

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Christmas 2008

LIFE IS GOOD

[Transcribed & edited from a talk given by Bo Lozoff in Costa Mesa CA, in March, 2006]

I hope that every time we have a meeting like this, we change ourselves – not just learn more about some subject like prisons. I'm hoping to be a deeper, more inspired and committed person when I leave the room tonight, and I invite you to do the same. We all have subconscious, semiconscious and unconscious metering devices in our heads. For example, if it were the Dalai Lama sitting here, your metering device might be set to change more, and with me sitting here your metering device is set less than with him, but maybe a little more than with somebody you've never heard of. Well, my metering device is hardwired at full tilt, because I want to change as much as possible every time I meet somebody or engage in any kind of activity, experience or exchange, because that's really what it's about – changing. **Constantly.** Shedding the layers of the onion until we're ripe, deep, compassionate, unafraid, simple people. I have never seen a time in our national life that it's more appropriate or would be more beneficial to do that. There are people in horrendous suffering all around us, all over the world.

There's also a lot of groundswell among religious people and religious clergy to get rid of the mystical, the transcendent, the miraculous. There's an Episcopal bishop who's just about made his whole career out of telling Christians they don't have to believe in "hokey" things like the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection to be a good Christian – he says religion is just about goodness; about human ethics.

Well, no, it's not. The Virgin Birth and Resurrection are child's play to the Holy Force that all religions are about. Nothing difficult about believing that at all. This is not a secular world; this is a mystical world. And it's not like, "Well, if I believe it, it's true for me but if you don't believe it, it's simply not true for you." That's like saying if I believe my heart pumps blood, then that's true for me but if you believe that your heart digests your food, that's true for you. There are certain absolutes that we don't get a choice about. The Transcendent, the Deep, the Real is an

absolute. Tens of millions of us, through the ages, have touched that Reality directly and we're called mystics.

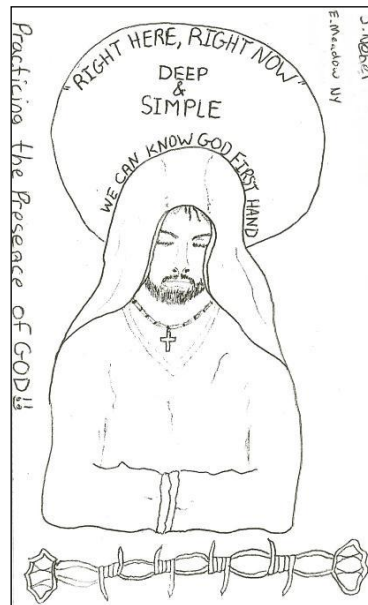
What in the East is called the Sanatana Dharma – which roughly means "universal religion" – has merely three principles: One, that there is a Divine Reality whether you call it God, Buddha Mind, the Great Spirit, the Divine Mother; it is real. Like the Dalai Lama told an interviewer a few years ago, "Sir, the Buddha was not just a nice man."

We're trying to make Jesus and Buddha and all the mystics and masters into nice men. We're trying to say, "I don't need anything deeper than human ethics to believe in. I don't need a crutch." But it's not a crutch. It's **all** that's real.

So that's one thing I just want to lay out at the beginning: I'm not secular. My life is about touching a Power and a Force that is absolutely real. I've touched it many times and it's the only thing that makes sense out of all the tough and crazy stuff we go through in the course of our lives. Kabir says, "A moment with the Beloved and the river changes her course." I like to add: "A moment with the Beloved is worth **anything** that you and I could possibly risk or sacrifice to touch it." I've spent three years in retreat. I've spent

over a year in total silence. I've fasted almost to death. I've spent months at a time in total isolation. It's all nothing compared to a single moment of touching what is Real.

So don't settle for the psychological spirituality that's popular these days: "Whatever you're comfortable with is fine." No, it's not. The Absolute is Real. And you know something? Being comfortable is pretty dull. It's really nice to live without fear. It's really nice to stop worrying about your comfort. It's really nice to know what Jesus meant when he said, "Be in the world *but not of it*." We never think about the second half of that sentence – "but not of it." I've been an activist since the 1960's. I've dedicated my life to working in the world. But what did He mean, "Be in the world *but not of it*?" There is something to be *of* that's so much bigger that we never get burned out on our activism, that we're not just so frustrated and tense. We keep doing



work in the world, but, sweet friends, that's not the world we're *of*. Thank God.

And the world we're *of* is not a crutch for those who are unable to face the ugliness of the reality of this world. This world and all its good and evil, all our hopes and dreams, the noblest ideals of how people can live together – it's the size of a pea. And the world we are *of* is the size of the galaxy. We have unlimited strength to draw on when we know where we are *of*, in order to work in this really struggling, suffering, challenging world of all the contradictions and evils that we are *in*.

After Sita and I came back from a meeting with the Dalai Lama in India in 1994, I was on the phone with one of my most intimate elders, an eighty-five year old British Anglican monk, and I said, "You know, Father Murray, His Holiness is so completely in touch with the suffering of his people and the world, he's not in any way detached from anybody's suffering. And yet he's the happiest human being I've ever met in my life. He can hardly say ten words without laughing."

Father Murray's instant response, being a wise man himself, was, "Yes, Bo, and can you imagine how much **pain** that man has been willing to endure in order to become this happy?" And I got it. There's no Resurrection without the Crucifixion. And so I've just lent myself to that pain. I've shown up time and time again. I'm walking around in a much bigger world than I've ever walked around in. I'm no longer "*of* this world." It's not just rumors – the things that the wisest, most loving people have handed down to us, like, "Take courage and be of good cheer;" "I'm with you until the end of the world."

It's all literally true. We're so worried that it's going to hurt. Yes, it is. But we're bigger than anything that can possibly kill us, and that's the secret. There's a lot of fear in meeting God. There's a lot of fear in splitting every atom. Every one of the atoms we split within ourselves to open up power – it's a fearful leap. But it's okay. We can do it again and again. After we do it the first few times, then we say, "Yeah, I'm afraid but I really want to know God. So yes I'm afraid, but I don't care. I'm going to keep saying 'yes.' I'm going to keep opening up." We just change our relationship to fear.

Ram Dass used an analogy of skydiving: We're free falling, and you suddenly reach for your ripcord, and you find you don't have a parachute at all. You start freaking out and you call out to someone like me, "I don't have a parachute!", and I call back to you, "It's okay: there's no ground."

That's us – we do have to leap, but we never hit ground. Life flows. Life flows and we flow with it, and it's okay because we're people of faith. What it means to be a person of faith is, Life is Good. There's an ultimate Good, not an ultimate randomness or neutrality or chaos. This enormous

explosive power of the universe, what Hindus call Krishna Consciousness, it's not neutral. The Buddhist "Shunyata," the emptiness, is not a void. It is filled with Good. The emptiness is filled with Goodness. The whole flavor of Light is Goodness; it's Holiness beyond our wildest comprehension. It's just so Good.

And the Light is at hand; it's available to all of us and it's only our false self-

protection that keeps us small and limited. We have this popular word, "boundaries." Forget about boundaries; boundaries are for volleyball. George Bernard Shaw has a beautiful quote that we put in *We're All Doing Time*:

This is the true joy in life: Being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

It makes you squirm because it really hits the nail on the head. A "selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the *world* will not devote itself to making *you* happy."

Tonight is the time to do something about it. It always seems like it's not quite yet. Tonight is the time to decide: "I'm a person of faith; I do believe in this ultimate Good. Self-protection is a lie." And *how* that looks in your life – living more simply, opening your heart more – that's your adventure every day. But the intention and the commitment are very simple. Applying it may sometimes be complicated. But with daily practice, we strengthen our intention and commitment – they remain forever simple. You say, "I'm a person of faith; I want to give up this self-protection that's keeping me so tiny and afraid. And I'm doing it; this is it. I'm signing up, and I'm gonna sign up every single day of my life."

We can do that. It doesn't ever have to get more sophisticated than that. How does it look as we walk around with the enormous number of decisions we have to make?: What is selfish here? What is unselfish? Does it mean I let everybody take advantage of me? Of course not. So that's your adventure movie. That's going to be different for everybody. The application is a different adventure for everyone, but the commitment is the same. Life is Good. It's going to bring ups and downs, but Life is Good, even when it takes me through poverty or suffering or loss or grief. Life is ultimately good. That is not up for debate. ☸



PRACTICE: THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE

With Bo on sabbatical, we decided to print a practice from another teacher. This practice was written by Lama Chuck Stanford, who is the volunteer chaplain at Lansing Correctional Facility and regularly visits Buddhist inmate groups at five prisons in the Kansas/Missouri area. Reprinted with permission from the Rime Buddhist Center, copyright 2008—All Rights Reserved.



We usually think of being thankful or grateful at Thanksgiving, but I think an attitude of gratitude is important all year long. Meister Eckhart, one of the great Christian mystics of the 13th century said, “If the only prayer you say in your life is ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.” The Buddha said: “Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn’t learn a lot today, at least we learned a little, and if we didn’t learn a little, at least we didn’t get sick, and if we got sick, at least we didn’t die; so, let us be thankful.”

Recently, I visited the Buddhist inmate group at the US Disciplinary Barracks. One of the inmates told me about being out on the yard and seeing an incredibly beautiful sunset. He commented to another inmate about the beauty of that particular moment. The other inmate said, “Yeah, but it would be a lot better if we didn’t have to see it through that stinkin’ chain link fence.” The first inmate said he didn’t mind the fence, he could just enjoy the beauty of the moment, while the second inmate missed the beauty of the moment because all he could see was the fence. Practicing gratitude can make all the difference.

There is a wonderful story about gratitude involving Argentine golfer Roberto de Vincenzo. After winning a tournament, he received the check and smiled for the cameras. As he walked to his car, a young woman approached. She congratulated him on his victory and then told him her child was seriously ill and near death. De Vincenzo was touched by her story and took out a pen and endorsed his winning check for payment to the woman. “Make some good days for the baby,” he said as he pressed the check into her hand. The next week he was having lunch at the country club when a PGA official came to his table. “Some of the guys in the parking lot last week told me you met a young woman there after you won the tournament.” De Vincenzo nodded. “Well,” said the official. “I have news for you. She’s a phony. She’s not married. She has no baby. She fleeced you, my friend.” “You mean there is no baby who is dying?” said de Vincenzo. “That’s right.” “That’s the best news I’ve heard all week,” said de Vincenzo. De Vincenzo was not angry or upset that he had been taken advantage of – instead, he was grateful that there was no dying baby.

Imagine an experiment involving two people. One is asked to spend ten minutes each morning and evening expressing gratitude (there is always something to be grateful for), while the other is asked to spend the same amount of time practicing complaining (there is, after all, always something to complain about).

One of the subjects is saying, “I hate my job. I can’t stand my apartment. Why can’t I make more money? My spouse doesn’t get along with me. The dog next door never stops barking, and I just can’t stand this neighborhood.”

The other is saying, “I’m grateful for my health. What a gorgeous day; I really like this fall breeze.”

They do this experiment for a year. Guaranteed, at the end of that year the person practicing complaining will have deeply reaffirmed all his negative “stuff,” while the one practicing gratitude will be a very grateful person.

Expressing gratitude can, indeed, change our way of seeing the world and ourselves.

So take time every day to stop and think about things that you are grateful for. ☸

LETTERS

* Friends, please note that Bo is on sabbatical right now, and not able to personally answer any letters. The following correspondence took place earlier this year.*

Dear Bo,

Hi my name is D, and as anyone can tell I'm in prison. I've been in ad seg now for 17 months And I received your book We're All Doing Time – by the way it was great. Anyway I'm just writing cause I've been living through one crazy life, but the thing that's been killing me the last few years is how I lost my children. Don't get me wrong they're alive but because of their mother (K) and things I've done to her I have not seen them in 4 years now. She hates me with a passion and it kills me because all I can do is love her. I wish she would understand that when I was out there on drugs, that was not me, and I'm truly sorry for the things I've done. But she has taken off and is hiding. I've tried to put this all behind me but it's a daily nightmare I live through.

I love my children so much how do I just forget and move on? I know this was just a journey I had to go on to learn from my mistakes, but will I ever see my children again? My date is coming up soon and I don't want anything to keep me down or stop me

prison is not where I want my life to be. What am I to do? I know I must work on getting my life together but how do I get over this hurt pain and loss of my children? What makes it so bad is I always promised my children I will always be there for them and not abandon them as I was as a child but I look at how things are and can't help but feel so much hurt and guilt for causing all this. How do I move on and still hold the love for my children without giving up on them?

Well I guess I'll end at this but please if you have any words of wisdom please send them. No one will ever answer me about these issues I have.

Always, D.

Hi D,

It's good to know you, and I'm so sorry about losing contact with your children. In a way, though, you can be grateful that it hurts you so much, because I know tons of fathers in prison who never think about all the kids they've left behind.

The best hope you can have for the chance of ever having a relationship with your kids again is to get out and make something decent out of your life. Talk is cheap. K has probably heard your apologies before. You need to be patient and extremely committed to creating a new life for yourself that has nothing to do with drugs or crime. Become a good,

caring, unselfish man who is a blessing to others around him wherever you live. And as you do that, have a little faith that perhaps Life will bring you together again with your kids.

You ask how to “forget about” your kids and move on with your life. You're not

if you never see them again!! You need to pray for them every day of your life, feel your love for them – not the selfish love about how much you miss them, but the unselfish love that says “I hope you have a wonderful life, sweethearts, and I am so sorry I let you down.” Keep them in your heart every day. You may even want to write them letters once a month that you keep to give them someday when you see them, even if it's 20 years from now. That will show them you always cared.

But to just bitch and moan about missing them and how K is being unfair, will do you or them no good at all. Actions speak louder than words, brother. Become a good man with a life that works and then see what happens if you have an opportunity to communicate with K after a couple years of being successful, responsible, reliable, etc. Life is big, D, and it brings many good things to pass. You need to focus on your part. I wish you every good thing. Do this the right way, okay? Patience and persistence. Never give up.

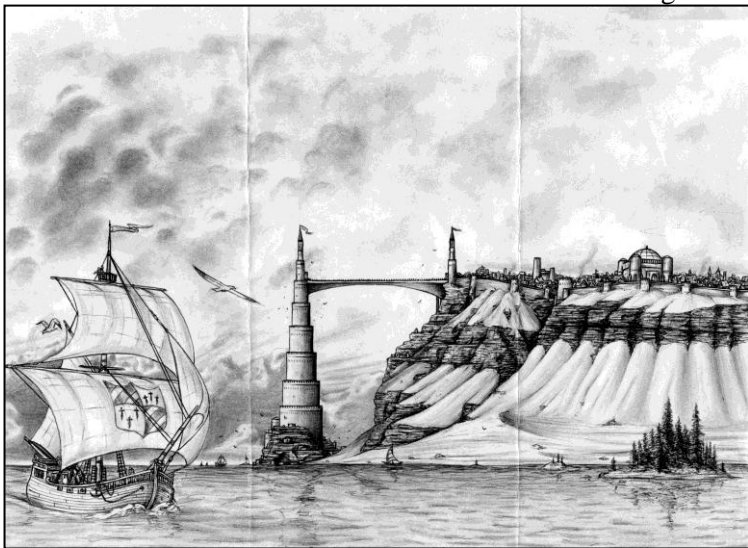
Love, Bo



Hi to all,

I've been thru some highs and lows during these past 13 years of incarceration. I've had times that tested my decision to lead a non-violent life, and for the most part I never slipped back to the selfish, miserable, hateful, SOB I once was. But in the last month I have found myself questioning all I've come to believe in, especially myself.

Recently I was notified my 19 year-old niece K was murdered by her 16 year-old boyfriend. This sick punk put a 20 gauge shotgun 6" from her left eye as she slept, woke her up and told her, “I want you to see who is going to kill you” and pulled the trigger. There were so many early warning signs, but no one took them serious.



from making it out there because

supposed to forget about your kids even

He beat her up numerous times, and forced her to prostitute herself with threats of violence, as well as threats to kill all, including K's grandmother (my mom).

The last time I saw K was 9 or 10 years ago here in the visiting room. To me she is forever that smart, beautiful, shy little girl. The deep shock and devastation that all in my family have felt seems to resonate still. I've ran thru all the emotions one would imagine a person would feel at such horrible news.

Very quickly I came to realize the deep, intense anger that I have for this punk. It was such a stupid and senseless act of a coward. it makes me sick. So here I sit, no longer caring to be non-violent. I can honestly say if I could get to this piece of crap I'd take his life in a heartbeat. The moment he pulled that trigger, he gave up his right to breathe another breath. As I write this, I know this punk is sitting alone in a jail cell breathing in and out while my niece lies in her coffin under six feet of dirt.

Fuck him. My family says they want this punk to do life so he'll have to wake up everyday seeing K's face as he killed her. They are p.o.'d at me because I want him dead. Sure it won't change anything and sure it won't bring her back. Nothing will, but at least that punk won't be breathing and living.

See, my family has no idea how it is in prison. They think every person who murders someone is remorseful, and

granted a lot of the lifers I know are, but there is a small percent of those who have taken a life that brag about what they did, wearing their coward act like a badge of honor. They have no compassion, no respect for anyone or anything. I know of punks like this, they are the biggest cowards of all. So to think this punk will do life in prison bragging about how he killed this bitch and she deserved it, etc. is like a knife being thrust into my heart time after time.

The reality is even if I wanted to I could never get to this punk ever. But that is not a comfort to me. Never have I ever tried to take someone's life. I've done a lot of horrible things but killing a person was never one of them, but if I could, I would. My lifer friends urge me to let go of my hate and anger and find a way to forgive

him. As I told them, screw that, I'll never forgive or forget.

I know my sweet niece wouldn't ever want violence, or any kind of retribution, but I am not the sweet loving person she was. So now I question why I could ever have had friends that took other people's lives. Even though the lifers I know as

friends are decent people who are very remorseful, how can I ever accept what they did to not only their victims but also their victims families? How could I have ever accepted such people? Yet, here I sit with murderous thoughts in my head. I wonder if their victims' families have forgiven them, and if they have, how and why would they? The last thing I could ever see myself doing is forgiving this piece of shit.

Peace to you all, maybe someday I'll find mine once again.

C

Dear C,

Hello, friend. This is Josh, Bo and Sita's son. Bo is out of the office on sabbatical for awhile, and there are several of us here answering the mail.

That is a very intense situation you find yourself in right now. You sound very sure of your feelings, so I don't want to spend too much time trying to "convince" you to let go of your anger. You know what we stand for, you know what we believe, and you know we're here to help you along in your journey in any way we can.

However, since you do understand the heart of our work, I don't think you would have written us unless there was a part of you wanting to get past this intense anger and hatred. So I will offer a couple of thoughts. Do know that they come from someone who is not an across-the-board pacifist. I have trained hard in martial arts my whole life, there are several wars I probably would have fought in if I'd had the chance, and I believe there are times when a man's responsibility may include protecting and defending others.

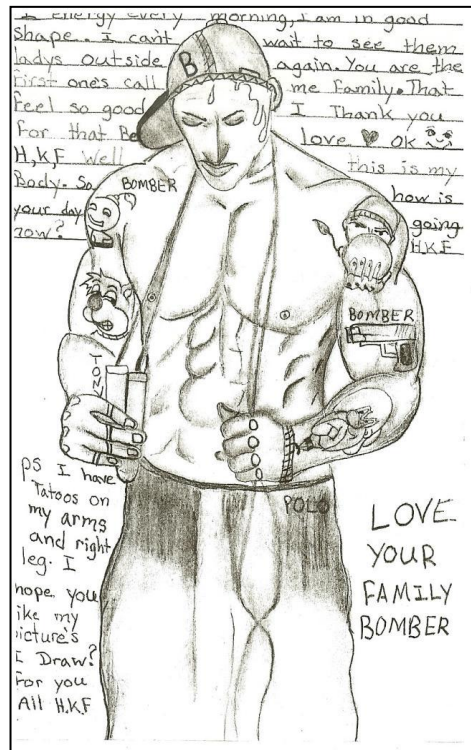
First of all, my heart breaks for your family. K, you and your whole family are all in our thoughts and prayers.

You say you never want to forgive or forget, and though your friends urge you to let go of your hate and anger, you never will. But you also admit you'll never be able to get to this guy. So one thing your friends may see a bit more clearly than you right now, is that your anger and hatred are only hurting one person – you. Your feelings aren't changing this kid's experience one bit. His path, whether it ever involves remorse for his actions, whether it involves life or death, is completely beyond your control.

That's frustrating to the part of you that wants to put your hands around his neck, but it's also a huge gift. It means at your deepest level, you know that your anger serves absolutely no purpose. It's just tormenting you. It's not for this kid's sake that your friends are encouraging you to let go of your anger, it's for yours. The same as encouraging a friend to stop doing drugs, or fucking up their marriage. They see behavior that's only hurting yourself. Yes, you have the right to stay angry, hateful and miserable for the rest of your life. What does that do to this kid, other than to allow him to ruin your life the same as he's ruined others?

And the big irony in all this – one that I imagine has occurred to you in your calmer moments – is that you readily admit to having been a “selfish, miserable, hateful SOB.” You may not have ever killed anyone, but that's a very convenient distinction for you to make: people who've done what you did have the possibility of turning their lives around (as you have), but murderers don't? I believe – and I hope deep down you do, too – that everyone has the possibility of transformation. It *may* never happen to this kid this lifetime, but that was true of you, too. And yet here we are.

Another thing to remember about anger is that – as valid as it seems in the moment – it's usually masking a whole bunch of other feelings. There's a lot of grief in there, plain and simple. And frustration that your family didn't do more to recognize the warning signs before K was killed. Maybe even some self-hatred that you're locked up and weren't out there to protect her. The problem with using anger to cover up all that other stuff, is that those things need to be dealt with. So do you want to put that off for years, and just be angry at this



Sean Fenwick. Beaumont. TX

kid, or do you want to be tougher than that, and allow yourself to feel all the pain you may be feeling?

What a bundle of contradictions anger and hatred are, huh? You love K and hate her killer, yet the instinctive reaction her tragic death brings up in you is to want to be more like him (violent and hate-filled) and less like her (sweet and loving). I'm not even saying that's crazy. I understand it. But these are the times when it's the most important to affirm our deepest beliefs. This kid is God's business. In prison he may change his life totally around like you and many of your friends have done. Or he may be one of the “small percent,” as you say, that stay shallow, self-centered and cowardly. But to be 100% positive that he will never change or grow... That's not writing him off, that's writing off God. Beyond the pain, beyond the anger, you'll have to figure out if you're comfortable writing off God in that way.

Okay, my friend. A lot to think about if you want to. Again, please know that our hearts ache with yours. This sorrow is as big as it gets. And so is the opportunity you have in terms of how you deal with it all.

Blessings,

Josh

Dear Bo,

In the book of Job, his friends came and sat with him for seven days saying nothing after they saw his suffering. I felt someone's pain yesterday, and that's why I had to write you this letter. This 18 year old kid is in here for capital murder. He killed a 76 year old woman to get drug money. He was crying, telling me through the window in his door that he was so messed up, he did not mean to, he just pushed her, she was old, she fell, hit her head, died. So he panics, gets her car, gas card, a gas can and drives to a store, pumps gas in the can, comes back, sets the place on fire to cover it all up. They got him on video at the store with her card, car, and he lives next door to the woman. Anyways, while he's telling me all this, I'm just staring into his eyes, and all of a sudden, I am hurting so much for him, but also I feel his pain like it's me who killed that lady. I start crying like a baby. I had to go back to my cell and shut my door. I cried for 45 minutes.

It was so weird. I can't be crying like this, not in jail. What if someone sees me? – that's what I was thinking, but I don't care – I have so much love, even for this kid I had never met before...

Always, W



It's gift-giving season!



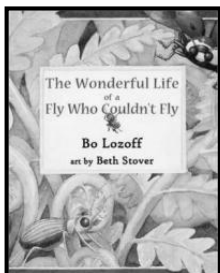
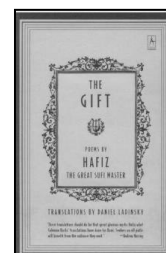
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A few friends gathered shortly before Bo began his sabbatical. We miss him around here, but we know he is doing important work, which will benefit us all. Please keep him in your prayers.

Before going on sabbatical, Bo gave a lengthy website interview. To see video clips or listen to the entire interview, go to www.iHanuman.com.