

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

fall 1994

IT'S NOT THE TOP, IT'S THE CLIMB!

Dear Family,

In the early '80's, when my son Josh was about fourteen, I was asked to accompany a small group of kids from his school in an Outward Bound wilderness training course. I had heard a lot about how great those courses were, so I jumped at the opportunity to do one for free. Off we went to the Wilkesboro, North Carolina Outward Bound base camp for four days of ropes courses, rappelling down cliffs, "bouldering" (climbing big, sheer boulders), wilderness solos, etc.

I've always seen that Outward Bound experience as a good reflection of the spiritual journey.

It Could Be Called "Inward Bound"

For one thing, the events themselves — all the physical challenges — may be what demand your attention during the course, but they're virtually meaningless except as the ways by which you develop inner qualities. It's the same way in our lives — the daily, practical world may require all our attention, but it would be crazy to forget the spiritual purpose behind every situation we face.

In other words, if I were to say, "I must develop courage," and then sit in a chair to think about courage, that's not going to accomplish much. But the "ropes course" — climbing a skinny rope ladder forty feet up a tree and then walking across a narrow, slippery log during a light drizzle, and then grabbing onto another rope to swing all the way down to the ground, may give me a lot more opportunity to look at fear and courage.

There's nothing very important or noble about climbing a rope or a tree or jumping down — who cares? How does that help the world? Yet *courage* definitely helps the world, and it can't be seen, heard or felt by itself. It's like trying to see a color: Color is real, isn't it? Yet we can never see it by itself. We can see red *paint*, white *chalk*, black *pen*, green *shirt*, blue *sky*, gray *paper*, brown *pants*, but we can never see pure redness, whiteness blueness, etc., by themselves.

Our lives are solely a journey into our Divine Nature — our Love, Godliness, holiness, however you want to say it. That's the important part, like courage at the ropes

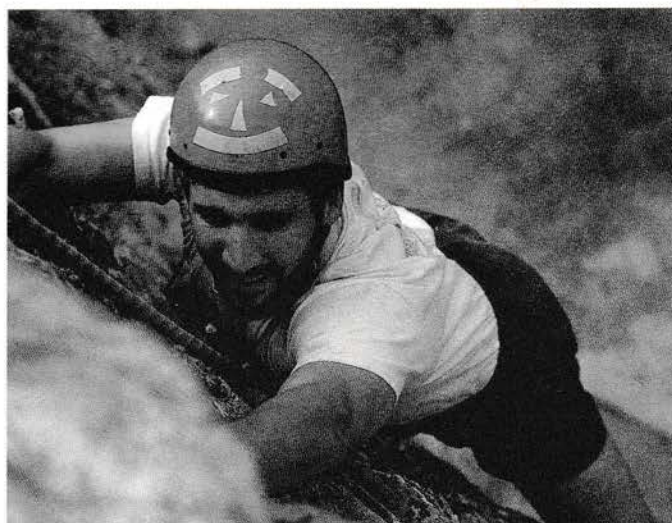


photo by Peter Noebels, courtesy of Outward Bound, NC

course or redness on a piece of paper.

Every person and situation in our lives is merely an "inward bound" ropes course or boulder or cliff, designed precisely to bring out the best in us. What's the point of signing up for the course and then complaining that all the events are too hard?

Years from now, we may hardly remember the challenges or the objects of desire or fear or anger that once may have seemed important enough to lie, cheat, steal or even kill over. All we will have at the end of our lives will be the inner qualities, bad or good, which those situations gave us an opportunity to develop.

To go even further, if you entertain the idea of reincarnation, in our *next* life we won't even remember a *single event or person*, even the most important ones — our husbands, wives, children, parents, best friends, worst enemies — yet we will be the sum total of the honesty or deceitfulness, compassion or selfishness, courage or cowardice, greed or generosity, lust, gratitude, anger, patience, etc., which we have developed.

In other words, even if you serve forty years in prison in this life, you probably won't have any memory of it in your next life. But you will be the product of how you used your time.

*Good deeds done in life
are your only shield when
you must die and go
alone...to another world.*

-- Wm. Buck, The Ramayana

The Top is Really Nothing; It's The Climb!

In the bouldering event at Outward Bound, we were asked to climb a very sheer boulder about thirty feet high.

I remember looking at the top of the boulder while I was on the ground waiting for my turn. The handful of people who had made the climb were standing around the top, looking incredibly happy and radiant and exhilarated. What an easy (and frequent) mistake it is to think, "Wow, they look so happy; There must be something really great on top of that boulder!"

Of course, the truth is, there was nothing spectacular at the top of the boulder. Those people were enjoying the rewards of a tough climb. But how many times in our lives do we forget that, and merely try to get to the top of that damn boulder by every other means *except* going through the same effort and risks the people at the top went through?

I caught myself doing that a few months ago, in a conversation with one of my favorite spiritual elders, Father Murray Rogers, a Bishop of the Anglican Church who lived in India, Israel and China for many years. I had just returned from India, and we were talking about my meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I said that the Dalai Lama was probably the most *profoundly* simple, *deeply happy* person I have ever met. Father Murray's response was, "Yes, and just *imagine* the pain and struggle he must have endured in order to become so thoroughly happy."

I was seeing the Dalai Lama at the top of the boulder, and Murray's response reminded me that it was the climb, the climb. What we see in saints is the result of a long, hard climb, not a lucky break or an avoidance of difficulty. You and I have every opportunity to make that same climb, and of course, we're all doing it all the time, whether we like it or not. It's just that we can climb with ignorance, fear, avoidance, denial, complaining, whining,

and so forth, or with excitement, respectfulness, gratitude, perseverance and rock-solid faith.

The purpose of spiritual practices is not to get to the top with less effort; we will each be called upon to expend *tremendous* effort — to forgive the unforgivable, bear the unbearable, surmount the insurmountable; we will be called upon to develop Lovingkindness in response to ignorance, hatred, fear and persecution. Anyone looking for an easy, painless way through life should burn this newsletter as quickly as possible and run in the opposite direction of any *genuine* spiritual teaching.

The purpose of spiritual practice is to **remember** that life is basically an Outward Bound course: The top is entirely meaningless except for the proper climb up to it. If yours seems to be a very tough climb, you may find even more joy at the top.

And everyone is climbing the same boulder. The difference between spiritual seekers and others is simply the awareness or faith that the struggle is indeed worthwhile and leads to the top. Imagine what a constant hassle life must be to somebody climbing a difficult boulder with no faith in the climb, the struggle, or the top.

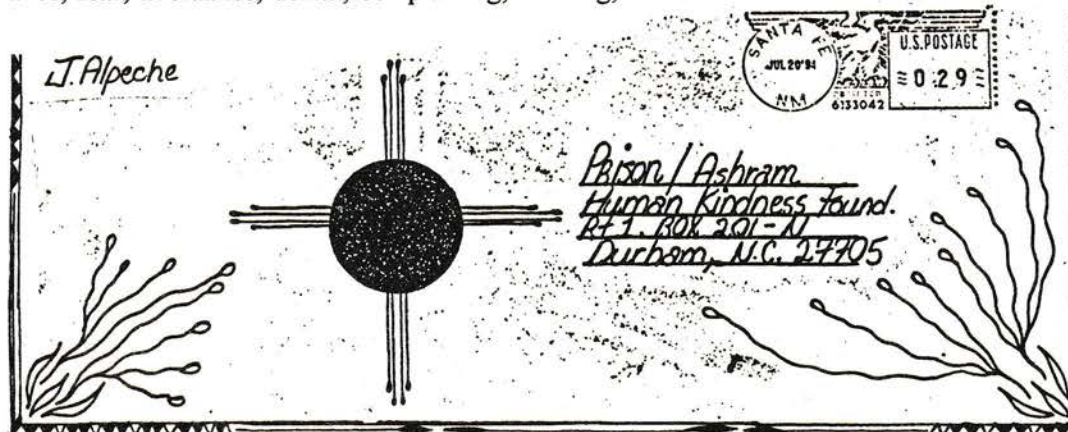
As you look around and see most of the people in the world in that predicament, the best help you can offer is to *recognize* your oneness with them as a climber, *recognize* the oneness of the boulder and the typical scrapes and bruises, problems and woes which befall us all, and then pay attention to your own climbing, always willing to lend a hand when called upon. When others see your increasing freedom

and happiness and say, "It must be great to be up there on top of that boulder," you can remind them that it's not the top which leads to happiness, it's the climb.

Love, Bo



photo by Peter Noebels, courtesy of Outward Bound, NC



SOME SIMPLE PRACTICES FOR REAL CHANGE

Clarifying Your Motivation

- ♥ **The Big Clarification:** As basic as it may sound, very few people take even a few seconds every day to remind themselves of who they are and what they hope to do with their lives. The mind moves toward what it dwells on. If you're constantly afraid of accidents, you're bound to have them. If you become obsessed with failure, you'll fail time and time again. And conversely, if you begin each day thinking briefly of who you are and what you most sincerely hope to find in your life, you will move toward those goals.

So, either as soon as you wake up and you're still lying in bed, or at the beginning of your morning meditation session, train yourself to bring into awareness a series of thoughts something like this (pause briefly between each sentence to let the meaning sink in): *"I am a seeker of truth on a spiritual journey. I have deep things to learn; May I learn them honorably. I have good things to offer; May I offer them generously. I am where I need to be; I am doing what I need to be doing. May I be a simple, humble, kind presence on the Earth today. May I be grateful to those who came before me, and may I make the roads smoother for those who will travel them after me."*



That's just one example. As you work with a morning clarification like this for a while, what will happen is that at various times throughout the day, you will become aware of whether or not you're living up to your hopes and moving toward your goals. Remember, no one laid these hopes on you from the outside; these are the things *you* hold to be important, so it's not like "Hey stupid, look how you're not living up to whom you want to be." Not like that at all. It's more like "Hey, remember your clarification this morning? You're not going to be happy with yourself if you violate it like this, so why not start being kind to yourself by changing your behavior?" Instead of being your own harshest critic, you become a gentle pal, merely reminding yourself of what you really believe in, what you really want out of life, and urging yourself to move toward it even if it's a little tough at times -- well, actually, even if it's *very* tough at times.

We're all weighed down by habit patterns that are hard to break. But hard or not, I promise you they are worth breaking. It's the only way we become truly new people, the only way our loftiest concepts gradually become real down to our very bones. You can't imagine how much you can really change! You can become a happy, peaceful person no matter what you've been through, done, or feel like right now. And it all begins very simply by clarifying your reasons for doing what you do, from big to little, every day. Just by saying, "This is what I want; am I acting in such a way as to move in that direction?" So simple.

- ♥ **Little Clarifications:** Clarifying your motivation is very useful even for the small issues of daily life. You reach for something to eat, and think, "What's my motivation? Am I hungry or bored? Or you go to turn on the tv, "Am I hoping to see something of value or just be distracted?" You find yourself in a conversation, telling some old story, and wonder, "What's the purpose of saying what I'm saying? Is it to share, to inspire, to help, to give, to learn -- or just to compete for attention, to build my own ego, which will never be satisfied anyway?" A Buddhist teacher once told me, "Proper and improper behavior is very simple: Proper behavior is anything which will increase your awareness and peace; improper behavior is anything which will decrease your awareness and peace." So clarifying your motivation can help you to make a freer choice in all your activities -- What do I really want, and will this help me to attain it?

Looking Back and Re-Dedicating Yourself for the Next Day



- ♥ Clarifying your motivation is the front door, and looking back at the end of the day is the back door. Again, either at the end of your evening meditation period, or when you're lying in bed before drifting off to sleep, take a few minutes to look back really honestly at the day you've just lived, and allow yourself to see the things you feel good about and the things you wish you had done differently. Don't make excuses or elaborate defenses about why you did what you did; no one is watching.

This is the time for you to feel the difference between doing the things that you feel good about, and the things you feel bad about. It's important, because now with compassion for yourself, you can re-dedicate your commitment for tomorrow so that you don't have to feel bad tomorrow night as well. Be honest, but gentle. Firm, but forgiving. "I'm humbled by today; may I be more consistent tomorrow for my own happiness and the happiness of all beings." Simple as it sounds, this is a solid beginning for living a happier, holier life.

LETTERS

Dear Bo & Sita,

My nervous system is shot; I'm eating but I'm losing pounds by the week, the mental health staff wanna put me on meds but I'm simply not having none of them drugs.

It's not AIDS or something like that — see, I am about to die of stress in this half super-max, half mental health prison because I strive every day to help make things better — for the homeless, for ex-prisoners, for prisoners rights.

But God, it's hard helping people that don't know or want to know that the way things are can be changed and that we need to work together for that. I'm really fucked up here now because I can't stop caring and I'm still not reaching the brothers here.

Guards here do so much dirt that it's expected and accepted, yet brothers react all wrong and end up hurting us more. When I see c.o.'s in full riot gear and tear gas rush another human it hurts me deeply because corrections is all about unfair and dishonest conduct, and I'm trapped here with people that I've come to love — even if they don't love me.

But now I need some help. My nervous system is killing me. I stay up all night every night writing letters to the government and everywhere else trying to get this place to run just as a prison should. It's like no one wants to help someone who really wants to make a difference. People don't give a fuck, and trying to get help for myself and others is like playing Russian roulette with a 45 automatic.

I've read your books, and meditation has helped but then when I come out of it my world starts going down hill. Maybe I'll start taking the damn meds. But first I need to hear from you.

Peace, S

Dear Brother S,

I can feel your pain and confusion, and if it's any consolation to you, you should know that you're in good company. What you're experiencing is the realization and frustration almost

every single person experiences as he or she "wakes up" to the simple truth of what a **better world** it would be if we all listened to each other and loved each other.

Just like a baby who cries and whines for months as his teeth start coming in, you're feeling the real growing pains of your own spiritual self.

But our big advantage over the baby is that we can understand that this pain is actually a process of growth, and it is moving us steadily toward the Good. Awful as it feels, you actually asked for this to happen the first moment you ever

"God, it's hard helping people that don't know or want to know that the way things are can be changed and that we need to work together for that..."

prayed to be guided toward the "Light."

When our eyes open after years of darkness, a lot of what we see isn't the beautiful or peaceful stuff we had imagined.

With eyes wide open, we will eventually see profound beauty, but of course we will see ugliness and sadness, too.

Especially when it comes to what we wish for others. "Oh, why can't they see?? Why can't they wake up?? Why can't they accept me for what I am?? Why do they keep harming themselves??"

The "why's" can drive us nuts, but the fact remains, we all wake up when we wake up and not before. Five years ago, there may have been someone right next to you who felt the same pain and depression over your "unawakeness" that you feel now over everyone else's.

Yet you couldn't wake up until it was time, until you suffered enough, and neither can the people around you.

A monk named Father Theophane said, "Sometimes we must see the beauty in others and remain silent." That's so hard!! But do you think you're bringing about change in those around you by being depressed, con-

fused, losing weight, etc. — or would you bring about a greater degree of change by being a simple, radiant, peaceful person?

The very frustration you feel of "them" not being "reached" by you, is your biggest obstacle to reaching anyone. The first journey you must strengthen is your own. Devote yourself to study, practice, and quietude. *Become* the message instead of preaching it. It's hard work, but it puts the control in *your* hands instead of anyone else's.

Learn what it means to be *devoted* to truth, to spiritual improvement. "Devoted" is one of the most important words in life. You must become devoted. If you are truly devoted to

your brothers and sisters, then you will take time to become a stronger, clearer, more helpful presence. That's what all my books and newsletters are about.

You can do this. I have, and so have millions of others. There is definitely an alternative to the kind of isolation and despair you are feeling. Reach in for it, brother. Please.

You'll be amazed at the joy buried underneath that despair. I promise.

Love, Bo



Dear Bo & Sita,

Just a note to say thanks for your newsletter. Your books and newsletters have always made an impression on me and left me with something valuable — but perhaps the most moving words you've ever written, as far as I am concerned, were "Dear Family."

It felt so good to be included like that, and I got a little choked up reading that.

Quiet Peace, G

Dear Bo,

Like so many others who write you, I've been in prison more than on the streets in the past 15 years. And like all of us I've been in my self-made prison all my life.

Till about three months ago I really hated life and myself. That was when they put a F.N.G. in my cell ("fucking new guy"). I'm 35 years old and have over ten years in prison and this FNG was only 20 and had his first one-year bit. My first words to him was, "Fuck this, you got to find a new house. I don't live with no fucking hoppers."

I was told by the sergeant that he couldn't move the guy for a few days because there wasn't any open cells, and he asked me to just give the kid a few days. So I went back to my cell and told Mike (the FNG) that he could stay but he was living by my rules.

I don't go out of my cell much and I read a lot so I asked him if he had any books or mags. He said he had a really good one called "We're All Doing Time." That was the start of me opening my eyes.

I read *We're All Doing Time*, that first day I just couldn't put it down. Mike told me he has been into it for about a year and really knew it worked.

The next day I watched Mike as he did his meditation and yoga. He really did look happy even when I did my best to make his stay in "my house" as hard as I could.

The third day I read your book again and asked Mike a few things; I even tried meditation. It didn't go very well, but something told me I should keep trying. I started to do a little yoga with Mike, and found I really enjoy it.

Well, till this day I never told anyone, and I'm not even sure I knew at the time why I did it, but I went to the sergeant and told him to just let Mike stay where he was, that I would deal with it. Then I told Mike that the ser-

geant told me he didn't have anywhere to move him, and that we just had to get along. It was a lie.

So to make a long story short, I started to read and re-read and ask Mike things. I now can meditate for longer times each few days. And I am truly happy to be here.

I still have a long way to go to be able to not act on my emotions. But my "best friend

Mike" says I really am moving along at a good pace. Not too fast but not too slow either.

For the first time in 35 years I can say I love someone and mean it. Because thanks to Mike and you, I now know what Love really is. Hell, I can even show it a little already!!

Well, yesterday I give Mike a hug and said good-by as he went home. I was so happy for him, but I will miss him a lot. But I know it is as it should be.

Thank you so very much. I can feel your love when I read your words and that is something I've never got from a book, so I know it's from you and not the book. Be well and know you are loved!

A friend always, E



Dear Bo,

This is my first time in prison. I do not know how things work yet. I do not want to get raped or used. Would you be able to give me some advice?

My cellie is telling me when I get to camp I will have to "shank" someone

to make a name for myself, and then no one will mess with me.

I have never had to fight much because of my size & the company I ran with. I do not know what to do or whose advice to trust. I cannot go to the officials or I would be labeled as a snitch which would cause me more trouble.

I do not know if I could kill a man. But they say I will have to, or become a homo-sexual "bitch," which I will not. I need to know what games to look for here and how to avoid them. Please pray for me.

M.

Dear M,

I know thousands of convicts who don't shank anyone, and who don't get made into "bitches." No one, including me, can tell you what your prison experience is going to be like, but you certainly don't have to go into it thinking the worst.

Prison life is tough, but the rules of the Universe still apply: Be the kind of person you would be proud for your son or daughter to imitate. Respect people. Respect yourself. Kindness leads to kindness, fear leads to fear, anger leads to anger.

You do have a lot of control over what happens to you in the joint. I'm sure there will be tough and scary situations, but even those are for the purpose of finding your courage and faith -- not to become an animal like some convicts do.

Don't buy into the macho scenarios some people paint about how you have to kill somebody. Violence is just a form of fear, nothing else. If you want your life to go in a good direction, you have to do good. Period.

Take a little time every morning when you get up, and every night before you hit the sack, to sit straight in silence, focus your attention on your breath, and quiet down. You truly can use the time to make some changes in your life that you'll be thankful for forever.

I've known thousands of guys who have done it, and you can do it too. But it takes work. It takes a lot of self-honesty and a lot of patient practice. Go for it.

Love, Bo



Dear Bo & Sita,

Please help me out of a very painful conflict I've been suffering for many years.

Ten years ago at the age of 21, a guy I worked with got his friend to punch me one evening after work. The guy was bigger, stronger & tougher than I was, very intimidating. I thought about fighting back, but I was too shocked & too scared. So I wimped out! I ran back to the store for protection. I felt violated, humiliated, helpless & cowardly. Compelled to become tougher, I took boxing lessons, etc. & have always needed to prove to myself and others that I'm not a wimp.

The experience has destroyed me of 10 years of potential happiness & life. I still suffer. It's an obsession. I was told by someone that I am projecting my own aggressive thoughts onto others which is causing this. I've searched my soul, read your books, listened to your tapes, all in an effort to find relief. Nothing's helped.

Please! Please send me an insight which may help me out of this "sentence" I've been serving. I'm desperate.

By the way, a year later I ran into this guy & he told me that his friend asked him to do this to me because — and it's true — I was nasty to him at work (I had apologized to him for being nasty, but he still got his friend after me).

I hope you can send some insight to me.

Love, N

Dear N,

I'm sorry to hear you've been so

troubled by this problem, which seems to be your tremendous sense of pride which refuses to forgive yourself for one act of cowardice.

You've punished yourself quite enough for "wimping out." Let go of the foolish pride which has overdramatized that one act of cowardice and confusion. It's just pride, that's all. You were scared and you ran away. I don't know anyone who hasn't, at least once.

And of course, you admit that your own "nasty" behavior was part of the situation when you were hit; so obviously the more we cultivate lovingkindness instead, we discover there aren't as many fists waiting for us in as many parking lots.

Now it's time to move on and apply forgiveness to whatever else you've learned. You have the key to your cell right there in your own hand; I hope you decide to parole yourself. Please keep me posted.

Love, Bo

Dear Bo,

I can't tell you how happy I was that you took time out to write me! Thank you, very much!

I think you're right about my pride. It seems to be the same issue which makes me worry about pleasing people, makes me worry about people's responses to

what I say, think & feel, and what makes me dread being wrong, making a mistake, or looking stupid, wouldn't you say? Pride seems to make it virtually impossible for me to be me!

Thanks again, Bo. Your insights are always appreciated.

Love, N



Dear Bo & Sita,

After spending the past 13 years in prison, I will terminate my sentence soon. I just want to thank you for your books and newsletters.

I have come a long, long way in the last 13 years, from a person filled with rage, hate, prejudice, lies, selfishness, uncontrolled lust and passion, to the person I am today — growing in love, peace, thoughtfulness, kindness, compassion, and self-control.

I struggle, I slip, I fall. But it is so much more easy to get up now and continue on. I grow stronger each day and my slips become less frequent.

Thank you so much for being a part of that. Take care and may God bless you.

Love, B

EXCUSES

"Why not?" That was the first thing he said. He had never seen me before. I hadn't said a word. "Why not?" I knew he had me.

I brought up excuses: "My wife...the people I have to work with...not enough time...I guess it's my temperament..."

There was a sword hanging on the wall. He took it and gave it to me. "Here, with this sword, you can cut through any barriers." I took it & slipped away without saying a word.

Back in my room in the guesthouse I sat down and kept looking at that sword. I knew that what he said was true.

But the next day I returned his sword. How can I live without my excuses?"

-- "Tales of a Magic Monastery," by Theophane the Monk



NEWS, NOTES, & OFFERINGS

Bo & Sita Receive 1994 Temple Award

We are very happy to report that the Institute of Noetic Sciences has awarded its annual "Temple Award for Creative Altruism" to Bo and Sita Lozoff. To quote from the Institute's letter to the Lozoffs, *"These awards...honor people whose lives and work embody and model a spirit of unselfish service....The Temple Award is presented to you this year in recognition of your pioneering approach to working with prisoners and others... Your passion, commitment, and generosity are truly inspiring, and your work is a model of creative engagement for us all."*

Bo & Sita went to the Institute's annual conference in Chicago this summer to accept the award, which carried a \$12,500 cash prize, which the Lozoffs donated to Human Kindness Foundation. In Bo's acceptance speech, he told the approximately 1500 people assembled that he was grateful to see *any* prison work honored in this day and age of such intense hatred toward offenders. Bo said that *any* form of socially-approved hatred harms us all, and is neither a necessary nor successful step toward creating a safer, less crime-ridden society.

He reminded the audience of Dostoyevski's classic statement, *"The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons,"* and pointed out that by that yardstick, we are extremely uncivilized and getting more so. Bo urged the Institute's members to begin taking responsibility in their home towns to find more sensible, community-based solutions to crime and punishment, instead of the massive build-up of new prisons which is making the USA "a nation behind bars."



Stop Prisoner Rape

If you agree that it's time to make it clear to prisoners, institutions, the government and the general public that prison rape can no longer be tolerated, write to this group for information on what they're doing about it and what you can do.

Stop Prisoner Rape
Box 2713
Manhattanville Station,
NY, NY 10027-8871

Loved One in Prison?

Help others by sharing how you handle it. Writer-inmate spouse preparing book of coping skills; your experiences needed. Call or write to request anonymous questionnaire. (corrected address:)

Coping
Box 3125, 268 Bush St.
San Francisco CA 94104
(415) 292-4993

Bo's Upcoming Lectures & Workshops

Place	Date	Contact for further information
Wash., DC	Oct. 27th	(301) 251-1058 (public; Pat Miller)
Lorton, VA	Oct. 28-29th	Lorton Prisons (prisoners & staff)
Doylestown, PA	Oct. 30th	(215) 348-3428 (public; Pebble Hill Church)
Graterford, PA	Oct. 31st	State Corr. Inst. (prisoners & staff)
Bucks County, PA	Oct. 31st	Bucks County Prison (prisoners & staff)
Philadelphia, PA	Nov. 1st	(215) 590-8895 (public; Drexel Univ./Dr. Hall)
New Jersey	Nov. 2nd-4th	NJ state prisons (prisoners & staff)
NY, NY	Nov. 5-6th	(914) 232-8866 (public; Connie Kamer)
Bedford Hills, NY	Nov. 7th	Bedford Hills Corr. Facility (prisoners & staff)
Ossining, NY	Nov. 7th	Sing Sing Corr. Facility (prisoners & staff)
Boston, MA	Nov. 9th	Massachusetts Corr. Inst. (prisoners & staff)
Boston, MA	Nov. 10th	Medford Training Center (prisoners & staff)
Ludlow, MA	Nov. 11th	Hampden County Corr. (prisoners & staff)
Elmira, NY	Nov. 13th	Elmira Corr. Facility (prisoners & staff)
Harrisburg, PA	Nov. 15th-17th	(717) 787-6151 (public; Jim Smith)

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*...We will each be called upon to develop
Lovingkindness in response to ignorance, hatred, fear
and persecution. Anyone looking for an easy, painless
way through life should burn this newsletter as
quickly as possible and run in the opposite direction
of any genuine spiritual teaching.*

-- Bo Lozoff