



Together-Apart: Sharing Our Sorrows

My dear friends,

Exactly one year ago, in our Summer/Fall 2020 newsletter, we introduced the idea of sitting “Together-Apart.” We really had no idea at the time how much this practice would take off. We have heard from many people inside jails and prisons and on the outside. They tell us that joining us on Wednesdays is a profound practice of connecting with the HKF family all over the world.

Dearhearts, for me this practice touches a deep place in my heart where I feel an age-old truth: everybody suffers. It’s not new. Pandemics and other calamities are the forms, and yes, those change. But it has always been true, like the Buddha said in the Four Noble Truths, that everybody suffers. This truth doesn’t make it hurt less. Sometimes that place in my heart feels like a deep pit of sadness.

The joy of our “together-apart” practice is that we can join together to bring love into this world that’s filled with such immense sorrow. When we focus our loving energy on the many suffering beings in the world—wishing them peace and joy, wishing them relief from their suffering—we actually

bring healing and love into the world. When we know that others

are doing the same for us, we feel better. I believe it is possible to lighten each other’s burdens in this way. Practicing compassion has made me a happier person. It can do the same for you.

So if you would like to join me on Wednesdays, please sit with me and focus your loving energy, in whatever way you’re drawn, to all suffering beings. Send gentle and tender thoughts to all, including yourself. Sit with the intention of beaming love to all who suffer, which is everybody.

I’ll “see” you on Wednesday, dear friends! Much, much love, Sita



The practice: From 7:00pm to 8:00pm on Wednesdays (or any time if that hour isn’t possible for you) meditate, pray, or do other spiritual practices in community with your Human Kindness Foundation family. You can join us using any spiritual practice that you dedicate to compassion for all who are suffering.

From a friend inside:

"Sita, when my long-time wonderful cellie was transferred to another prison, we both found comfort in the fact that we would be together in prayer and meditation on Wednesday evenings.

Thanks so much for coming up with this way for us to be Together-Apart."

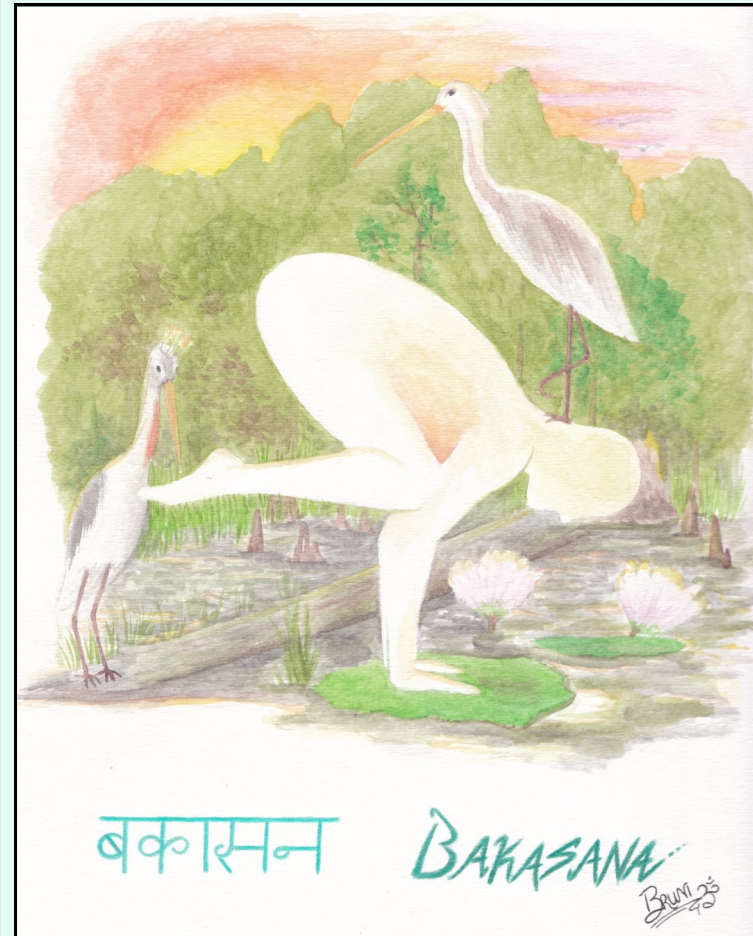


From one of the first participants in “Together-Apart”:

“One of the Muslim brothers on my block got me started with this practice, and Sita joined us after a short time. I’m able to be there every week, ready because I know you’re there and you always bring more people. To you all I gladly say Namaste. Thank you Sita for making that time so very special to me that I might join the world in prayer.”

Repairing our relationships: Mark shares his experience

In a 2012 newsletter, we shared an interview with our friend and HKF volunteer Mark. [Mark is not his real name. These newsletters go out to more than 30,000 people and we chose to protect his privacy even though he is open and honest about his past.] Mark no longer lives in North Carolina where he was volunteering with HKF, but he agreed to respond to this recent letter from "W." Whether your charges are similar to Mark's or not, the tools and practices he used during his incarceration are available to you.



Mark is now married, employed, and continuing his spiritual practices. Service to others is a top priority in his life. Here's how he describes that commitment:

"I think the best way to honor my victim and my family is to be an ethical person, and never harm anybody again, and to do as much good as I can in this world. That was all part of why I needed to change. ... My transformation has been a gradual process. I still have work to do. You know, I've hurt a lot of people. It's easy to hurt people. It's much more meaningful and difficult to help people. I'm really committed to a path of not harming. I feel like as long as I keep that as my true north, that I keep my eye on that commitment and let it guide me, then I'll be all right. And it does get easier."

Mark's connection with HKF started when his friend Mike gave him the book *Deep & Simple*. Mike is doing a life sentence, and Mark was intrigued by the life of service and spiritual practice Mike had made for himself. Mark is grateful to Mike for connecting him to HKF all those years ago, and they are still close friends.

If you don't have *Deep & Simple*, you can request it by writing to: HKF, PO Box 61619, Durham NC 27715.

Dear Mark,

Some years back, I read your story in an HKF newsletter about the rape you committed—it was almost like reading about myself. A few months ago, I met a woman. I was honest with her about my charges. So for me being honest, she put money on my books. All was good until she wanted to know about the nature of my case. Cut a long story short: she cut me off.

So how do I handle this when I meet a woman? Should I be 100% honest? I am not the same person now that I was when I committed this crime. I want people to see me for me and not the choices I have made in my past. How do you deal with it, if you don't mind me asking?

Yours truly, W

Dear W,

Thank you for your letter. I will do my best to answer your question. I'm not sure when your release date is but I imagine that you will want to have emotionally and mentally healthy romantic relationships when you're released. It's a reasonable desire and what *most guys* want. Just keep in mind, if you are on the spiritual path then you are not *most guys*.

I would not make romance a priority. I spent 6 years working on myself when I was incarcerated and did not have any female penpal friends during that time. In other words, I didn't try to find romance while I was inside. When I was released in 2005 I had some basic priorities based upon the spiritual principles that I wanted to practice in my life and the new person I wanted to be. Jumping right into a romance was not on my priority list.

Why? **Because I was not mentally/emotionally/spiritually ready!!** I needed to do some more work on myself: Meditation, prayer, finding employment and rebuilding relationships with family and friends. For many guys finding housing is a big thing.

Also very important was working on my recovery/sobriety and going to 12 Step meetings, humbling myself by keeping my mouth shut in the meetings and listening so that I could learn the wisdom, experience, strength and hope of others. Over time I was able to share some of my own experience, strength, and hope with others to help them in their recovery. So those were some of my priorities.

W, there is a trust issue that we need to rebuild with friends and family. We need to do **some fixing and repairs**, my friend. Mostly folks' unspoken attitude in regards to me was: "ok, you're out of prison now, but *show me, don't tell me.*" As you well know, many dudes in the joint are full of promises. If I had a dollar for every time I heard a guy say, "I'll be a good guy from now on, I'll never do that again. I'm a new man etc etc." You know, it's a fair expectation for those that we've hurt to be a little cautious and even skeptical about such claims. I don't blame them. Trust takes time to build. So if we're going to be a handyman and do some fixing upon our release, **we need to start with fixing ourselves.**

Being inside gives us an opportunity for this. If we're going to be spiritual handy-men we need to get some tools for that. What better time to develop those tools than right NOW?!? Please don't squander this opportunity by being distracted with people putting money on your books. Fix yourself brother (I still work on myself daily). We need good guys like you out here.

Very generally speaking I've known two types of people who are released from

prison: **Those who give, and those who take.** The

dudes who want to give back upon their release are humble, sincere, and looking for ways to be of service. Their attitude is: "How can I help? How can I be part of the solution rather than part of the problem?" Others who get out have the basic attitude of "give me, give me, give me!! What's in it for me? How can I get over on somebody? I deserve this, I'm entitled to that."

It's your choice what kind of person you want to be. But I can tell you this: the "takers" I've known always end up back in the joint, dead from an overdose, or living through some other calamity. They are deeply unhappy people. I've seen it time and time again. It's no joke.

I had a strong feeling of wanting to give back when I got released, and service to others is still a big part of my life and my spiritual path. I cannot emphasize enough, W, how critical a spiritual path is for our recovery from being incarcerated. Bo's books will give you plenty of practices for being a calmer, kinder human being. Central to our spiritual path is an ethical/moral element that we *must* use to guide us on the path. You see W, repairing our relationships to others, earning trust, building bridges takes time. But if you carry yourself in an honest, ethical, compassionate and upright way then you will gain the trust and respect of others.

This will happen of its own accord if you stay focused on a sincere spiritual path.

So back to your question: YES!! I would be honest with people about my background. Now this does not mean you tell everyone you meet, right off the bat. You need to use your wisdom and discretion. Not everybody is open-minded, and disclosing too much could harm you and frighten others for no reason. Later in my release, after I had done some work on my priorities and had my life in decent condition, I *did* pursue romantic relationships. I always

made it personal policy that no matter what, at



some point relatively early in the romance, I would be honest with the lady I was dating. Once again you have to use your judgment on the timing but I would always be truthful. I start those conversations by saying something like "I have to speak with you about something very difficult for me to talk about." When I disclose my past I speak in general terms about my conviction and emphasize the work I did on myself and thus the changes I made while incarcerated. Be humble and sincere, and if you've changed many people will see it and give you a chance.

I can tell you based on my experience: most of the people that I was honest with were pretty accepting of my past. As you stated in your letter, we are not the same person who committed those harmful acts. So, my personal policy is full disclosure of the past, early in a romance. Since you asked, I suggest that you do the same.

In regards to your letter and the lady that you were in contact with, I know it does not feel good to be rejected. You can't change other people but you can change how you react and relate to people and situations. Let it go. Move on.

An important part of my spiritual beliefs include closely examining motivation. So, for example, if I'm locked up, what exactly is my motivation for wanting a penpal or communication with someone for possible romance? Am I lonely? Afraid? Am I being selfish and just want some-

one to put money on my books? Is it both? Take it deeper. Why am I lonely and fearful? If I'm being greedy and selfish, that is not a good motivation and I need to let the thought of using somebody go. Selfishness is not in line with my values and the kind of person I want to be.

I truly hope you spend some more time while you're inside in introspection and spiritual practice. Be of service to someone. If you're in recovery go to 12 Step meetings. Pick up some of Bo's books. Read, study, and put into practice what you learn. Go Deep man. Get some tools. We know you can do it!! Don't give up brother!! —Mark



This photo of Mark was taken in the HKF office in 2012.



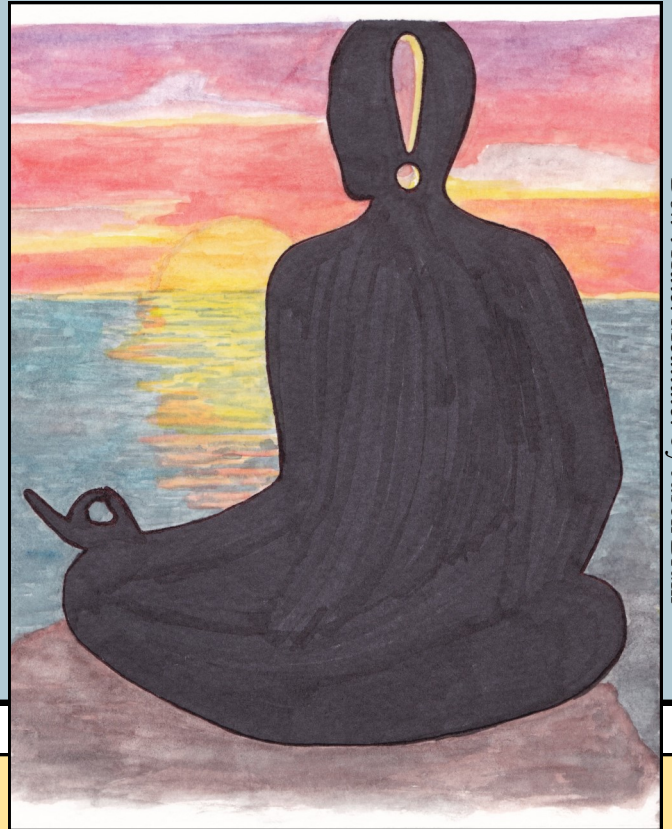
The HKF Board of Directors & staff: Chris, Catherine, Morgan, Aaron, Jaki, Sita, Gina, Joe. Not pictured: Mecca.



Thank you, artist Kenneth Pierott, for this envelope reminding us of a Biblical promise that the Peace of God is available to all of us in prayer. *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 4:6-7



My Love Runs Deep by Jason Bruni



Don't Hate. Meditate! by Jason Bruni

Many thanks to the artists: pg 1: Robert Joseph Swainston, Gatesville TX (birds), Stephen Stoeltje, Beaumont TX (mandala), Paul Garvin, Canon City CO (flower); pg 2: Jason Bruni, Graceville FL; pg 3: John Scott Badgett, Raleigh, NC; pg 5: Kenneth Pierott, Midway, TX (“Philippians” envelope), Jason Bruni, Graceville FL; pg 6 & 7: Paul Garvin, Canon City CO; pg 8: Christopher Ellis, Spruce Pine NC.

Letters

Dear HKF,

I received 2 books and a newsletter from the Human Kindness Foundation. That was quick! I have devoured both books and started to practice the yoga and meditation they teach. These books are turning out to really change my outlook on life and helping me to deal with the day-to-day stresses of being incarcerated. I honestly cannot emphasize enough the benefits to meditating daily combined with yoga. Set small goals and every day focus on reaching those goals.

—J, Huntsville, TX



Dear Sita & HKF,

I was giving a girl in my trailer park heroin to shoot me up because I was so bad about doing it myself. That went on for about a month, then things went to hell when she shared the heroin with her boyfriend and he overdosed. I was charged with manslaughter.

So my own stupidity and bad selfish decisions stole someone's son from his mama. I do not blame anyone but myself, and even though it was a mistake, I feel so much pain and guilt that I tell myself even a life sentence isn't justice for being the cause of that young man's death and a mother's pain of losing her son just because I wanted to get high. I hope someday to forgive myself. Maybe I can with the help of your books and my own spiritual awakening.

It's crazy to me how much writing this down to a total stranger feels like a weight lifted off, and so I'll continue to write your foundation. Thank you for all you do. You are all angels on earth.

Love Always, S

Dear S,

Thank you for your letter. We are very sorry to hear about what happened. It was a tragic accident that we know you did not do deliberately. I hope you will work on learning to forgive yourself for this. There are karmic forces in play in all



of our lives, and how we deal with those karmic forces can either create new karma or purify old karma. Our lives are not random accidents—all things have purpose, and that young man's life had purpose too. You can go to his spirit in meditation and tell him how sorry you are and how you feel. Ask for his forgiveness and make things right on a soul level. He has his karma too, and the two of you share some of that karma. It is important for your soul's journey—and his too. The scope of the uni-

verse of souls is so far beyond our comprehension that we cannot understand it all—nor are we meant to. But you can have total faith that it all has purpose.

Love, Donna



Dear Catherine,

I'm currently serving time in a state prison. I have been away since 2013 and as of right now my release date is 2034. I went to trial and lost and they box-carred my time meaning that I have more than one sentence—when one ends the next one starts. But I hope and pray I'll get it changed so I can get out sooner.

In the last month or so I have become more into the Word. I have always known that there is a God but now I'm trying to fully give myself to God. My mind, body, and soul completely. And in doing so I feel that God has been talking to me and giving me little signs that I'm going to be released in the next 5 years or so. When he is ready for me to go, that is. Like when I first start doing my time God told me that he will give me my freedom and return me to my family when I get my mind, body, and soul together. And he never told me

at first how to do it. But now I feel that he has come to me and told me that now is my time to do these things.

Ok first he put me in the same prison as my brother which I haven't seen in 15 years. My brother has life plus, and we didn't have too much of a relationship due to him being away so long. I done a year on lock up and the whole time I was doing my lockup time I beg the Lord to send me wherever my brother was at and low and behold he did it. When

I got put in the block with my brother we start partying hard. That went on for awhile, till I just say that I'm not going to smoke no more cause I seen that it was taking us down. But at the same time he was still doing him. Then the prison goes on lockdown for something that happened in another block. And on lockdown I start to work out a little and get into the Word. I remembered what the Lord told me about how he will send me back home once I get myself together and give myself to him completely. So I tell my brother this and he gives me a couple spiritual books. And the more I read I just feel the Lord in me more and more. For real these books bring me closer to God than ever before. I can't believe some of the things that I see now that I didn't and couldn't see before.

Now don't get me wrong I still am weak and still don't feel that I have gave my whole self to the Lord just yet. But I pray all the time and try my best to do so. Then tonight a inmate that I deal with bring me your HKF "A Little Good News" and I read it and just feel that I need to write you and ask for help to keep myself going in the right way to God. So if you're able to please write me back and send me some books to read and give me ways to stay focus on giving my whole self to the Lord. And ways to work out in my cell my mind, body, and soul. Thank you so much!

L

Dear L,

Thank you for your letter. I appreciate your powerful faith and your motivation to give your whole self to God. We're sending you some books. Our books include the kinds of practices you asked for: ways to

improve focus and dedication in your mind, body, and soul.

Congratulations on your decision to stop smoking and partying, turning your energy instead toward working out and taking your spiritual journey seriously. I think you will find great blessings on that path, and you will be able to share those blessings with your brother and other people you care about.



I can't predict what God has planned for you about a release date, but I am confident that your prayers and self-discipline will give you strength, peace, and an ever-deepening relationship with God right where you are. Let the future unfold in God's time. You're doing wonderful things with the present.

Peace & blessings,
Catherine



Dear HKF,

I hope you are well. My mother just passed away, and it's broken my heart so damn much. I lost my two daughters and their mother and now my mother—all in the last 5 years, and now my best friend may be dying.

Now I sit here lost and the books help but I ask, why me? Help me to understand, please.

Peace and Harmony, T

Dear T,

Thank you for reaching out to us. My deepest condolences, dearheart.

As far as the recent losses you have had to endure, we are all learning that grief is a force of nature, probably like no other. It grabs hold of you and dominates your heart and soul, and it can be such that you never return. But it can also open your heart in ways that nothing else can. It can teach us the vastness of our own hearts and our extreme capacity for love. We as humans have such a deep capacity for love and for grief. The best we can do sometimes is be there for one another as we each take our turns on this cosmic wheel. We hope we have a dear brother or sister in Karma who can be there for us when we need it, and who we can be there for when they need it. We are here for you,

T, and we are wrapping our virtual arms around you in your time of grief, each of us having known much grief in our own lives as well. But also, each of us has known so much love. We are sending all that love to you right now. And some day you may be able to pay that forward to another soul who needs you.

Love, Donna





humankindness.org

PO Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715



**Row, row, row your boat, Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, Life is but a dream.**

"All the ancient sages and gurus said the same thing: This is a dream. A passing dream. And it is your duty to wake up to the truth that you are powerful." —Prince Ea, American rapper, spoken word artist, and civil rights activist explaining why the children's song "Row, row, row your boat" is meaningful to him.

Our thanks to artist Chris Ellis for the envelope that reminded us of this song.