

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Fall 2015



ALL WILL BE WELL

Most of you know us by the name “Human Kindness Foundation,” which is the official name of our nonprofit and what we use most often. We even say “HKF” around here as if everybody in the world would know what that means! But there’s another name for this project Bo and

Sita Lozoff started 42 years ago: **Prison-Ashram Project**. The idea — just as valid today as it was in 1973 — is that a prison cell, like an ashram cell, can be a place of spiritual transformation.

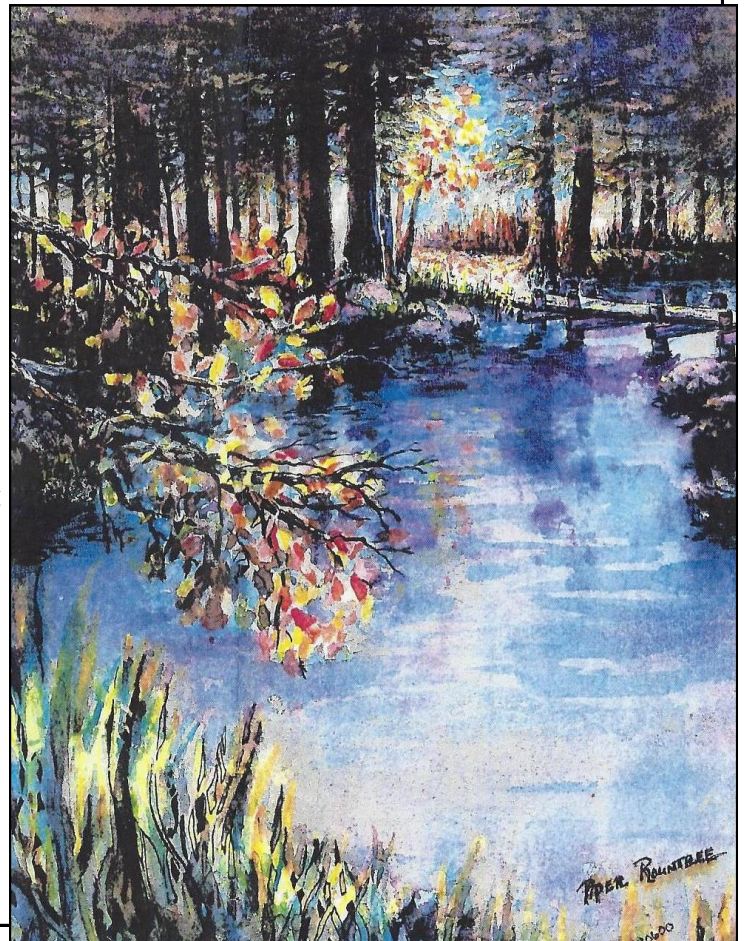
An ashram is similar to a monastery. Spiritual seekers live there for the purpose of spiritual growth. Many external freedoms and choices are taken away, and life is focused on spiritual practices. People who live in ashrams or monasteries don’t choose what they’ll eat, what clothing they’ll wear, or who sleeps in the cell next to them. They don’t choose what work they do or what time they wake up. Within that limited lifestyle, there is the possibility of discovering a profound freedom.

Julian of Norwich chose to give up her freedom in a way that was drastic even compared to most monasteries or ashrams. She was a 14th century Catholic nun who chose to be an “ anchoress,” which means she was walled into a small cell attached to a church. The cell had small windows, but no doors. She could be served food and water, and she could see into the church and churchyard. She never left that cell. From that confinement, Julian wrote of God’s constant love for humanity, his infinite forgiveness, and the bliss she found in God’s love. She had a mystical vision in which Jesus tenderly told her: **“...but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”**

Jarvis Jay Masters did not choose to give up his freedom. He is incarcerated in California, on death row. He is confined to a small cell, probably about the same amount of space Julian lived in. When Sita visited him last summer, she saw him brimming with love. Sita experienced Jarvis like a light in that very dark place. Jarvis says his peace is because of his Buddhist practice.

Viktor Frankl experienced the horror of being imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp for being Jewish. He said: **“What is to give light must endure burning.”** We are certain he did not mean that everyone who wants spiritual bliss must experience the extremes of an anchoress cell, death row, or a concentration camp, but he recognized that suffering can have meaning. He wrote about a freedom that lives inside of us, which can never be taken away by external circumstances. Frankl wrote: “When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

Look back at the title of this newsletter. HKF is in touch with many thousands of people for whom life circumstances aren’t going very well. People suffer, sometimes in ways that make us want to yell and break things. Some of those injustices will never be made right in this world; some wounds will not heal in this lifetime. So how dare we say “all will be well”? We don’t have an easy answer for you, and we sometimes get lost in the pain. But we invite you to explore,

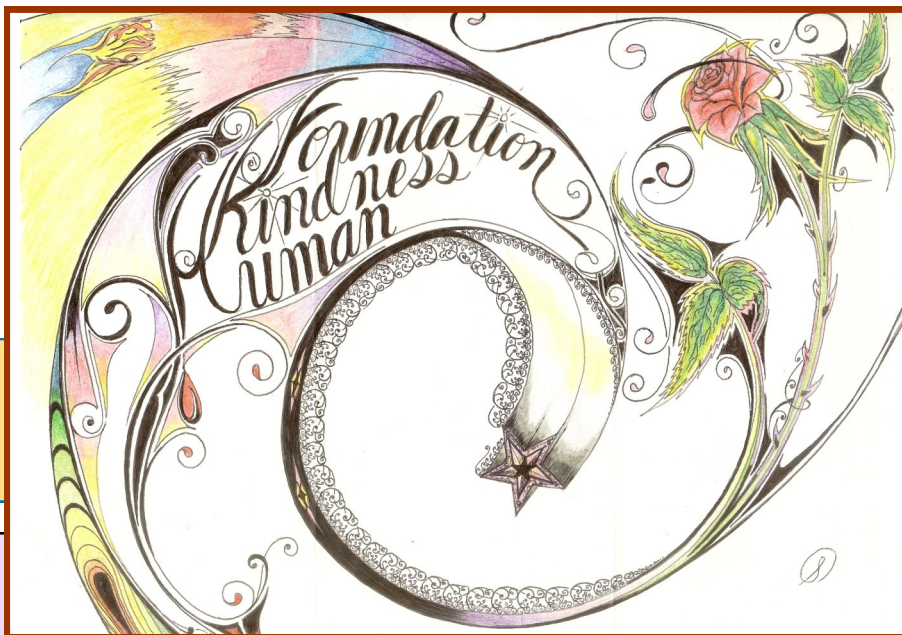


with all of us in the HKF circle, what Julian and Jarvis and Viktor discovered about suffering. Will you choose to use the circumstances of your life, whatever they are, to open your heart and deepen your compassion? We believe there's a chance that you—yes, really, we mean *you*—will discover the greatest freedom of all: true spiritual liberation.

All as it should be —An experience in a dorm

Dear Human Kindness Foundation,

I have read both *We're All Doing Time* and *Lineage*. Both outstanding books!! I am deeply moved and even very seriously considering becoming a monk. During one of my first meditation/chakra breathings I had an experience that I have not shared with anyone yet because I don't know what to think about it. I'm new to this whole idea and unsure in my steps on my spiritual path. I was sitting in my bunk, which is in the middle of what you might call an open bay dorm. No cells just bunks. It was around 5 or 6 in the morning. I had been up all night reading about the different chakras and trying to get an understanding of them. I was focusing my breathing on the 6th and 7th chakra during meditation, and when I opened my eyes I was looking out of not just my eyes, but it seemed that more of my vision was coming from my forehead., which is I guess the "third eye." As I glanced around the day room, at other people's bunks, I saw each person's hopes, fears, desires. Essentially the realness of each person, so to speak. It was hard to describe but at that moment I understood every action, thought, movement of the world. And I realized with both sadness and joy (weird combo) that this is the true state of things and that all was as it should be. I felt power radiating from myself, like if I wanted the walls to crumble I had to just visualize it and it would be. But I had no desire to be rid of my environment, because like I said it was all as it should be. So for maybe the first time I was content. All ambitions, desires, wants, even needs were nothing but baggage. Then someone distracted me and it all went away. I haven't had anything else like it happen while I meditate or breathe.



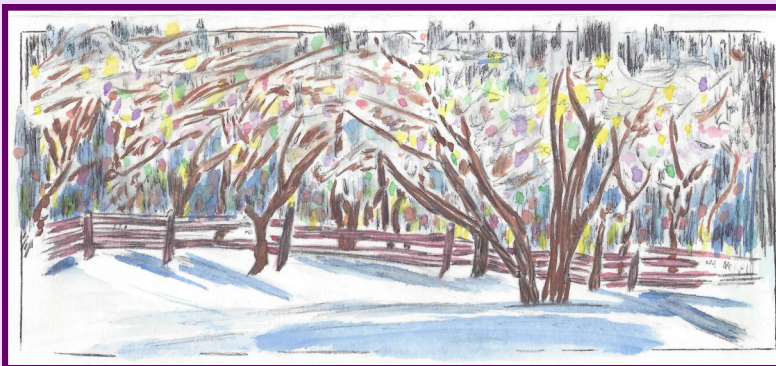
I am very confused. I am 24, this is my second time down and I'm ready for a change in my life. Clearly the path I've chosen isn't doing me any good. That's why I read *We're All Doing Time* in the first place, and it made me realize I need to change my spirit first and that will change my life. I've read both of these books a couple of times. I'd appreciate any feedback you might have toward my meditation experience!!

With love and hope, L

Dear L,

We're glad you wrote to us, brother. And so glad you are exploring your spiritual path in a serious way.

Your experience sounds wonderful! Not everyone who uses meditation and breathing practices will experience something like that, and you may or may not ever experience it again. You were given a glimpse of how truly connected we all are. If you use that knowledge well, it will be a priceless gift in your life. You clearly saw what the mystic Julian of Norwich is famous for saying: "All shall



be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." Even those walls, which maybe most of the time you'd like to see crumble, were as they should be when you had that moment of clear sight. You also saw something about the people all around you. With

that view of their hopes, fears, and desires, can you become more and more compassionate? After all, how angry can we be at someone if we completely understand their hopes and fears? How selfish can we be if we know, be-

yond any doubt, the “realness of each person”? Let the experience continue opening your heart, whether or not you ever have a third eye experience again.

There are many ways to learn compassion. You will meet people who have never had the type of mystical experience you had, who have opened their hearts in other ways. And having the experience is not enough by itself. If you don’t use it to develop compassion, it will just be an interesting story of this strange thing that happened to you one morning. But it did happen to you, and it can be a cornerstone of your spiritual practice. Reflect on it. Give it some time to work within you. What does it mean to you? Where does it lead you? Maybe you are called to be a monk and lead a life of contemplation, either in a monastery or in a less formal way, like “Monk” in the story “Lineage.”

There is a reason Bo and Sita chose the name “Human Kindness Foundation” when they needed to name the nonprofit that runs Prison-Ashram Project. After many years of living in ashrams and doing extreme practices, they recognized that if practices and experiences don’t make us

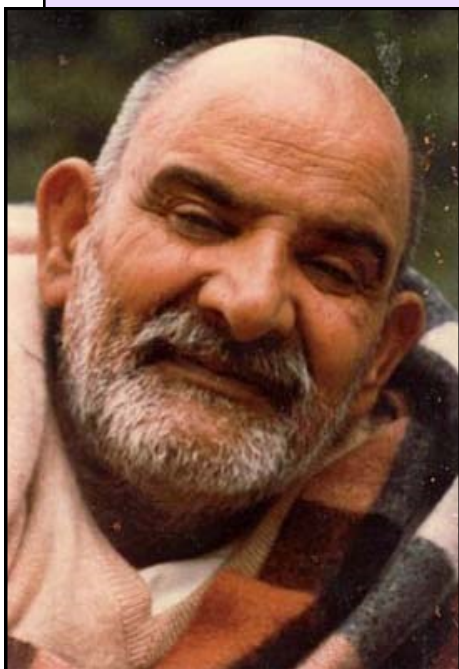
kinder, they really aren’t worth much. The Bible says it this way: “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” *1 Corinthians 13: 1-3.*

Sita and I hope you will always remember that you feel drawn to a life of practice. Whether you are a monk in a monastery, or practicing some other way, we trust that your practices can be of great service to you and to the people in your life. Peace & blessings, Catherine

“IT’S ALL RIGHT HERE,
YA KNOW.”



-Colt
@SCI
5-27-14



“Everything will be alright.”

— Neem Karoli Baba

Bo and Sita’s Guru, Neem Karoli Baba (pictured here), frequently said “Sab thik ho jayega.” That means, “everything will be alright.” All will be well.

Sita Reflects

When Bo and I first began writing to people in prison over 40 years ago, our teacher, Ram Dass, told us that we needed to feel both “the snow on top of the mountain” (the perfection of all of God’s creation) and “the blood at our feet” (the intense suffering in the world). If we were only aware of God’s perfection, we were in danger of being unsympathetic to the person writing us. But if we were too caught by the suffering, we would miss the point—that person was writing to us for spiritual guidance. So our work was to stay balanced between the snow on the mountaintop and the blood at our feet. I can share with you, beloved friends, that this decades-long spiritual practice has helped me open my heart and deepen my faith.

—with all my love, Sita



Advice from inside



Dear Sita, My name is G., and I'm serving 26-33 years. ... I'm sure God would attest to the fact we could all use a little work. I want to give some advice to a young man who has just started his prison time.

I'm a God fearing man who is still lost, but I try to look at it now: how can I help people, instead of making it about me. These "convicts" "inmates" "prisoners" people, most of them probably have never had anyone in their lives just be nice to them. A lot of them have had hard lives, they're just broken and can be fixed. Just know you can be one small piece of a great big puzzle for them to begin recovery of whatever addiction or problem they may have. I know I'm all broken on my way to be fixed, and every act of kindness done to me in

a place as negative as this is absolutely refreshing. So all I can say about that is pass it on or start it. I feel good helping people. Everybody deserves to feel kindness at some point in their lives even if it comes from prison.

Use your new confinement as a way to make yourself stronger, smarter, and confident, because if you can survive this agonizing lifestyle, you can survive anything. Pray, meditate, do what you need to do to become a better person, because we still do have that power. —Peace, love and good vibes, G.



Instead of holding on to anger and hatred, I can fill those places within myself with joy and heal-

ing and peace. I do this for myself, and for my children and my grandchildren. No matter what difficulties life presents you with, you have a choice. You can choose to

lead the rest of your life looking back on the worst things that ever happened to you. Or you can choose to pick yourself up and brush yourself off and look forward to a better future. —**Sunny Jacobs, who spent 17 years on death row before she was proven innocent**

Show respect even to people who don't deserve it; not as a reflection of their character, but as a reflection of yours.

— Dave Willis





Dear HKF family,

Namaste! I hope you are doing well! I am doing *very well* and for the first time in years I have had a period of lasting peace. I stopped trying to change the conditions surrounding me; i.e. the people, places and things... and I just concentrated on changing the way I perceived things.

I put emotional responses away. That doesn't mean I don't feel emotions, it means I don't act upon my emotions, or expect other people to do things because I think or feel like my reaction is justified. I've realized that people are people, and they're gonna do what they do regardless of what I do, feel, or say.

I just chose not to participate in the negative aspect of behaviors. Not mine or anyone else's! It's working. I always told people "If you want to be happy... BE HAPPY!" Right? Well, I took my own advice. PRESTO. Just a decision that I'm not gonna act the way I don't want to act. And its effect on my spiritual life has been huge. Now I spend more quiet time in peace.

Now because I've changed my attitude, I know freedom. This new freedom has just materialized by my not struggling. Now people are really taking notice. An officer I had nothing but contention with for the last year stopped by my cell last night and told me "Thank you for a good week." People are looking at me like they've never seen me before.

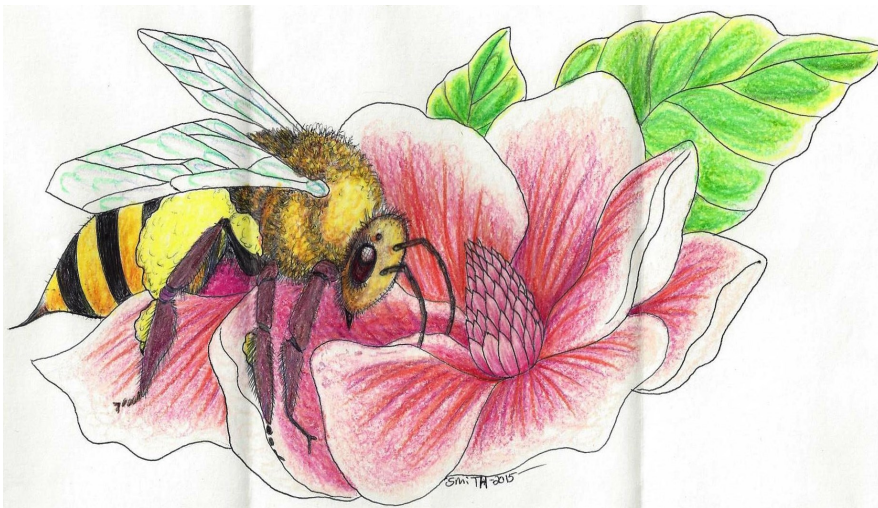
I ask myself, what have I done to be productive today? For me, for others, for society? If I just lie on my bunk all day I get stuck in a rut. If I take action, what we call practice, I get

good results.

The poem/saying you sent—"Let me be quiet having known that I reap what I have sown"—is on my wall and I meditate on it a lot. Thank you!

The Bible says to be happy in trials because patience develops perseverance until we are perfected, lacking nothing! That's how I feel today. NOT PERFECT, but WHOLE. Like I have everything I need to meet all my needs. Even the strength to say goodbye to this world when the time comes. I really feel like I've grown up. At 52! Bout time eh?

I always thought I'd be striving to find Enlightenment somehow, but since I started focusing on **freedom where I'm at** — somehow I've just become free. I was reading about Thich Nhat Hanh. He said, "When I came into the prison today I noticed the sun was the same sun, the air was the same air, the ground was the same ground." He said freedom is our choice. I began to have compassion on myself and instead of reacting as a prisoner I reacted as a free man. **THAT MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE FOR ME!**



I just wanted to share this new experience with you. I'm sure it took a whole bunch of little steps to get to this point in my journey. The thing is: today all doubt has been removed. I feel stable. I've never felt so strong before in my life. My thoughts have never been clearer and my mind is at peace.

I really don't understand how it happened. I really don't care. I'm just glad it was possible! Love, Jeffrey



"I got up one morning and decided to do a little experimenting by showing compassion and love to others. And I have found it's wonderful. I forgave everyone that has done me wrong. It felt like a great heavy weight lifted up off me. I love you all with all my heart." —**Dean, Federal Medical Center for Prisoners, Springfield, MO**

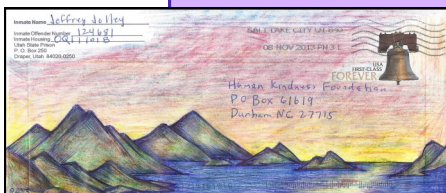
"The purpose of the construction of this mandala is to encourage every one of us to generate a compassionate heart for the benefit of all sentient beings."

—The monks of Drepung Gomang Monastery



Sita, Catherine, and Ken (an HKF volunteer) saw this mandala while it was being made in Carrboro, NC. Using colorful sand, Tibetan monks worked for 5 days in quiet, meditative precision and focus. After it was finished, in

accordance with this ancient teaching about impermanence, the monks wiped it all away.

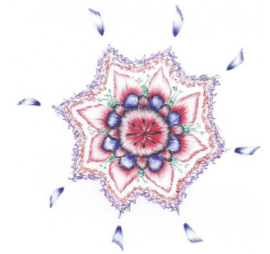


Artists in this newsletter: Pg 1: Eli King Thistlewood, Albion, PA, Piper Rountree, Troy, VA; Pg 2: Stephen Land, Angleton, TX, Francis Joseph Leary, Amarillo, TX; Pg 3: Jason Dale, Laurinburg, NC, Wyatt Fettig, Seattle, WA; Pg 4: Marc Thompson, Avenal, CA, Jimmy Stewart, Crescent City, CA, John Sanger, Hominy, OK, Wade Holman, Pampa, TX; Pg 5: Forrest Hawthorne, Angleton, TX, Brian Lee Smith, Norton, KS, Scott Haendel, Conneaut, OH; Pg 6: Jeffrey Jolley, Draper, UT; Pg 7: George Laura, Henning, TN, Terry Hyatt, Raleigh, NC.

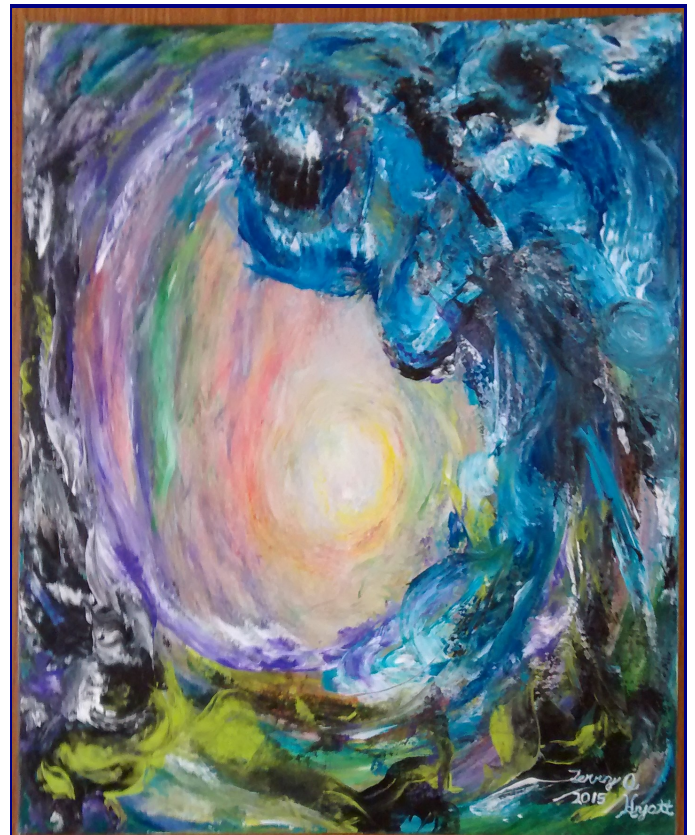


Meet the newest Lozoff!

Joseph, son of Josh and Melissa Lozoff, is also bringing great joy to his grandmother, Sita.



This beautiful painting, titled **"The Light Shines Through The Darkness,"** is by Terry Hyatt, a resident of Central Prison and a member of the mindfulness group on his Unit. Once a month, Sita and Catherine visit with mindfulness groups in two units of Central, NC's highest-security prison. We send our love and thanks to the men in both groups, for their presence with us each month, their openness to spiritual practice, and their willingness to share their journeys with us. What they share helps us deepen our understanding and, we hope, is reflected in what we offer to everyone who writes to HKF.



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Love from all of us at HKF:
Pam, Catherine, Sita, John (front row), Gabe, Aaron, Michele, Judy, Ann, Hannah (middle row), Richard, Joe, Chris (back row), and others who couldn't be here for the picture. We wish you deep peace and many blessings.