, but I decided to stay, even though I coulda switched cubes this morning. This guy had 20 different people move out in the last 50 days.

I'm staying because something won't let me run from the challenge. If he calls me a pussy can I forget about self and see his side, his fear & pain—probably not but what better way to at least try to learn it.

They say "Life is not waiting for the storm to pass, it's learning how to dance in the rain."

Now, I may only be on the porch looking for the umbrella, but I at least opened the front door and went to the porch. Maybe soon I'll dance in the rain!

Love you all, Robert



Dear Bo,

Greetings..... Your talk at a Meditation Center in the State capital in (Tallahassee) Florida (HKF Christmas 2009 Newsletter) ends with advice of re-awakening. Bo, I ask you how I should proceed to overcome this problem of when I wake up, Mentally things easily irritate me. As a victim of the U.S.A Law I'm a very bitter Man that is Locked into the American prison system for way too Long. In actuality, I think that I'm better off when I'm in that dazed and confused crash and burn Mentality. I've been Locked away from society for too Long of a time. As the fact about the truth of the Bible, the book Acts is the Last book in the Bible where doctrine was backed-up by Miracles. The SMALL god of this earth performs Miracles of evil at all times with or without doctrine. How much is the supernatural involved in this Mess!?! Bo, if you can shine some Light on any of that gunk above I sure as hell would appreciate it.

Truthfully, Wayne

Hi Wayne,

Hmmm, you ask me to shine a light on "any of that gunk above" but it's a lot of different gunk, brother! I'll have to separate it a little to shine anything at all.

I'm sure you are definitely locked up too long because our prison system is a horrible mess, and far too many people are in for far too long. Meanwhile, you are where you are and you need to do whatever you have power to do. Changing the system right now is not

within your power, but changing your head and heart is. That's what my books are about, and there is no easier or shorter way to do it than to do it. Many thousands of convicts have been successful in this, Wayne, and you can be too. You say "mentally things easily irritate me," well, that's something you can do something about! Become a student of your own life and meditation, breathing, etc., and you can change that.

If I were you, I'd temporarily let go of ideas about the Book of Acts, the "small god of this earth" and the supernatural. That's like a bad acid trip. There are certainly realities that are weird, awful, wonderful, scary, peaceful and everything else, but that whole journey starts with getting your own body, heart and mind in solid shape. People who focus just their minds on the Bible or ideas about God and evil nearly always get themselves in trouble. The Native Americans said, "If you seek to understand the universe you will understand nothing. If you seek to understand yourself, you will understand the universe." My books are about how to understand and work with yourself. The rest will open up to you as you become stronger and more stable and compassionate.

I know you're frustrated about the shitty parts of your life, and I really feel for you, brother, I do. All of us have shitty parts of our lives we can't do anything about. This is what Jesus called our "portion of the cross," and we are supposed to carry that cross as He carried His. So we can carry it with a bitter heart and sour mind, or we can carry it more gracefully if we learn some of the advice of our elders from all the great traditions. We are supposed to learn how to "suffer gracefully" by the time we are finished with this life. Letting you know this fact, and providing books with some of that advice from the elders, is all I can do as your friend. The rest is up to you. You can do this, I promise.

Love to you,

Bo



Dear Sister Catherine,

Peace be upon you. Well, I have had a very rough week. I have reached the place in life that for the last 16 years in prison I thought I would never get to—my max-out date—January 20, 2010.

But as life would have it, I will not be released in the morning. You see, for 16 years I have been led to believe I was serving an 8 to 16 year sentence along with a 2 to 4 year sentence for probation violation.

All my paperwork says I was serving concurrently, the DOC as well as parole dept all believed this "fact"! Well, in going over my file for release they came across one paper—a sentence summary—which says these terms should be served consecutively, so they changed the paperwork, and now I have up to four more years before I see a max-out date. They told me this with only five days to leave.

The worst part was telephoning my dear 73 year old mother to tell her that her 16 year wait will last 4 more years. Needless to say, she was upset! But I went back to my cell, and luckily my cellie was out, so I took some of Bo's advice and sat in the corner to meditate. Well, I should have gotten a speeding ticket because in only 30 minutes I went through denial, anger, and acceptance—and onto the "what next"?? phase.

The message was quite clear: "Be still

and know that I am God." Satan threw at me his best—4 more years—but he did not take me off my square. I can see that this life lesson is not done yet, so I will stay here and pray that I will recognize and understand the lesson when it comes, and then wait for my release. I am automatically eligible for a new parole review so I will file that paperwork.

Since I got the news—I can't judge whether it is good or bad, just God's plan—I have gone right back to work and have gained a lot of respect from residents and staff alike. They don't see how I could remain this calm, but that gives me a chance to tell them I meditate and will stay calm with God's help!!

Well, I hope this letter finds you well in spirit.

Shalom, Terry



Dear Sita,

Today is a weird day for me. This is the day 29 years ago I took the life of another human being. It has always been a sad day for me. I allow myself to just feel the all of it and not push it down. It's a powerful connection with the past and one I want to keep. It grounds me. A recognition of my lowest self and my own inhumanity. I thank God for forgiveness and healing, but I connect to the loss in that family and the void and the questions and doubts and fears and trust issues that I created for them, and I grieve. And I think of my family and the questions, doubts, fear and trust issues I created for them as well. Their devotion to me is more than I deserve. Through

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such tragedy and horror emerges the human spirit and restores the balance in the Wheel of Life and gives meaning to the path I'm on. I am grateful for what love can do.

Thank God.

Much love to you, Rick



Dear Catherine,

Thank you so much for responding. I find it difficult or impossible to open up to people to discuss my "issue."

I did want to ask a very important question as I was surprised you said you know people that are living with this hindrance "successfully." Can you elaborate at all without breaking any privacies? Where are they finding work or support? When I go to interviews I ace the interview and references. But once they learn I'm on the sex offender registry, it's over, and I don't get the job.

Thank you again. I live in a sober house, and the books you sent me are being passed to 7 other residents.

Sincerely, David

Dear David,

I'll elaborate on what I mean by people we know who are successfully making good lives for themselves in spite of being on the sex-offender registry.

First, and maybe most important, is acceptance. We know it's a hideous system and many people caught in it are not the dangerous people that the registry implies. But if you want peace in your life, you will need a deep acceptance of the restrictions placed on you by the law. Fair or not, you need to treat it like a diabetic treats his condition: something you must be very careful about, but once you take care of the requirements, you can enjoy and appreciate your life. The diabetic can have a great life with lots of joy and good relationships and meaningful work. And no matter how well everything else is going, he must watch his diet and take his medicine every day. Your "diet and medicine" is to know every detail of what is required of

you and follow it perfectly. You'll get the hang of it, so it won't take up all your energy, but you can't afford to ignore it, and being angry or resentful about it will hurt you.

Second, take a creative look at your options. Once you've accepted that certain jobs are totally off limits to you, what next? Most of the people we know who are looking for jobs with any criminal record start with something physical, like landscaping or moving furniture. We've seen better results from being up-front about your situation. Yes, some doors will close, but you won't waste much time on those. There's a very insecure feeling to having a job and wondering when/if they'll find out the truth about your record.

We recommend talking to small businesses, especially if you can talk to the owner/manager. People running their own small businesses can make their own decisions, and they sometimes will trust their instincts. Make sure you do everything you can to make a good impression: if you have an appointment, be a few minutes early. Look as neat and clean as possible, make eye contact when you talk with them, be very polite, don't use slang or profanity. Smile. I know one man who recently went on such an interview, at a moving company, and the boss was working while he talked. Sam pitched in and helped,

not expecting any reward for that but just because he wanted to be helpful. He got the job, in spite of his sex-offender registration as "high risk."

With creativity and patience, you can find work, and you might find a great job that you stick with for years. Remember, though, that your paid work is not the only way you contribute to the world. Do some service work. Help out in your family or community or just when you see somebody that needs a hand. Volunteer for an organization if you can find one that can work around your job schedule. There are many ways to engage in life.

Many blessings to you, David. Keep us posted on where you go next.

Catherine, and all of us at HKF



Robert Buetow, Burkeville, VA

Spiritual helpers
By
Robert W. Buetow

GOOD WORKS: TONY GIN INSPIRES YOUTH

“THIS LIFE HAS NEVER BEEN ABOUT ME... AND IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU... IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT US.”

Tony Gin got out of prison in May 2008, without a home or a job. Living on the streets in Los Angeles, he reached out to everyone he met, sharing his gratitude for being alive and his interest in helping others. He is now speaking to groups of young people in schools, colleges, and conferences. Here’s what one professor said about Tony: “He has saved thousands and has become an icon to Venice Beach business people and tourists alike. But it is the educational environment which can benefit most from his story--one your students will never forget.”

Below is a message we recently received from Tony:

I was born to a beautiful 14 yr-old mother who was being abused by the men she meet. With no father I believed I was the luckiest kid I knew running free in the streets of Los Angeles. However I never seem to find a place that I can call home. My selfish street survival skills kept me separated and after 6 prison terms and 35yrs of addictions I finally believe that nothing out there work for me and I just wanted to die. I found a book in the trash called *We’re All Doing Time*. It didn’t judge, criticize or even lecture me...it reminded me that I have within me a home. That the only thing I have to be better than, is better than I use to be. For the first time I was able to find the strength to face my hard thoughts. No matter what, now I know that there is nothing this day can bring that I cannot handle. Today I live free from my past and future and remind everyone I meet of their good qualities. I been invited to drive a limousine for a living, to live with good friends on the beach, and to speak to the students about it all. THIS LIFE HAS NEVER BEEN ABOUT ME...AND ITS NOT ABOUT YOU...IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT US.

Thank you for being a part of it... Tony Gin



NEW AUDIOBOOK AVAILABLE!

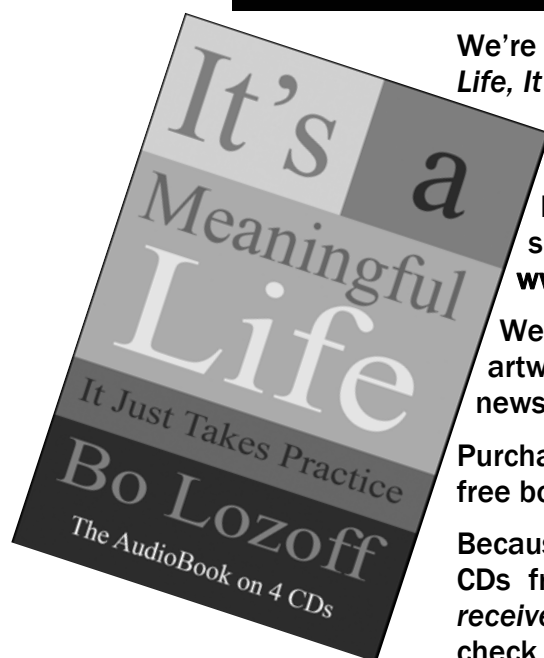
We’re pleased to announce *It’s a Meaningful Life, It Just Takes Practice* is now available as an audio book.

This is an abridged version of Bo Lozoff’s book on 4 CDs, read by Bo, for \$22.00 plus shipping. If you have access to the Internet, please visit us at www.humankindness.org, and visit our online store.

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FUTURE KINDNESSES

— From *Not Just Stories*

by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski

Rabbi Baruch of Mezhibozh was reciting the prayer before Kiddush Friday night, and as he read, "I thank You G-d for all the kindnesses that You have done for me, and for those that You will do for me in the future," he paused and reflected, "Why must I thank G-d in advance for future kindnesses? Why not just wait until those kindnesses occur, and thank Him then?"

After a few moments of meditation, Rabbi Baruch said, "Ah, I understand. When those kindnesses in the future occur, they may be packaged in a manner that I will not recognize them as kindnesses, but perhaps experience them as suffering, and I will then not be in a position to appreciate them and be grateful for them. That is why I must thank G-d for them in advance."

After a few moments, Rabbi Baruch began to weep. "How tragic," he said, "that G-d will be doing kindnesses for me, and I will not be able to recognize them as such."

Artwork by Claudine Fleury,
Chowchilla, CA

