

# Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Christmas 1994

Dear Family,  
Sita and I have recently done our first prison tours & public talks on American soil since 1990. What an eye-opener! It's a pretty vicious time out there, isn't it? — public hysteria, fear, anger and meanspirited political rhetoric about crime; very immature people being elected everywhere on the basis of their tough-talking plans to lock more of our children up for longer periods of time and treat them worse than ever. It's sad, but it means this is an important time for all of us to strengthen our practices and our love and our dedication to work toward a safer and kinder world for all. This is when it counts the most! It has been deeply inspiring to meet so many of you — inmates, staff, citizens — who are taking responsibility to do that against the current tide of public opinion and peer pressure. We are deeply grateful for your friendship & hospitality and have been bowled over by your love. Have a wonderful Holy Season. We love you.

Bo & Sita Lozoff

## SACRED LIVING, SACRED PRACTICE \*

[Revised & condensed from Bo Lozoff's sermon at Agape Church, Santa Monica CA, 9/25/94.]

We live in a great time; we've come so far. Because of transportation, mass communication, the world is becoming a single village. Most of us have access to the sacred teachings of basically any tradition, any religion that has ever existed. We can use that access, not to scatter ourselves, but to see "My God, it is the same, the Spirit is the same over here, the same over there."

There's an old saying about digging one well 200 feet deep rather than 20 wells 10 feet deep, and sometimes we've used that as an excuse for religious intolerance. But many of us have come to see that while it is true we should dig one deep well, we can use a shovel from Japan, a spade from India, a pick from Israel — tools and insights from any tradition to dig down to our depths.

What is this deep well, what is the Sacred Water it yields? The idea of living in spirit, the outlandishness of *really* living in Spirit, in the One, is an impossibility for our minds to grasp. We'll read things in the bible like,

*My own peace I give you, such as the world cannot give. This is a peace which surpasses understanding,*

and we go "Oh right! I get it!" No, let's do it again:

*This is a peace which surpasses understanding.*

We go, "OH...now I see!" Nope, nope.

*This is a peace which SURPASSES understanding!*

Confused, deflated of pride, we say, "But I don't understand...!" Ahh, finally! Now we're beginning to get it.

*I dissolved into the Emptiness, and discovered it was filled with Love.*

— Father Dom Bede Griffiths

### Going Full-time, Full-tilt

The most complex understanding I can imagine sustaining in the heart would be something like, "I have no idea what's going on, but it has something to do with Love." There's no point arguing about the difference between this religion and that religion, this practice, that practice. Like the old saw, "Excuse me sir, how do I get to Carnegie Hall?" Do you remember the answer? PRACTICE! How can we simultaneously be a poor and nameless devotee of the one living spirit, yet be bursting with energy for making positive contributions to the world? Practice!

When Sita and I visited His Holiness the Dalai Lama earlier this year, I put all my attention into being present, open, receptive in the presence of such a great spiritual elder. I tried to look very practically — "He's got two legs, two arms, a head, a nose. We both wake up in the morning, both go to sleep at night. What is the real functional difference between his experience and mine?"

One of the things I noticed is simply that he's "full-time." You and I will come together here this morning, and with enough mutual support and encouragement, we may open and open, and gradually be willing to feel the Living Spirit with each other, open and trusting and experiencing the preciousness of being together in this mystery where

\* the full 45-minute tape of this talk is available from us (along with another of Bo's recent church sermons) for \$8 (free to those who truly can't afford it). Prisoners, please be sure you have proper permission to receive it. This is a clear tape, but is not shrink-wrapped.



we are God yet we are separate, and we can't figure it out but it has something to do with love.

And then the service ends and we go out to our cars and on the way home we stop for gas or at a bagel shop or whatever, and you and I are then willing to pretend with the gas station attendant or with the waiter or waitress at the bagel shop that life *isn't* so sacred, that this is just a bagel going on, this is just getting gas; we won't look in their eyes, we won't be intimate; it's like an unspoken agreement *not* to feel how precious we are to each other.

The Dalai Lama and Mother Theresa simply don't turn it off! They go in there and see a Precious Child of God taking their Divine Credit Card for the Sacred Gas, and they don't hide it from that person taking the credit card! Their whole presence says "It's all equally sacred. Getting gas, praying in church, buying a bagel, all the same Mysterious Miracle. I live in Love, so of course I am in Love with you, and when I walk through that door then I'll be in Love with whomever or whatever is through that door."

A popular American Buddhist meditation teacher recently asked the Dalai Lama a question which seems to be a favorite notion in our culture — "Your Holiness, how do you feel about the issue of needing to take time for ourselves? You know, our need to drop out of our roles and just take time off, how do you feel about that?"

The Dalai Lama turned to his translator, Tenzin Geyche, who explained it a little more in Tibetan, but he still couldn't understand the question. So the fellow rephrased it about four different times, and finally the Dalai Lama got it. He burst out laughing and said "Buddha time off? Bodhisattva time off? hahahahahaha." What a concept!

Do we need time off from breathing? What would happen if we take time off from breathing? Every movement, every thought, every breath we take is our only begotten Son of God, God's expression into the world. Why create separateness between "me and the community," or "me and life," with expressions like "I need time for **myself**, and I deserve it!" That just reinforces our duality.

Sure, we need to eat, relax, play with our family — but because it's natural, not because there is any inherent *conflict* between altruism and self-care.

Besides, the only *real* rest from all our roles and identities would be, as the monk Father Theophane would put it, "to throw away our silly smiles, fall to our knees, clutch his hand and whisper, 'Father!'"

That's a *perfect* description of a period of daily spiritual practice: "I throw away my silly smile" — all my clever ideas, what I'm wearing, what I look like, who Bo Lozoff is, what I drive, how much money I earn, how much good I want to do in the world, what I'm going to say in this sermon... I throw away my silly ideas, fall to my knees, clutch his hand and whisper "Father". That's the opportunity we all have to take a real break from the tediousness and weariness of our worldly lives. Nothing less is truly "time off."

## The Great Equalities

One of the things I love most about the spiritual journey is the humbling equality with which we are born. Regardless of wealth or race or culture or era, we are all born with several conditions exactly the same.

**The first Great Equality is that the moment we are born, whether we are born in a crack house or the White House, we have no idea when or how we will die.** Thank you. Thank you, God, for making us so equal. We have no idea whether we will live to be 6 months old or 105. The Greatest Humbler of all!

**The second Great Equality is that we have no idea who or what the most important influences of our lives will be.** Looking back on the past, we may say, "Wow, little did I know when I woke up that one fateful morning, that was the day my life would change forever..." But when we actually woke up that morning, it was impossible to see. It takes practice to realize equally every day of our lives, every moment, every person we meet, "This could be the most important experience of my life." That attitude of perpetual openness is reflected in the core of both the Jewish and Christian traditions, of being ready *every moment* for the appearance of the Messiah — the instrument of our deepest salvation. It can come in any form, from joy or sorrow, success or failure, alone or with multitudes. We must therefore have *infinite respect* for the spiritual potential of all people and experiences.

**The third Great Equality — our Common Tasks.** We also are born with several equal duties. One of the interesting ideas that has come up over the past 30 years in the West is "I create my own reality." There is, of course, some truth in that. We surely create some of the mind-body attitudes which can lead to illness or health, but to take that idea into the realm of the deepest spiritual truths is to miss the boat by a mile.

We don't really create *all* our own reality. If you say "I choose for my heart to digest food instead of pump blood," that's simply not going to work. There is a certain obedience and surrender required to the natural and spiritual laws. The stomach digests food, the heart pumps blood, the lungs process air. Everybody is born with many equal physical responsibilities.

Everyone is born with a spiritual responsibility also, as specific as our hearts pumping blood: **We must learn to love one another, to receive and express goodness.** It doesn't matter whether we believe in it or not. Obey it and we will thrive, disobey it and we won't. Period. Isn't that wonderful? Our *human* justice system may be all screwed up, but the Divine Law treats us absolutely equally.

Look all over the world and see the people who unselfishly receive and express goodness, who are dedicated to the cause of love. They're the only people who are truly happy. They have tapped into the one mysterious, wonderful connectedness that frees them to live full-time in love. Some of them had great childhoods,



some were horribly abused, some are pretty, some are homely, some tall, some short, rich, poor — our situations are always unequal, but life does not judge us by where we've been, what we own, or what has been done to us; life judges us by what we do.

### When the Flesh Becomes Word....

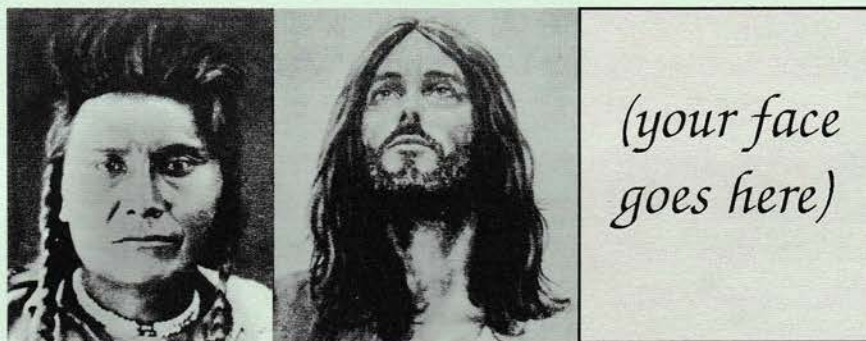
Every religion tells us in one way or another that "the Word becomes flesh." But we, the flesh, must become the Word as well. That's what happens when we are enlightened — a constant loop of the Word becoming flesh and the flesh becoming Word endlessly. Nobody home but God; no ego-self experiencing fear and selfishness; nothing going on but the Sacred being conscious of being Sacred, of existing simultaneously as formless and form; word and flesh; Divine Love and Human Compassion.

There's something in the East called *Sanatana Dharma*, which roughly means "Eternal, Universal Truth," and it consists of only three principles: First: There is indeed something transcendent, beyond comprehension, something divine. It's real. It exists.

Second: Each of us — you and I, not just the Dalai Lama, St. Francis, Mother Theresa — but you and I, **can and must** directly experience this divinity.

Third: That is the only purpose of life. Everything else, who we are, what we look like, how old, how wealthy, how poor, how much or how little we suffer or find happiness, what we do for a living, what we do in the world, how many children we have, **EVERYTHING** else, everything is a support system toward our direct experience of the eternal Great Mystery.

There are so many compelling forces pushing us to forget that all life is sacred, that this is all just a process of our experiencing God. There are so many compelling forces saying "You need this" and "you need that," and "be wary of that" and "be afraid of her" and "be upset over what they did to you." How can we possibly remember that we are the flesh becoming the Word of God? **PRACTICE!** It takes a lot of practice to remember our depth when we're being constantly hustled to be shallow and materialistic toward the goals of a culture built around consumerism.



### We Need Some Elders, and It's US...

Coming out of retreat and looking around at my own culture, looking at the crises that we are in, the problems that exist in the American family, I saw that on one hand, many of us have come a long way in order to be able to acknowledge Eastern masters, saints from other traditions. But where are the American realized beings? Where are our enlightened elders, where are the "Word become Flesh" in people who share our cultural experience, who share the bombardment of Ninja Turtles and McDonalds and all of that, who come from the same place, yet have transformed entirely and died into the living spirit "for the benefit of all beings?"

I started thinking, "I'll bet there are some in monasteries, convents, caves right now who are from the American culture and are just about ready to come out and say "Here we are," but that didn't really fly, because a little voice in me

said "Schmuck, you're it!" Me. You. Little old us. If not me or you, it's not going to happen.

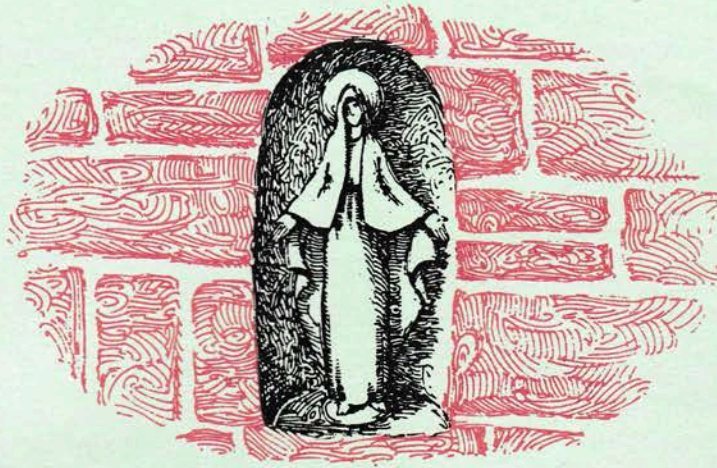
The American realized beings, people whose motivation is so compassionate toward our own people, our own unique situation of being brought up in this bizarre combination of unparalleled affluence amid vast spiritual loneliness and confusion — they've got to come from

among us. Are we willing? Our people are so confused and dismayed, so fearful, jaded, and unhappy, can we take that as inspiration and encouragement to get on with our awakening?

What is it that turns us into a being whose very presence quietly, modestly evokes the best in others? It's practice, and then putting what we practice into expression. So that's what I mean by Sacred Living, Sacred Practice.

What this country needs more than anything else is for us to become elders, walking the streets and doing our jobs, really happy, classic, ageless spiritual human beings. So that's the opportunity we have and I don't think any people in the history of the world has ever had more access to the methods and ideas for how to do that. We are very fortunate in that way, even if you're in prison. I love you very much and I thank you for being right where you are.





## *You'll Find It Very Handy*

When the guestmaster asked me what my spiritual practice was, I told him, "The Rosary. I've been saying that every day for years. I have a great devotion to Our Lady."

"Would you like to meet her?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, she's right over there, the door at the end of the cloister."

"You mean I could have an appointment?"

"No appointment, just go in." I did. There she was, no mistaking it. She remained in her chair, but her eyes and face embraced me as if I were her infant. Then she spoke my name. That surprised me. Why did that surprise me, when I had been praying to her for so many years? Then she took my head to her heart.

Then after a bit she began to speak. It was reminiscing. She went back to my infancy, told me about my parents, my childhood, adolescence, then went right up to the present. But she saw it all so differently. It was a total reinterpretation of my life. Finally, she said, "Before you go, I want to give you something. It's my Amen. You'll find it very handy. You can use it in all sorts of situations. You can apply it to persons and memories. It will grow with use, and hopefully some day you will say the Great Amen."

I live now in the embrace of those eyes. Daily I use her Amen. Please pray for me that some day I may dare to say the Great Amen.

— from *Tales Of A Magic Monastery*, by Theophane the Monk



## PRACTICE: THE RICHNESS OF POVERTY

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*Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven!*

— Jesus

There is a popular notion of “prosperity consciousness” going around which I’m sure has helped some people to stop limiting themselves. It’s not good to feel always lacking, as if there isn’t enough to go around. There is certainly an abundance of great things in the world.

Yet like so many other things, we tend to let a popular concept run away with us, and then we miss classic spiritual lessons — in this case, we miss the *wonderful* experience of our utter poverty of spirit which is essential to enlightenment.

Neem Karoli Baba once said to a disciple, “Serve the poor always,” and the disciple said, “But Baba, who’s poor?” and the great saint said, “*Everyone* is poor before Christ.” [the meaning of this is not just Christian; anybody of any religion can work with this teaching and experience something in keeping with their own religion.]

Something about that statement, “Everyone is poor before Christ” touched me so deeply, that most of my three years in retreat was spent looking into it. I especially remember one day, during a two-month period of silent prayer, when I was offering everything I could think of to God — mind, body, career, family, talents, energies, time, money, thoughts, opinions, past, future, *everything* I could think of — even my weaknesses, my vices, my suffering! And as I offered each thing, I saw clearly that it wasn’t mine to offer in the first place. Everything I named was already God’s, not mine!

The truth is, I had nothing to offer the One who has given me everything. I’ve never felt so totally poor. I saw crystal-clearly that I own nothing. The very *idea* of owning anything is ridiculous. I felt poor, and I felt ashamed having nothing to offer. And then I felt the most wonderful.....I guess *humility* is the closest word; the humility of our situation, the humility of being such utter panhandlers, receiving gifts of Grace constantly, even our every breath; I felt the mercifulness and Love of that Grace. I felt totally poor in Spirit, and I instantly experienced the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s really true that “theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Notice that He didn’t say “theirs will be the Kingdom of Heaven;” it’s not something we have to wait until we die for! The moment we really **GET** our ultimate poverty before God, ours is the Kingdom of Heaven. For real.

### The Practice

So here’s the practice: After a few minutes of meditation to quiet down, begin bringing to mind anything and everything you want to offer to God or to Life, whatever word you wish to use — and then ask yourself “Does this belong to me? Did I create it? Where did I get it? Am I able to hold it or keep it from changing?” Anything you can possibly think of under the heading of “MINE,” bring to mind for this practice. Where did it come from? Is it yours to keep?

With each thing that comes up, release the idea of it being yours, release the idea of it being permanent, release the idea of having total control over its destiny. Like taking stones out of a backpack, empty out every notion of “mine” that you can locate, and move toward your empty pack, your poverty of Spirit. When you get it, you’ll know it. And then you can come back into your life as a caretaker instead of proprietor, and you’ll be amazed at how much simpler and freer it feels just to work here, and not to own the shop!

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# LETTERS

Dear Bo,

I have been doing time since '86, and about 3 years ago a friend who saw more in me than I did, talked to me of ashrams & pathways past the concrete, steel, & guard towers. I thought he had lost his cookies, ya' know!

Well, I knew that T was here for brutal acts and the stuff he was talking about sounded not a bit like such a person. I listened, I learned, and eventually I began to love. As love's warmth melted icy hatred I began to see my life not as I thought it had been, but as it was. T & I shared in an adventure unlike any I had ever undertaken, the exploration of me!

A year ago T went home after 23 years in here. A month later a mutual friend told me T had been taken to the desert by an old enemy and he even told me who the guy was and where to find him.

I wanted to return to my former self and take care of business in the old style: "Eye for an eye, bullets fly, idiots die," but I realized that I could not do any act that T would not have wished done on his behalf. If I were to do so, I would in fact only be doing so for myself.

Out of respect for T I began to do for others the same thing he did for me — I asked them to take a journey with me into the wonder of really living. Each time I see the tears of wonder when one of my friends/students/teachers/partners breaks through to himself, I know what T was feeling, because I am given the bigger gift of joy every time.

Well, this is my story and I hope it has been worthy of the time it took to read it. Once more, Peace, Love, and Harmony be ever your companions.

J



Dear Bo,

Received your last newsletter. Thanks for thinking of me. It doesn't seem possible we have been writing for almost 20 years now, or that I've been on death row now for 12 years. Once you get into spiritual disciplines, quests, paths, and love it, the years fly by without much notice. ☺

I guess a lot of that is due to the inner peace, calm and joyful contentment. I probably would not have even seen "the path," possibilities or need to change

had it not been for you and Ram Dass. Thank you. ☺ In the coming year, be safe, happy, secure and healthy. Keep my soul's growth and spiritual evolution in your prayers. You remain in mine.

With Love & Full Respect, "Pops"



Dear Bo & Sita,

The first time I wrote you was approximately one year ago and that was literally a key turning point in my life. A time when I needed positive encouragement, guidance, understanding and compassion. I found all of those in you and your foundation and I credit you for the inner peace I am finding within myself, and even though I am incarcerated, the peace I am finding in my surroundings. Thank you sincerely and my heart and soul remain forever yours.

To give you a brief idea of the obstacles I am confronted with today please bear with me.

To begin with, I am 38 years old and have been incarcerated much of my adult life and a good portion of my childhood since the age of 12. Now for the present circumstances, I was compelled to "cop-out" to a 10-to-life. But that alone is not the "crux of the biscuit," so to speak.

The fact of the matter is that I have AIDS and I am now confronted with the real possibility of having to die in jail.

Now even as I write this letter I can begin to feel the myriad of emotions that are associated with HIV/AIDS. Once, not very long ago, I would have let these emotions — or better yet, my own suppression of these emotions — destroy my mind and soul because I refused to acknowledge and understand them.

But now, from the changes that are taking place in my life and in my attitude, behavior, and ideas, I am beginning to "Feel, Deal, and then Heal" from understanding these emotions as I am trying to turn all of that energy into a positive force.

One particular observation I have made through all of this is that because of my refusal and/or inability to accept and deal with the emotions I was suppressing, such as fear, shame, guilt, etc., that stemmed from my childhood, I

was also in effect denying myself the capability of ever feeling emotions of joy, happiness, pleasure, etc.!

My cop-out to a 10-to-life actually gives me the opportunity to remain where I am to educate myself further on HIV/AIDS-related issues and to get certified as an HIV/AIDS educator so that I may help the population here. Since I know all the people here — inmates, civilians, c.o.'s, wardens — I feel that this opportunity gives me the chance to do something positive with the remainder of my life.

I was diagnosed in 1987, in this very jail, and I consider myself a long-term survivor, the credit and appreciation for which goes out to the people and organizations like yourselves that have held my hand along the way. The list is literally too long to mention, but let me just say that between the slew of doctors and nurses and psychologists from AIDS organizations, that even among my "wardens" here, I have found a great amount of compassion and understanding from most of them.

In closing I would like to say that my diagnosis in 1987 — the realization of my own mortality — led directly to how and why the quality of my life has dramatically improved over the past several years.

Thanks for taking time to read this letter that started out just to be a thank-you letter but turned into much more. I will continue to look forward to the literature and correspondence not to mention the guidance you have given. Take care and God Bless...

R



by Don Shonk, Carlisle, IN, '94



## NEWS, NOTES, OFFERINGS & GOOD WORKS

### A FLAVOR OF KINDNESS

Graterford Prison in PA houses over 4200 inmates. The volunteer program called *FLAVOR* ("Food & Learning of Agriculture for Vocation & Optimum Rehabilitation") began last year to give interested inmates an opportunity to learn organic biodynamic gardening and vegetarian meal planning and preparation skills. Inmates are now nurturing living things, appreciating nature, and cooperating to achieve common goals. They learn the value of patience, have a positive topic of discussion, understand the value of a job well done, improve self-esteem, reduce stress and improve diet. For more information, contact volunteers:

Violet & Jerry Hoffman  
3206 Kennedy Rd.  
Norristown PA 19403

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

No more than an idea in the mind of an Arizona prison inmate back in 1985, **Prisoners Against Crime** has grown into a force of nearly 800 active members across the U.S. PAC assists prisoners, parolees, and ex-offenders to resocialize into society upon release.

Offering an interest-bearing savings program, PAC's "Freedman Town Community Development Fund" allows members to rebuild shaky credit and even apply for loans. PAC also helps parolees start their own businesses, and supplies free job training to ex-inmates in need of skills.

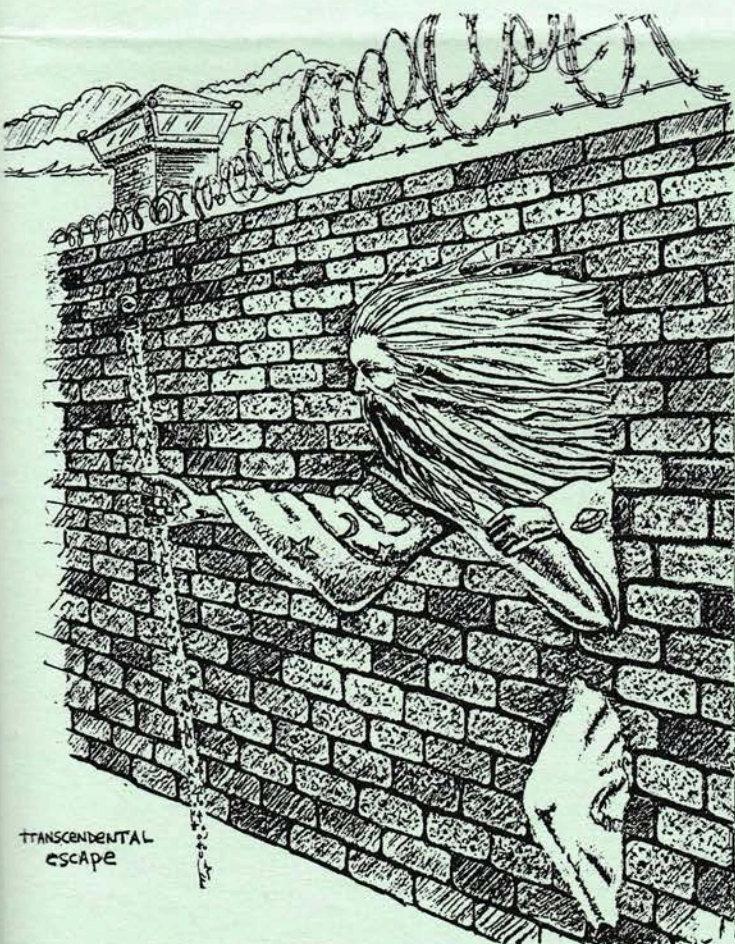
But members need not wait until they are out of prison to benefit from PAC. The most popular PAC program is a nationwide prisoner hobbycraft sales network. Not only do inmates earn money, but profits from the sales serve a very special purpose: To take the message into grade schools, high schools and colleges: **Crime doesn't pay. Drugs don't pay. Prison is no place you want to be.**

Members of PAC receive a quarterly newsletter and a free "willpower course". PAC charges no membership or dues, but asks all correspondents to enclose a SASE to help defray expenses. For more information, write:

James Pritchett  
Prisoners Against Crime  
3415 Michigan St.  
Baytown, TX 77520

*Let go anger; abandon violence.  
Don't you know anything?*

— the Ramayana



### *a little good news*

is a publication of the Human Kindness Foundation, which is non-profit and tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code. Donations and bequests are always welcomed and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. All money goes directly to support HKF's work, helping us to continue producing and distributing free materials to prisoners and others, and sponsoring Bo Lozoff's free lectures & workshops as well as Kindness House and the other projects of the Foundation.

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recycled paper



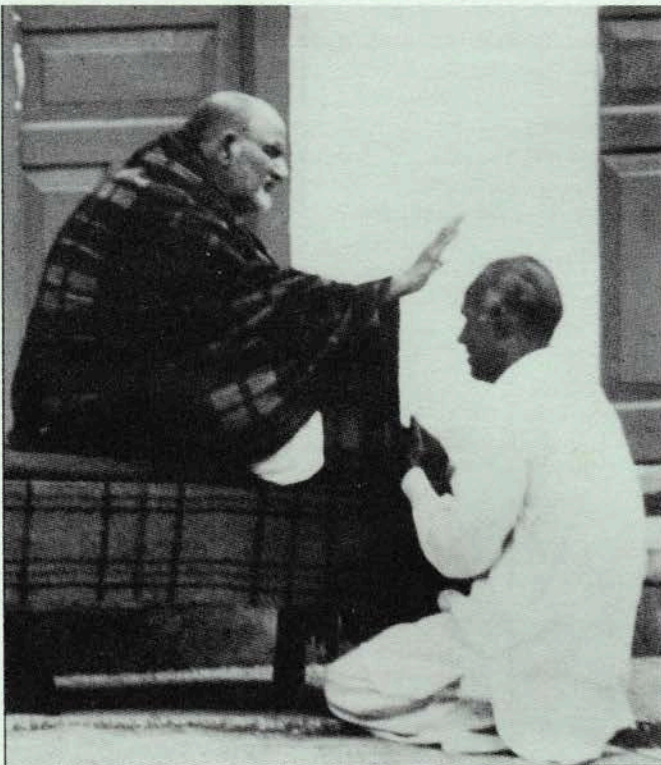
*Season's Greetings & Happy Holy Days*

address correction requested

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Neem Karoli Baba and a devotee in India, circa 1960's

Neem Karoli Baba:

*"Serve the poor always."*

Devotee:

*"But who is poor, Baba?"*

Neem Karoli Baba:

*"Everyone" is poor before Christ.*