

THE PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT

a little news

Summer 1987

THE HUMAN KINDNESS FOUNDATION

As of July 1, 1987, the Prison-Ashram Project will no longer be a project of the Hanuman Foundation. It'll still be called the Prison-Ashram Project, but it'll be a project of the Human Kindness Foundation, whose purpose is "to foster greater human kindness throughout society and the world at large." For all practical purposes involving our prison work, this whole thing is only a technical change. But the change is significant to us in the sense that it reflects the direction our paths have taken toward a simpler, universal understanding.

The Power of Simple Kindness

A number of years ago, Sita and I heard that Aldous Huxley was interviewed toward the end of his life, and was asked "Dr. Huxley, perhaps more than anyone else in the world, you have studied all the great religions and spiritual traditions; can you summarize for us what you feel you have learned?" Huxley replied "I think just to be a bit kinder."

As we've gotten older, that remark has sunk deeper and deeper into our hearts. For all our seeking and exploring, this simple, ageless wisdom remains the essence of a successful life on Earth, no matter what convoluted paths we may take to learn it. There is no spiritual practice more profound, no lifestyle more creative or productive, than being kind to one's family, neighbors (even in prison), the cashier at the grocery store, an unexpected visitor, the person who does the laundry or picks up the garbage or any other of the usually "invisible" people whose paths we cross in the course of any normal day of our lives.

Certainly there are spiritual mysteries to explore, and states of ecstasy or enlightenment that can't even be described. But over the course of a lifetime of spiritual practice, we begin to see that those special experiences are only meaningful when they arise from and return to a life of ordinary kindness. Whether we're sitting in silent meditation on top of a mountain, or feeding the hungry in Ethiopia, a feeling of genuine kindness in our hearts is the practical expression of any spiritual path.

Kindness has taken a bad rap in many ways, being associated with weakness or meekness or blandness. But true kindness comes from strength, and is full of life. I'm not talking about formula kindness or phony gestures. I'm not saying we should walk around smiling constantly, saying "have a nice day" as if we were just three-dimensional bumper stickers with no individual personalities. I've visited ashrams where people come up to me all day long saying, "Oh, how nice to see you; is there any way I can serve you; you're such a beautiful being". By the end of the day, I'm ready to pound somebody's face against the wall just to get a real human reaction! Although the motives may be great, a pasted-on smile and stale slogans come off as impersonal rather than personal; they tend to increase the gap between people rather than decrease it.

The real point is a matter of the heart, not the mind. It's a matter of heartfelt respect for each and every experience of our lives, without presuming which are petty and which are significant; respect for each person, animal, machine, or anything else we find ourselves dealing with; To simply respect the mysteries of life enough to be present in each moment without formulas, indifference, or presumptions. Any moment could be the last moment of our lives, so we want to be aware and open. Nothing spectacular, nothing particularly noticeable, but just truly present in a kindly fashion, wherever we are, whomever we're with.

The normal hustle & bustle of our lives tends to bring forward a host of desires, anxieties and tensions which isolate us from the people around us, who are usually feeling all **their** desires, anxieties and tensions. Kindness is the opposite of isolation. It stems from the power and happiness of **inner** success; from a quiet mind, an open heart, an honest nature which has learned and accepted the simple fact that every living creature wants to feel cared about.

In my own journey into this teaching about kindness, it seems that one of the biggest stumbling blocks has been self-hatred (or if that sounds too strong, how about self-criticism?). I never imagined how much of that stuff I had until I began to notice that I could shrug off a thousand sincere compliments, yet grab on to one insult or criticism for months or even years. That's pretty suspicious behavior. Sound familiar?

The more I opened to the possibility that I was hard on myself, the more I saw it in action in a thousand big and little ways throughout every day. It's as if there were two people in my body: One a normal guy trying to make his life work, doing the best he can, and the other a stern, disapproving critic who seemed to be always pissed off at me at the drop of a hat, and who constantly expected me to be screwing up or at least a total phony.

And I looked around and it seemed that most of us are in the same boat: Never doing quite well enough, never living up to what we expect of ourselves, never really enjoying being the good people whom others perceive us to be. Often, the people most stuck in self-hatred are the ones who express their self-confidence the most loudly.

Who knows why we're so down on ourselves? Who cares? Does it really matter whether the cause lies in our childhood and disapproving parents, or goes all the way back to a built-in unworthiness in our whole species, stemming from original sin and separation from God? We could debate the causes endlessly while the precious moments of our lives tick away. It seems more practical to see it, work with it and move on.

I've found that the solution to self-hatred is neither irresponsible self-indulgence nor the sort of defensive, narcissistic self-approval which seems to be a fad in pop psychology. Those kinds of attitudes are just reactions which mask the real problem and keep us too busy to understand. The real solution goes right back to Huxley, but with the added understanding that being a bit kinder has to also apply to ourselves.

We can use all our hurts and joys, all the good and bad forces that molded us, to soften our hearts and embrace the world with kindness and respect. There's nothing in our lives we have to forget about or hide from. There's nothing that we can't use to become kinder. Our happiness can help to make us kinder because true happiness inspires generosity. And our sadness can help to make us kinder because we can allow our sadness to remind us of the occasions of sadness in every human being's life. Our strength can enable us to be kind if we understand that kindness doesn't diminish strength; it increases it. And even weakness, shame, and guilt can help us to be kind because, as with sadness, we can embrace those feelings in everyone and have that much more compassion for every living creature.

A friend of mine named Sujata once wrote, "This living is so hard, how can we be anything but loving?" That's a powerful thought to work with; think about your own life, and think of all the people you know -- whether you love them or loathe them -- and let his comment keep running through your mind: This living is so hard, how can we be anything but loving?

So here we are back at the beginning. We look around, use some practices here and there, make our best guesses as we go through the course of every day -- all the same stuff we've been doing since the dawn of time. And at the end of every so many years, when we've gone around in circles a thousand times and forgotten what it was we were after in the first place, when we've gotten sucked up and blown out from this movement or that teacher, this religion or that community, this drama or that scandal, somebody may write a little newsletter like this or approach us at a retreat or on the yard or on the street and say "Hey, did you ever hear what Aldous Huxley said about kindness?" And we nod our heads, laugh at ourselves, drop a hundred little burdens and complexities, and start all over again.

So Here We Are...

We formed the Human Kindness Foundation to enable us to expand the scope of our services beyond prisons. We're working on a few other pilot projects with the idea that with each workable program we create, we can offer tips and expertise to you or anyone else who might like to do something similar in your own communities. We'd like to offer free help in every way, from consulting on the general purposes of a project to specific operational strategies and even computer programs which can make the work as effective as possible.

Some potential projects of the Human Kindness Foundation --

Inspired by the Bread & Roses Project in California, we're working on the "Love Shows" project here in North Carolina. The idea is to provide free or low-cost entertainment to prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, rehab centers and other institutions.

"Knitting & Needing" -- Another project we're putting some thought into was inspired by an article in PEOPLE Magazine about a woman who coordinated a network of nursing home residents to knit warm caps, mittens and sweaters for needy people in their area. This is a great example of a wonderful, low-cost service that can be accomplished through the efforts of one person who takes the time to connect a natural need with a natural resource.

"Power of Kindness" Discussions -- Unrelated to Prison-Ashram work, I'll be giving general talks in colleges, high schools and various groups. One of my aims is to share the idea of a "career of kindness", such as non-profit work in any field. Many students and others have never really had exposure to that possibility, and a surprising number of people have no understanding of how simple it is to work for or set up a non-profit organization.

Want to help with our Logo?? -- As yet, the Human Kindness Foundation doesn't have a logo. We're wide open to ideas, sketches or actual artwork you may wish to submit for consideration. We hope to have found one by late June. What does kindness look like to you?

Donations and other help --

If you'd like to contribute toward the work of the Human Kindness Foundation, of course we welcome your donations and they're tax-deductible. If you'd like to set up a talk or workshop in your community or at a nearby university, please let us know (with as much detail as possible) and we'll send you more information or call you to talk things over. All my lecture and workshop fees are flexible, and go directly to the Human Kindness Foundation or the Prison-Ashram Project.



Love, Bo + Sita

ROCK & ROLL TOUR '87

A few days ago we finished our second annual NC prison rock & roll tour with an outdoor concert on a gorgeous day at Piedmont Correctional Center. Our band was terrific, we had remarkable inmate talent participating, and the audience was great. At one point I asked the crowd of about 400 men what day it was. They shouted back "Sunday". I said "And who made this incredible sky we're standing under?" They answered back, "God!" I said, "Well, then I guess this is a church, so welcome to my Sunday services. I want you to know God loves you all and so do we, so now let's play some more rock & roll!" There was so much love and Spirit all around us, that was all the preaching that seemed to be needed.



Alison Weiner, Bo Lozoff, Ben Palmer, John Hanks, Zan McLeod, Chris Turner
Craggy Prison, 1987

After the concert was over, an inmate came up to me and looked very clearly into my eyes and said "Hey brother, I just want you to know that we understand what it is you're trying to do, and it's working, man. And we appreciate it." On the way out, a guard approached me and said "Mr. Lozoff, I want you to know that I truly did enjoy your Sunday church services. It was a real good day for all the officers here."

I want to try to explain a little bit about why those comments mean so much to me. As you probably know, I've been doing prison workshops for nearly fifteen years now. The serious meditation work has been very important and powerful, and continues to be the thrust of this project, mainly through my book, WE'RE ALL DOING TIME. But those workshops and teachings have never involved more than a small percentage of the prisoner population.

About seven years ago, in my meditations, I began to hear Jesus' remark "I was in prison and you visited me," over and over, and I had flashbacks of all the thousands of faces I've had to ignore in prison corridors on my way to meet with small groups of serious spiritual seekers. I began to feel elitist, and I saw that although the overt spiritual teachings are essential, they're also very limiting if I want access to the whole prison population to share simple love and Holy Spirit.

Performances such as rock & roll, magic, juggling, and comedy bring **everyone** together in a happy way -- inmates, staff, guards, crazies, activists -- to a great degree everyone can drop their usual roles and be laughing and singing and just enjoying a few hours of life with each other.

Compassion doesn't always need weighty spiritual overtones in order to be a healing, constructive force in somebody's life. If I am love, I can awaken love in the people around me; not always, but often. And I can honestly tell you that the spiritual love generated during these concerts has been absolutely overpowering, not only for inmates, but also for guards, staff, musicians and myself. We hope to continue being involved in meditation workshops, rock concerts, inmate talent shows, theatrical productions and whatever other forms seem useful for expressing God's love. More than ever before, we feel this work is blessed, and we deeply hope that you enjoy as much as we do all these madcap faces of the Divine. It's all the same work, always.

LETTERS

Like our newsletters of old, we wanted to share a few letters with you once again. The first couple are a special treat -- from Mickey and Paul, who were featured in the chapter, "In What Prison?", in WE'RE ALL DOING TIME. That chapter ended with Mickey in a very scary state of mind, and unwilling to correspond anymore with Paul or with us. Now, three years later, Paul is out of prison and Mickey is back among the sane and loving. Here's a little slice of the pie:

Dear Bo, Sita, & Josh,

Well, it sure is wonderful to be "back home" again! You talk about being "touched by my letter to you all; well, I was "caressed" by the book and the letter from you.

I wrote Mickey as soon as I got your letter and received one back from him already. I can't express in words how deep this experience was; so just by saying that, the expression was made, dig? I know you know how I felt. Let me say this -- I felt a burden lifted. You all were right; he's back to his sweet, clear, free and beautiful self. Mickey comes up for parole in '88 and I'm wanting to help prepare a place for him here in Tulsa. My AA sponsor is so much like Mickey and is going to help, and going to start writing him.

I can't help but feel that God has plans for Mickey and I to serve others together as you all have. Prisoners especially.

A very wonderful experience is happening for me now. My fiancée (as of last June) is here with me now from Wisconsin. We've been through a lot of heavy karma together, and we made it. It's wonderful to have joined in the Spirit with a mate that accepts me, identifies with me, mothers me, teaches me, listens to me, loves me and is a trusting, compassionate companion. And besides, she loves WE'RE ALL DOING TIME.

Well, loved ones, answer when you can. Enclosed is my first letter from Mickey, which he said you can feel free to print if you want.

Much Love, Paul

[from Mickey:]

Dear Paul,

I sincerely hope this letter finds you well and in the best of spirits! It was very good to hear from you, Paul.

You are my brother still. You always have been. I've been waiting to hear from you. I knew it was just a matter of time. God has His way of doing things, you know. He's led us down

some pretty tough paths, but it's all been necessary. It always is.

I've been here at Lexington for a little over a year now. I'm doing alright, Paul. Haven't nutted out or gotten severely paranoid in over two years. One day I just woke up and it was gone. I guess I just had some pretty heavy dues to pay. Sometimes I didn't think I'd survive, though. But of course I did. Yes, it's such a strange and funny world bro. It sure is.

I go up for parole next year. I really doubt that I'll make it the first time, but maybe the year after. I've been in for fourteen years now. Seems like they will give me a break soon.

That's about all for now. Keep it light, bro, and know that I love you,

Mickey

Dear Bo,

I hope this letter finds you in the best of health and spirits, and your beautiful wife also. I am doing time in a prison in which I am the only Native American, and I adhere to the tenets of the traditional religion of my people. I've been in prison now for nine years and have spent my time advocating human rights and political rights of aboriginal peoples by publicizing various issues with regard to governments and multinational corporations' violations against the people.

I have some influence on my people because of my love for and dedication to their welfare. Where my problem is, is here: My involvement in the struggles of my people has caused a bitterness to grow within my heart that is so intense and huge, it scares me. I will be going to the free world in a couple of years, and being the Indian-rights activist I am, I want to do what is best for my people -- with always the future generations in mind.

The elders are wise, and I know they are right when they advocate peace, but I feel that peaceful tactics on our part over the years have only caused the suffering of my people, because the white governments have no morals or ethics or respect for human life, much less all the rest of the Great Spirit's creations, and the only "legal" basis for their unilateral abrogation of treaties is "might makes right". Their continual and complete disregard for human rights, inherent rights, international law, and even their own laws, in their policies concerning Indian people, is repugnant to any sense of human dignity and respect.

Could you please give me some guidance in the matter of my bitterness and hatred, perhaps share with me your views and wisdom so that I may learn to have a stronger control over my bitterness? I am sure that I will never go against the wishes of the traditional elders when I fight for any particular cause, because they represent all that I live for. But I have no inner peace, because of this bitterness and pain I live with as I watch my people die.

*May the music of the meadow
with its songs of silver streams
bring sunlight to the paths you walk
and magic to your dreams.....*

L R, Oklahoma

Dear Brother L R,

Your bitterness and hatred may seem to you to be the result of what the government and corporations have done to your people, but that's not really the way it is. It's the white man's separateness and fear which has allowed him to continually destroy the native people. It's your own separateness and fear which react with bitterness and hatred.

It's not like you're being terrible or immoral for being bitter, but you **are** being fooled by faulty spiritual vision. You have every "right" to hate the forces which have oppressed your people, but spirituality isn't really about "rights". It's about enlightenment. It's about seeing the way things really are, the deeper meanings, the connections between all of us.

Again, nobody can blame you, but being blameless isn't good enough for spiritual warriors. What you want for your people must be what you want for yourself: To struggle however you must for a decent outer life, and at the same time not allow your more important inner life to fall prey to the demons of hatred and anger and rage. The outer life is over in an instant, and there are so many conditions and events we can never control. But the Great Mystery which lies behind it -- that's what you're missing while you're blinded by bitterness.

Look around this culture. Millions of people have all the rights and opportunities you're fighting for, and yet their lives are still empty, confused, frightened and lonely.

Your own heart has to be the most powerful medicine for healing the wounds inflicted on your people. Your brothers and sisters must be able to feel the power of your happiness, of

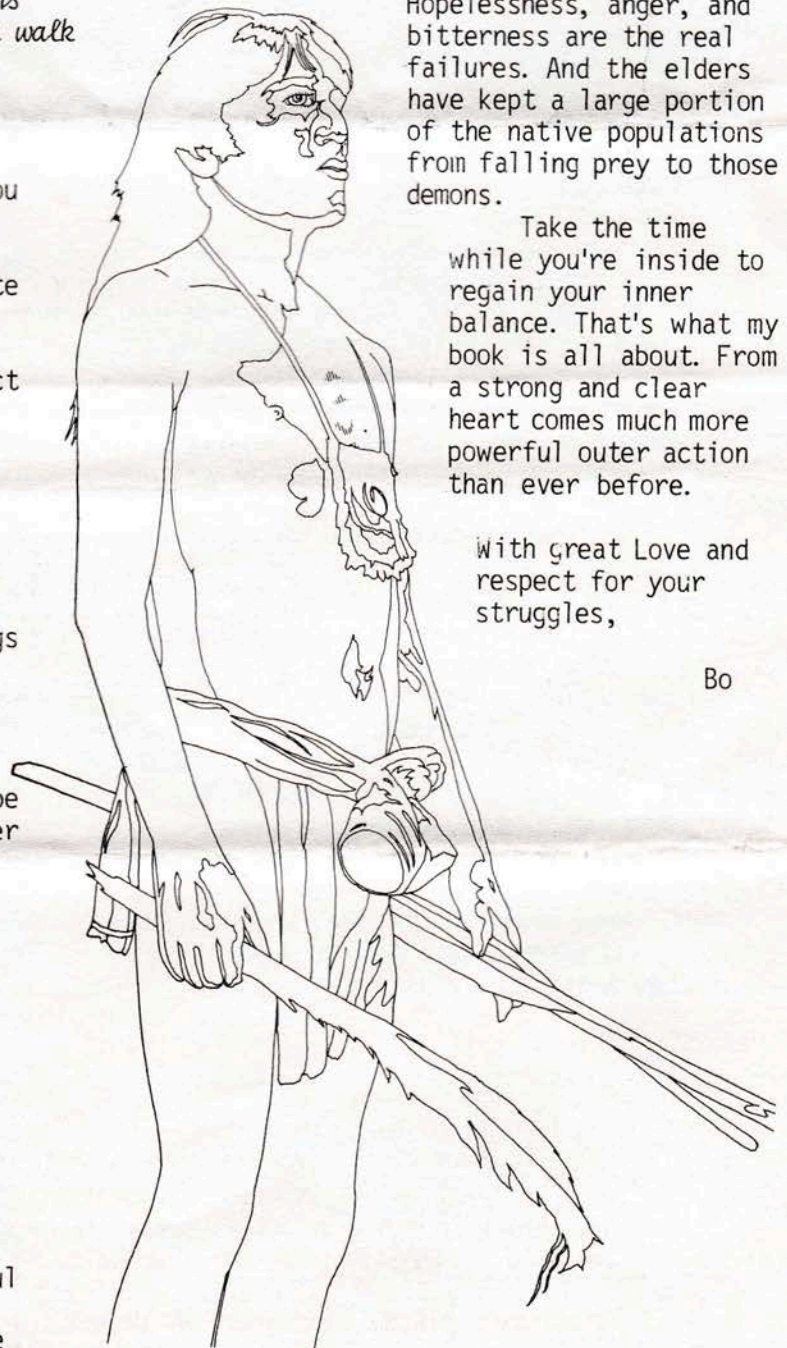
your vision; not of your righteous rage. You mentioned that the peaceful way of the elders hasn't worked so well. But has a more violent way worked any better? Besides, maybe the peaceful way has worked better than you think. The elders aren't fools. They've kept the peaceful native heart alive through 200 years of unbelievable cruelty and slaughter. I'd say their way has worked very well. Death and oppression aren't failures, brother; they're just tragic cycles of human history.

Hopelessness, anger, and bitterness are the real failures. And the elders have kept a large portion of the native populations from falling prey to those demons.

Take the time while you're inside to regain your inner balance. That's what my book is all about. From a strong and clear heart comes much more powerful outer action than ever before.

With great Love and respect for your struggles,

Bo



artwork: Michael Ferguson

"Alternative Nobel" nomination

Sita and I are very honored to let you know that we've been nominated for one of the 1987 Alternative Nobel Prize awards to be given by the Right Livelihood Foundation in the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm later this year. We're very touched personally, and also to see that prison work would be so recognized and appreciated by "outside" people throughout the world. Our nomination is evidence to us that people do care about men and women behind bars. Below (though hard to read!), are the letters of nomination which we wanted you to see and enjoy along with us. After all, you've been an essential piece of this pie!

 The Menninger Foundation

February 17, 1987

Mr. Jonathan Bergen
215 West 90th Street
New York, New York 10024

Dear Mr. Bergen:

Dr. Pat Morris has told me about the Right Livelihood Foundation Award which the Lozoff couple might receive. I certainly hope they do because they are remarkable people, unselfish people and useful people. They are dedicated to a desire to be of service and comfort and encouragement to prisoners. They put their life and their hearts into it. I don't know how they survive. I agree with Dr. Morris when she says she knows no one who has done so much with so little for so long with such cheerfulness and joy.

I hope they get the award.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
BOARD OF PROBATION AND PAROLE

February 4, 1987

Sincerely,

Karl Menninger, M.D.

Jonathan Bergen
West 90th Street
York, NY 10024

Dear Mr. Bergen,
It is a pleasure for me to support your initiative in nominating Bo Lozoff for the Right Livelihood Foundation Award, which I wholeheartedly endorse.

I have been aware of Bo's work for several years, first through listening to tapes of sessions he conducted through the Prison Ashram Project and then by having the fortune of seeing and hearing him in person. Throughout, I was struck with his unique ability to communicate a clear understanding of human dilemmas. He provides a subtle and powerful process to opening one's outlook and effecting significant change.

As Director of Staff Development of a statewide agency, I had the opportunity seven years ago of helping to develop a national drug and alcohol conference. I invited Bo to present a seminar and he graciously accepted. Since then he has led training workshops for my agency and I have accompanied him on several prison seminars.

In over fifteen years of criminal justice experience I have seen no individual as effective as Bo in reaching convicts as well as others. There are many good, dedicated people in the field, but Bo's presence and perception combined with his total commitment is unique.

Sincerely,

James O. Smith
Director of Staff Development

JOS:dme

February 17, 1987

Bo and Sita Lozoff
Prison Ashram Project
Route 1, Box 201-N
Durham, N.C. 27705

Dear Jonathan Bergen,

The news that you are nominating Bo and Sita Lozoff for the "Right Livelihood Foundation Award" delighted us in our Community on this side of the world.

This work among prisoners, carried on almost single-handedly by this courageous and creative couple, is, we feel, a really great human effort and is certainly a source for us of much encouragement and gratitude.

When my wife and I visited the U.S.A. last year and stayed with the Lozoffs we were immensely impressed by their great respect and compassion for our fellow human beings, both men and women, in prison, and by the creative energy and joy that so obviously flows around the whole enterprise. The fact that no much life and work springs from such a hidden and "home-made" house and office in spite of further, as well as their readiness to go forward with such diminutive resources.

Yours sincerely,

Stanley Krippner, Ph.D.

Professor of Psychology
Saybrook Institute

ACA Galleries

67th Street, New York, New York 10021 (212) 628-2440

February 17, 1987

Bo and Sita Lozoff
Prison Ashram Project
Route 1, Box 201-N
Durham, North Carolina 27705

Dear Bo and Sita,

It gives me great pleasure to inform you that I am nominating you for the Right Livelihood Award. The RLA's are four grants of \$25,000 each given annually in Stockholm in the day preceding the granting of the Nobel prizes to people who exemplify the spirit of service to humanity.

I'll need letters of endorsement by a diversified and wide group of individuals familiar with your good work, all as a description of the Prison Ashram project. I'll send them to my home address in New York City.

I am looking forward to receiving the above and will submit along with my own endorsement as soon as I've received materials.

Yours in the spirit of love,

Jonathan Bergen

28 January 1987

Dear Mr. Bergen:

I am pleased to support your nomination of Sita and Bo Lozoff for the Alternative Nobel Prize. I am aware of this award and think that Sita and Bo would be worthy recipients.

About 3% of the American male population has been to prison, is in prison, or is on parole or probation. This is the highest percentage in any Western democracy and one of the highest in the world. The figure points to severe problems in the American culture.

Sita and Bo have attempted to use spiritual wisdom to help this 3% find some meaning in their arrests, incarceration, and experience. Of course, they also work with female prisoners.

They work in the spirit of love, but combine this with a hard-headed practicality that has achieved outstanding results. In so doing, they lavish attention on to a group forgotten (at best) or reviled (at worst) by most of the U.S. public.

The Prison-Ashram Project is funded on a shoestring. Despite this lack of support and resources, Sita and Bo have created a model program for changing behavior and increasing awareness.

Very truly yours,

Stanley Krippner, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology
Saybrook Institute

SAYBROOK

SAYBROOK INSTITUTE
GRADUATE SCHOOL AND
RESEARCH CENTER
1775 WALDEN STREET
SAN FRANCISCO
CA 94123 (415) 441-3034

February 2, 1987

Mr. Jonathan Bergen
215 West 90th Street
New York, N.Y. 10024

Dear Mr. Bergen:

It gives me great pleasure to write in support of Bo and Sita Lozoff for the Right Livelihood Foundation Award. I can recommend them without reservation.

I have known Bo and Sita since 1977, when work we were doing in connection with prisoners and prisoners brought us in contact. They have been in close touch with them and their work since that time. Bo and Sita bring to the attention of the one hand, and perseverance and dedication on the other. Their commitment to being of service has been unwavering over the last two decades. They are creative, truly cheerful, faithful, and honest. They are like exemplary across the nation, to tens of thousands of prisoners. For self-development, with practical, down-to-earth guidance and involvement of prisoners.

For the last 15 or so years, Bo and Sita have committed their resources, both personal and economic, to their work with prisoners, and I am positive they would put this resource to the best possible use, in a largely unattended area where the need is as great as anywhere in our society, and has lasting impact and benefits.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Morris, Ph.D.
Clinical Director
Biofeedback & Psychophysiology Center
PAC:124

Founded in 1973, the Prison-Ashram Project is a free resource for prisoners and other shut-ins throughout the world. At present our mailing list includes about 10,000 people in over 25 countries. Most of our funds come from small donations from non-prisoners who want to see this work continue. If you care to send a donation or to buy a copy of Bo Lozoff's book, WE'RE ALL DOING TIME (\$10) or his album, STUMBLING TOWARD THE LIGHT (\$8, please specify LP or cassette), please send your tax-deductible contribution to:

PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT
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DURHAM, NC 27705

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A Project of the Hanuman Foundation



Gifts are great, the founding of temples is meritorious, meditations and religious exercises pacify the heart, comprehension of the truth leads to Nirvana -- but greater than all is loving-kindness. As the light of the moon is sixteen times stronger than the light of all the stars, so is loving-kindness sixteen times more efficacious in liberating the heart than all other religious accomplishments taken together. This state of heart is the best in the world.

-- Buddha