

# Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Fall 1996

## “ TO BE ABLE ”

Dear Family,  
**D**I got a phone call recently from a young man in Atlantic City, New Jersey. He said, “A friend of mine told me I was heading down the wrong road, and that I really need to get your books to steer me back in the right direction.” I asked him what wrong road he was taking, and he said he was using drugs again. He has been out of prison since 1993 and has been doing “so-so,” but he knew that he was starting the Big Slide again and was desperate for help.

I said, “Well, you don’t need my books to know that drugs are going to screw up your life. You need to do whatever it takes – twelve steps, counseling, detox, whatever – to stop using drugs immediately. You have to stop. You already know that. Don’t wait for my books. You need to do it today.”

He said he had already been through groups and rehab, and maybe he would go again, but wasn’t sure how long it would hold up. So I asked him to tell me what his life was about. He said that he has an apartment and works at Bally’s Casino. That’s it. That’s his life.

I told him I’d probably be doing drugs too if that were all my life was about. Working every day in a greed-filled, decadent environment, witnessing pathetic gamblers, prostitutes, drug dealers, gangsters, wealthy people, poor people, young people, elderly people, wasting their time in pursuits that have absolutely **nothing** to do with the meaning or purpose of human life; if all he’s doing is working there and going back and forth to his apartment — that’s not life, that’s hell. He was silent for a while.

I asked him what he believed in. What is important to him? What brings him joy? What noble cause, what passion, inspires him? He was silent again for a minute and then said, “I don’t know; just living, you know, just hanging out.” I asked him what he was good at or interested in — anything that he might strive to become better at, whether carpentry or auto mechanics or music or art or anything at all. “I don’t know, nothing, I guess.”

I told him we’d send our books, but there was no magic recipe which will help him create a delicious life out of such rancid ingredients. He needs a bigger change. I encouraged him to look into his heart, talk with others, develop some worthwhile interests, find a cause he can believe in and work hard to support.... after about five minutes of which he meekly said, “Well, listen, um,

thanks for sending me the books; I appreciate you taking the call,” and hung up the phone.

*Before reading on, please take a moment or two to send that brother in New Jersey a silent blessing from your heart that he may find his way, that he may find a decent vision to follow. Please send him your love.*

### Why Do So Many Of Us Feel Useless or Powerless?

How is it that millions of people in our modern society reach adulthood having almost no values, interests or useful skills? It is a big mistake to assume that this is just a matter of underprivileged kids needing a better education! Privileged kids are just as lost and apathetic, and usually even *less* skilled in practical things like fixing a flat tire or repairing a leaky roof. These days, few kids of *any* socio-economic group feel any link to their ancestors’ honor or their unborn children’s’ future, or any ideal larger than “I don’t know, just living, you know, just hanging out.”

In her recent book, *Jesus Meets Buddha*, Sister Ayya Khema says that the Buddha listed fifteen qualities which are essential for a good life. At the very top of the list is **“To Be Able.”** To be a capable person, to have a variety of skills that come in handy, give us self-respect, and which provide various honorable ways to make a living.

The Jewish culture has a well-known word for such a person: *Mensch*. A mensch is someone whom you can loan your car to without worrying about it; someone who can figure out how to get the crumbly piece of toast out of the toaster without electrocuting anybody; someone whom you would like to work with, or have next to you in a fire, or a stuck elevator, or an earthquake or hurricane.

What does it take **to be able**, to be a mensch? It seems to me that it takes three things which should be the framework of any educational system or model of childraising:

1. Learning the classic spiritual and moral **values** which are common to any civilization — mercy, kindness, justice, courage, etc.
2. Learning practical **skills** relevant to the basics — food, shelter, warmth, health. Such self-reliance is the core of self-respect and common sense.
3. Developing **self-discipline** and adaptability so one doesn’t fall apart in hard times. Not needing to be pampered. Not being so touchy or needy.



## A Different View of Childhood

In the ancient Hindu culture, even the most privileged kids, the children of kings and emperors, were sent into the forest ashrams of rugged sages at a very young age to live without any luxuries and learn true unselfishness.

In most other ancient cultures too, childhood was mainly about learning those three things: **Values, skills, and self-discipline**. This is what gives us a sense of connection to others, a sense of our place in the great scheme of life, a sense of responsibility to the common good. If we separate kids from any duties in the real world, we inadvertently remove their deepest sense of value as well.

That may be the chief reason modern American kids are so lost and angry. American childhood is unnaturally insulated and separate from the adult world. **"Generation gap" is not a natural human phenomenon; it's a serious problem we have created by having so little to do with our children's daily lives.** Many kids don't know or care what their parents do for a living. The kids have no direct importance to their family's daily needs or maintenance. Even the government calls children "dependents." Is that a good message?

We may see American childhood as "giving them a chance just to be kids, just to have fun while they can." But in reality the effect seems to make them bored, agitated, and hopeless. People of every age *need* to be useful, and *need* to be skilled at something.

If we provide no opportunities for kids to be responsible, skilled, and needed; no meaningful initiations from one stage of childhood to another, then children will form their own groups — gangs, social cliques, Satanic groups — in which they can experience initiation, define their identity and value to the group, pledge their loyalty, and learn the skills relevant to that group — even if the relevant skills happen to be using a credit card to pick a lock, or shoving an icepick through the exact location between two ribs so that it punctures an enemy's heart.

## A Nation of Mensches

Helena Norberg Hodge, a British woman who spent many years living in the tiny Himalayan country of Ladakh, points out that before our modern western educational system came to Ladakh, the society was basically a whole nation of mensches!

Children grew up learning their society's values of compassion, nonviolence and harmony, and **virtually every boy and girl, by the time they reached adolescence, knew how to raise food, mend clothes, care for animals, build houses, construct complex irrigation systems** — in short, Ladakhi youngsters naturally became moral and capable young adults.

Now "progress" has come. Thousands of children are removed from their villages, crammed into classrooms to memorize facts and recite their times tables. They no longer learn from their parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents; they no longer share the responsibility of

food production, warmth, shelter, child care; they now have a more "privileged" childhood.

But as Ms Hodge explains, when their education is finished and they return to their villages, they are essentially useless. They have been cut off from the wealth of values, skills and traditions which have made the Ladakhis a happy people for hundreds of years. Many of them then migrate to the larger cities around India or Nepal, becoming prostitutes or drug abusers or working for minimum wage and being as aimless as our friend in Atlantic City at the beginning of this article. It's a very sad situation, similar to the devastation of the Native American cultures in the USA

## Josh's Two Complaints

In 1991, Sita and I celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary by spending the day with our son, Josh, in a remote spot at the bottom of the Rio Grande Gorge in northern New Mexico. The three of us took the opportunity to clean out all our old baggage with each other, air any secrets, deepen our sense of love and connection and loyalty to each other. Josh was twenty at the time.

At one point during the day I asked Josh if there was any way we had let him down as parents. He said there were actually *two* ways. "First of all, whenever something was hard for me to do, you guys helped me so much that I didn't develop much self-discipline. That hurt me a lot when I got to L.A. I had to develop all my self-discipline on my own. You didn't help me become very tough or adaptable.

"The second thing is, Dad, do you remember when I was fourteen and I told you that as soon as I finished high school I wanted to go out to L.A. to be an actor, and that I didn't want to go to college?" I said that I remembered, and he continued, "Well, you told me that I would have your blessing to do so on one condition: That by the time I left home, I was a skilled carpenter. That way, whether I succeeded in my acting career or not, I would still be able to make a good living and feel the satisfaction of working with my hands."

Once again, I said I remembered. Then Josh said, "But you didn't make me do it. You didn't force me to become a good carpenter, and you gave me your blessing anyway. You should have stuck by your word."

I said, "But I tried! I built five buildings between the time you were fourteen and the time you left home, and I tried to get you to help me on every one of them. You didn't like it; it was like pulling teeth to get you to help. So I gave up. I didn't want to force you."

Josh replied, "That's exactly what I mean: You *should* have forced me. You were the parent and I was the kid. You set a condition for your blessing and then you didn't make me live up to it. You should have made me become a good carpenter whether I liked it or not."

Sita and I sincerely asked his forgiveness on both those accounts. He asked for ours on a few other things. It was a



great day – a renewal of deep affection and trust. I recommend such an occasional event to any family. And once again, it reminded us that kids don't want to be in a fantasy world of their own, they want to be needed and involved and held accountable, even though they may resist it.

### The Common Myth of "Personal Freedom"

Most people think of personal freedom as doing whatever they want to do; our media images of personal freedom always depict self-centered pleasures and irresponsibility — "getting away from it all," "taking the phone off the hook," "luxuriating in a bubble bath," "being rich enough not to care what others think," etc. . But human beings *exist* in relation to each other. Real personal freedom is being able to respond to whatever our situation or circumstances require from us. Ability to respond. Respond-ability. Responsibility.

If I don't know how to swim, and I walk by a lake where a child is drowning, I may passionately *want* to save her but not have the personal freedom to do it. I may have a million dollars in my pocket, I may be president of the United States, but if I don't know how to swim, that child will still drown. Motivation is only one part of freedom. Skill is another.

Many things limit our true personal freedom. **If we are unskilled, illiterate, addicted, greedy, short-tempered, we will not be very free.** We will always be victims of forces outside of our control. Even addiction to cigarettes, coffee, or sweets or a certain amount of sleep or particular working conditions compromises our personal freedom.

Needing to be "validated" or "acknowledged" by others also prevents us from being free. The popular sentiment "I just want to be loved" is a veritable anthem of slavery, not a song of freedom. When we focus on our ability to *give* love instead our need to receive it, that's when we set foot on the path to true liberation.

### Cutting Out the Old and the Young

The truth is, *real* freedom, *real* joy, require a sense of one's "fit" in the great scheme of things. **In order to feel connected to Life, we must contribute something positive toward the common good.** Children and elderly people are no exception. By sheltering children from responsibility and putting the elderly out to pasture, we have unwittingly created an angry, aimless younger generation and a lonely, unappreciated older generation.

Many Americans assume this is simply what it means to be young or to be old. But anyone who has traveled in other cultures knows this is not true. Children can be happy, respectful, capable. The elderly can be radiantly peaceful, lucid, venerated.

Life is a holy and mysterious process all the way through. It's not just about making a living. There are wonders and challenges in every stage of life. Each stage is worthy of equal respect. Each stage requires **values, skill, and self-discipline**. And in every stage, we need each other. We need younger, middle-aged and older people around us, not just others our own age. We are ever and always part of each other. We either walk into Heaven arm in arm or we don't get in at all.

### Making the Change

At this moment, there are many millions of angry young people, lonely old people, and lost, unhappy people like our friend in Atlantic City. The situation won't turn around overnight. But each one of us can begin the process of turning it around by sizing up our own lives with respect to **values, skills, and self-discipline** and doing whatever we need to do in order to bring those qualities up to our liking. We can look at how we are treating our children and elders and see whether we are allowing them their own areas of usefulness and responsibility, even if they fuss about it for a while.

We can steadily dismantle every notion we have that freedom is about money or accomplishments or prestige or recreation, and we can cease passing such empty notions on to our kids. We can develop common sense and basic skills, at any age, so that we become more self-reliant and adaptable to changing circumstances. We can size up our way of talking and make sure that we say what we mean and mean what we say; no hidden agendas or broken promises to ourselves or others.

In short, these are the qualities of a basic *Mensch*, and the world badly needs more mensches. **Values, skills, and self-discipline** make for a more enjoyable experience of living, more self-respect and confidence and friendliness to others. We can put ourselves and our kids and our elders back on this time-honored path to freedom and see how it begins to affect the folks next door and down the block. Everyone wants to feel better these days. A humble personal step in the right direction is a contribution to the whole world and to all future generations.

with love, Bo



# LETTERS

Dear Mr. Lozoff,

I'm writing to you for some truly needed advice. I respect your wisdom. Let me give you some background information, so you will have a better understanding.

I have been in the system (in one way or another) all my life. I am presently incarcerated in a maximum security prison. I'm what a convict calls "a fish" because I'm new to this program and it's my first time in my prison.

My parents are dead and the rest of my family is either too busy for a "problem child," or smoking dope, which only makes my time harder. I'm a 22-year-old with no job skills, and I'm stuck in, this environment which hasn't improved my mentality.

I have no understanding about life, I have no goals, I have no respect for life, I love nobody (not even myself). Life matters very little to me, but I blame no one for my troubles, I am a realist; I realize that I brought this all on myself.

My main problem is: I don't want anything out of life, nothing I've done, seen or heard entices me to accomplish it. Sex is remote, beauty fades into normal, friendship is lies, love is a matter of opinion.

I'm a person who likes things simple, straight across, no small print. I do respect kindness, I envy wisdom and understanding. I also believe you're only as good as your word!

The reason I need your advice is because I get out in sixteen months, and let's cut the bullshit - I'm scared!! Please help me.

*Humbly requested, J*

Dear J,

It's all up to you, J. You can get smart and have not only a bearable life but a GREAT life. Or you can stay stuck with millions of other people who have no values, no skills, and no self-discipline. It's a sad, hard age we're living in, but your part is up to you.

It is not a matter of what anyone else does to you, not a matter of whether you get a break or not. Right now, you have sixteen months to work your ass off becoming a deeper human being.

Study our books, dedicate yourself to clearing your mind getting your body healthy. Develop tremendous self-discipline, take any vo-tech course which will provide you with useful skills for making a living. It may be an uphill battle, it may be the hardest journey you ever set foot on, but it is in your power to do.

Millions of people live bleak lives like you described. But thousands have found meaning and purpose and joy. It's your choice which group you want to be in. Let the old J die and a new one be born right there in prison. No drugs, no booze, no lying, no scamming. Become a student of the ancient wisdom, a humble and compassionate person — because that is who you truly are.

If you do your part, your spiritual friends and guides will do theirs. Little miracles happen along the way. People or books or signs show up just as you need them. Opportunities come. All it requires is your effort and self-discipline. Follow the one Great Way of all the religions — the way of kindness, unselfishness, study, and practice. Train your mind to quiet down. We will be with you on this journey if you take it. We are your spiritual family if you want us to be.

You've already got the first steps right there in your hands in the package we sent you. Are you ready to begin taking those first steps? Set aside a

Dear Bo & Sita,

I am a 51-year-old Caucasian female correctional officer who has become a better person in general through my work experience inside a man's unit for the last 9-1/2 years.

I relate easily to all races and consider the majority as my "kids." I mainly listen and learn something new everyday in patience and understanding of what it's like to lose one's freedom. It's taught me the sweetness of life in simple things and to grow in grace in spite of myself at times.

If it was in my power, I would "adopt" a lot of folks in this world who've never had any kind of home life to speak of.

*Sincerely yours, P*

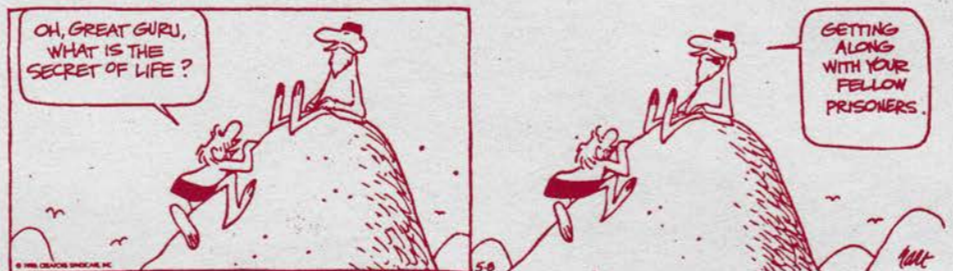
certain time every morning and evening for study, prayer, meditation. Don't be casual; be formal and respectful about it. Work intensely with the insights provided in *We're All Doing Time*. Apply them in your own situation every day. You are not alone in this. Not only are we with you, but thousands of other cons are doing the same thing this very moment.

Work with these first steps for a couple of months and let me know how you're doing. And look into whatever classes or training you can get for useful job skills. Practical skills are part of the spiritual practice.

*We're with you, Bo*



**B.C. By Johnny Hart**





Dear Sita & Bo,

Thank you so much for the book. I was very touched that you sent it.

After being denied parole twice, I am finally maxing out in less than 3 weeks!! All the system demanded was tangible proof of punishment (as though learning to live with the responsibility of the accidental death of a loved one isn't enough) but in the long run they did me a favor. I can feel punished; whereas, otherwise I believe I would have led a self-destructive life in order to punish myself. I won't have to do that now.

Also, I spent the last 8 months working at the motor pool. I can now change oil, do basic maintenance and minor repair on lawnmowers, vans, trucks and tractors! Ha! How about that!

Whenever I feel sorry for myself, I try to remember that many others have it much worse. It helps keep a perspective on my troubles.

I'm so glad y'all popped up when you did, when I was feeling completely isolated in my experience of the universe. I'm not the only one! I'm not!

Love and thanks, A



Dear Bo & Sita,

It's been a while since I last wrote, but it's not been wasted. Meditation works REAL well. I was so scared of some of my own demons, that I never thought about how other people might be worse off in their life (on death row, mental hospital, can't cope with their problems). I've set aside 15 min. every day just to meditate for others' problems, and send my love to them.

I want to thank you for both of your love and understanding! I've controlled my terror, lust, pride, grief, guilt, greed, and other problems I've had! I find peace of mind in my meditation every day. Also, it's improved my outlook on life! I'm at a lesser security prison (thanks to meditating my anger away)! I've not been in any trouble since I last wrote. Thank you both so much!

In Loving Kindness, R

Dear Bo & Sita & Josh,

As you can see from the enclosed picture, my wife and I have been blessed by a child, conceived on a conjugal visit, but more importantly in a state of love.

Deciding to have this child was no easy matter. My wife and I have talked about it for years and when it became obvious



the political tenor of the times was not going to allow me freedom anytime soon, she essentially put her foot down. I was filled with fear: What if this happens, what if that happens? — Mostly the same old bugaboos that plague all of us in here to one degree or another: Lack of control, fear of change, guilt. Luckily, she refused to let me go on wallowing and also refused to let me say no.

Remarkably, at every turn we didn't meet the resistance I was expecting, but mostly encountered compassionate people trying to

help out. After the second try where it was possible, it happened!

The day of her birth, the staff here went way overboard to make sure I was able to get on the phone and be as much a part of the process as possible.

The child is Grace personified, perfection, love wrapped in soft flesh and happy eyes. Every time I think about the feelings she has awakened in me I find myself overcome with emotion. Since she was born, she has been in the visiting room every weekend. I have watched men who cannot express joy or happiness inside melt in front of her. It is as though her humanity is so strong, so

uncorrupted that it evokes the humanity that resides in all of us, deep below the hurts and scars of a lifetime.

There is no doubt in my mind that she is supposed to be here, that she came to remind all of us here about the truly important things in life. As you wrote about recently, I am so glad she is here, I will remind her everyday I am with her how much I appreciate her. Life is good!

Take the best of care and strive to be happy; **Peace to you all, K**



By Daniel K  
Carnell  
Fry



## PRACTICE: *Stopping* — the Ultimate Spiritual Practice

Angulimala was a notorious bandit who lived at the time of the Buddha. Once he stalked the Buddha on a trail through the forest with the intention of robbing or killing him. The Buddha walked along slowly, peacefully, just a short distance ahead of Angulimala. But Angulimala could not overtake him. The Buddha continued at the same pace while Angulimala kept speeding up until he was running as fast as he could, but the distance between them mysteriously remained the same. Finally, exasperated and breathless, Angulimala called out angrily, STOP! The Buddha turned and said, "No, Angulimala, it is you who must stop. I have already stopped harmfulness, deceit, greed, hatred and delusion." Angulimala instantly became a disciple who reached enlightenment in that very lifetime.

In the spiritual community in which I live, we *stop* speaking at 10 PM each night. During our work day we practice mindfulness, which is simply to *stop* thinking or speaking of anything other than the task at hand. When conflicts arise, we come together not to accuse, but expressly to *stop* feeling ill-will and distrust so that we can see beyond self-protectionism and personal symbols. Our morning and evening meditation practice is the most challenging form of stopping. First we seat the body in a way which enables us to *stop* moving or fidgeting. Then we *stop* looking around. Finally we strive as best we can to *stop* perceiving ourselves through the usual ceaseless mental chatter we have grown accustomed to.

In fact, most of the great spiritual commandments, precepts and teachings throughout history have been merely guidelines for what we should *stop* doing. Most of the ten commandments start with "Thou Shalt Not..."; the Buddhist precepts and Hindu *Yamas* and *Niyamas* start with "Non...", as in "non-killing, non-stealing, non-lying," etc. Many contemporary people have complained about such overwhelmingly negative wording in the ancient teachings, but there is a good reason for it: There really isn't anything to *do* in order to realize the Divine Presence, the natural Holiness which life offers. We have merely to *stop* thinking and acting in ways which are harmful or selfish. Think about your own life for a moment, and the main improvements you would like to make: Don't most of them involve *stopping*? — smoking, drinking, drug use, uncontrolled lust, anger, fear, self-hatred, etc.; just stopping what keeps you bound?

The Great Teachings unanimously emphasize that all the peace, wisdom and joy in the universe are already within us; we don't have to gain, develop, or attain them. Like a child standing in a beautiful park with his eyes shut tight, there's no need to imagine trees, flowers, deer, birds and sky, we merely need to open our eyes and realize what is already here, whom we already are — as soon as we *stop* pretending we're small or unholy. This is not a philosophy; this is the way things are.

I could characterize nearly any spiritual practice as simply being: **Identify and Stop**. Identify the myriad forms of limitation and delusion we place upon ourselves, and muster the courage to stop perpetuating each one. Little by little, deep inside of us, the diamond shines, the eyes open, the dawn rises, we become what we already are. *Tat Twam Asi* — Thou Art That (as soon as Thou *stops* pretending otherwise).

The final invitation from the saints and sages is to stop even the last sense of self — true ego-death, to leap into the volcano as a human sacrifice, followed by a resurrection from the ashes as a Perfect One. The BIG Stopping! The consequence of this ultimate stopping is pithily described in a little story by Father Theophane in his book, *Tales of a Magic Monastery*:

I sat there in awe as the old monk answered our questions. Though I'm usually shy, I felt so comfortable in his presence that I found myself raising my hand. "Father, could you tell us something about yourself? He leaned back. "Myself?" He mused. There was a long pause. "My name...used to be...Me. But now...it's **you**."





## NEWS, NOTES, OFFERINGS & GOOD WORKS

### BO LOZOFF PRISON TALK ON VIDEO

We finally have a decent quality video of one of Bo's recent prison workshops — Twin Rivers Correctional Center in Monroe, Washington, in February of '96. We're happy to provide a copy to prison staff or groups free of charge. (Anyone who can afford to pay for a copy can send \$20 per tape. We can't afford to send free copies to individuals.)

Human Kindness Foundation  
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### FREE "GOOD NEWS FOR EVERYONE"

The non-doctrinal *Good News For Everyone* flyer is available for a self-addressed stamped envelope. It appeals very much to prisoners with its messages of forgiveness and the "heaven" to be found within. Great to copy for others too.

The Friends (Quakers)  
313 Castle St.  
Wilmington NC 28401

### PEN WRITING AWARDS FOR PRISONERS

PEN American Center sponsors annual cash awards of \$100, \$50, and \$25 in each of the following categories: Poetry, Fiction, Drama, and Non-Fiction. For details about how and when to enter, write:

PEN Writing Awards  
568 Broadway  
NY NY 10012

### PRISON PHONE RIP-OFFS?

Loved one in prison? Phone bill too much? Write to us about these things: 1) The cost of phone calls; 2) No choice of phone company; 3) what happens to the money generated that should go to inmate benefits; 4) monitoring or taping of attorney calls; 5) interference with other services paid for by billed party (call waiting, etc.); 6) any other complaints that apply.

Prison Phone Project  
American Friends Service Committee  
972 Broad St., 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Newark NJ 07102



Artwork by Cruz T. Baumea,  
Sacaton, Arizona

*a little good news*

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On June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1744, the commissioners from Maryland and Virginia negotiated a treaty with the Indians of the Six Nations at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The Indians were invited to send their boys to William and Mary College. The next day they declined the offer as follows:

*We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those Colleges, and that the Maintenance of our young Men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinced, that you mean to do us Good by your Proposal; and we thank you heartily. But you, who are wise must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things and you will therefore not take it amiss, if our ideas of this kind of Education happen not to be the same as yours.*

*We have had some Experience of it. Several of our young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces: they were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods...neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counsellors, they were totally good for nothing.*

*We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind Offer, tho' we decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make Men of them.*

— from *Touch the Earth*, by T.C. McLuhan