

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Christmas 1998

PLEASE ACCEPT OUR APOLOGIES!! This is only our second newsletter of 1998. Our work load has increased so much (35,000 people now on our mailing list), that we fell behind in our newsletter schedule and missed our Summer/Fall issue. Hope you enjoy this one. Blessings to you all.

"YOU MUST DIE!!"

Jesus in word and deed was almost violent in his call for death, for denial, for stripping, for abandoning, for letting go, for leaving all, for the journey up by going down.

...This whole dialogue runs deep in us and all things. One could say, with complete honesty, that life is really no more than a series of heart-breaking good-byes, so full is it of having and letting go, of embracing and parting.

— from *My Song is of Mercy*, by Father Matthew Kelty

Dear Family,

If only we could have what we want and not have to *change* so much for it! "Lord, I'm a decent person at heart. Oh, sure, I have faults, but I don't mean anyone any harm. Why can't you just help my life to work better? Why does everything have to be so *hard*?"

Is this your usual conversation with God? Do you want the joy of resurrection without the pain of crucifixion first? Why must life require so much constant work? Why must change require so much *change*? It's exhausting! Life often seems to be one enormous obstacle standing in our way. Or as Father Kelty put it (above), *life is really no more than a series of heart-breaking good-byes, so full is it of having and letting go.*

On the one hand, take comfort from all of this. If your life seems to be an unending struggle, a ceaseless procession of hurdles requiring you to jump higher and higher, well, don't feel so alone. This is life. Life is hard. We all face a lot of difficulties, it's not just you.

And on the other hand, take even greater comfort, because the sages and saints of all time have assured us there is a great purpose to all of this; it's not just "Life's a bitch and then you die." Not at all. Once we surrender to what life is really about — which is the spiritual journey — then we find there is plenty of advice, instruction, and comfort amid the difficulties. When we take the advice of the great religions, we discover that 90% of our obstacles and pain are caused by us in the first place.

It's easy to call yourself a Christian or a Jew, a Buddhist or Muslim or Hindu, a Taoist or Wiccan, but it's another thing entirely to really live according to the teachings of any genuine religion. Christ said that many will come in

His name, but we must look for the ones actually doing His Father's work. When the American sage Joseph Campbell was asked whom he considered to be the greatest living Christian, he replied, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama." The Dalai Lama is the leader of Tibetan Buddhism, he's not considered to be a Christian at all. Campbell was using Jesus's own instructions about who is and who isn't a Christian: the Dalai Lama's life is entirely dedicated to compassion, mercy, love, justice, charity, humility, forgiveness — all the qualities which Jesus described as His Father's work.

Many people go to church on Sunday and then pass by a beggar on their way home without stopping to help in any way. They choose a church which will comfort them in a self-centered lifestyle rather than challenge them to be true Christians. Being a true Christian is a terrifying prospect. Being a true Buddhist, Jew or anything else is a terrifying prospect. All the religions stress that we must die as self-centered little idiots in order to discover new life as selfless, loving, generous, fearless souls.

Die to my own plans and dreams? Die to my countless preferences and aversions? Die to my pride and greed? Yes, yes, and yes. Die.

Father Murray Rogers, the beloved elder on our board of directors, had a powerful experience along these lines many years ago. Father Murray is a Christian who has been involved in the interfaith dialogue for over fifty years. As part of his interfaith experience, he went to Japan to spend time in a Zen Buddhist temple for a few months. The Temple was a serenely beautiful place, extremely neat and orderly, extremely quiet, like most Zen temples.

The abbot, a small, courteous man of few words, showed Murray around for a half-hour or more, whispering "This is where you will eat," "This is where you will be meditating," "This is your room," and so forth. In his room, just before turning to leave, the abbot leaned forward toward Murray and whispered, "There is just one more thing." And then he thrust his face directly into Murray's with a wild look and screamed at the top of his lungs, **"YOU MUST DIE!!!!!"**



From Left: Sita, Father Murray, Mary, Heather, and Bo

The abbot turned and left, with young Murray trembling like a leaf, thinking, "Oh no, I've gotten myself into some bizarre cult, this man is crazy, what do I do now," and so forth. But after a while, as the adrenaline settled and his mind regained a little composure, Murray began to think, "Well, isn't that actually what my Lord Jesus said as well? 'You must die to self and be born again of Spirit?' Perhaps I have just never taken it seriously before. Perhaps this Zen Master is not so crazy after all. Perhaps Zen and Christianity are not so different. Every Christian prayer I have ever uttered is essentially my willingness to die and be reborn in Christ."

Father Murray did complete his stay in the Zen Temple. Today he is an eighty-one-year-old joyful and humble Christian elder who has recognized that this message of dying into Christ is found in one form or another in all the great religions.

No great sage or prophet has suggested that this "dying into life" is fun. Obviously, Jesus's own crucifixion and resurrection were no light matter. That's why being a good Christian or anything else is a terrifying idea. We are called upon to actually give our lives away in duty, service, devotion; to worship God through kindness to His creation. Jesus was not vague about this at all; he made it crystal-clear: "Whatever you have done for the least of my brethren, you have done for me."

In the free world, "the least of my brethren" include the growing numbers of homeless people, the hookers and ex-cons, the crippled and disfigured. In prison, the "least of my brethren" would apply to sex-offenders, homosexuals, snitches. Anywhere we ever find ourselves, there will be a population we can conveniently exclude from our glance, from our friendship, from our respect; a population we can frown upon and feel superior to.

I assure you, if Jesus appeared in a prison today, he would offer his friendship to the very lowest cons on the totem pole, and most of the supposed Christians would scorn him for it. When will we learn that **"everyone"** is invited to My Father's table?

That does not mean everyone accepts the invitation, but that is not our business. It is our business to be respectful to all, open to all, no matter what they look like or what they may have done in the past. "Judge not, lest ye be judged." And most of us have plenty to be judged for!

It is very easy to fall into hatred, superiority and racism, especially in a place like prison, where we hardly have any power over who does what to whom. But easy or not, it's the "broad way which leads to destruction." We must resist the impulse with all our might. Keeping a daily discipline of practices and readings can help a great deal by giving us a bigger view than what we see out on the yard.

True tolerance and respect are not easy in today's world, especially in prison. The Christmas Story is not an easy story: The perfect child, the lamb of God, the Prince of Peace, is born in a barn among cattle, then has to be hidden in foreign lands for many years, then comes out to get scorned and crucified. What was easy or fair about that? And he didn't even do anything wrong!

You and I have done lots of wrong things, lots of selfish things which have hurt others, and yet our life is still easier than the life of Jesus. He showed us that Love is superior to power, yet we constantly struggle for power in our lives rather than open ourselves into His Love. He showed us the way which leads to life and the way which leads to death, and we continue to choose death over life. God's patience with us is amazing.

Christmas season is a good time to give birth once again to the Christ child in ourselves. Born in a manger or a lock-up cell, what's the difference? What needs to be born is our willingness to die, in a sense. Our willingness to dedicate our lives to the common good, our willingness to spend our time giving rather than taking, comforting rather than abusing.

You and I make dozens of these choices every day, and you know that's true. May we be blessed to feel this Christmas season seriously enough that we surprise (and even frighten) ourselves with the way we make those choices. Study spiritual truths every day. Look upon all beings with kindness and respect. Pray not for things to go your way, but for yourself to go God's way, even if that takes you to the cross.

The world is very much in need right now for ordinary men and women like ourselves to take the great teachings seriously. Anger, selfishness and religious divisiveness are choking the planet. It's time to be the teachings instead of arguing them. "No greater love hath man than to lay down his life for his fellow man." And what happens when we do? That's the Great Irony: We discover all the freedom, peace and bliss we had been unsuccessfully trying to find through selfish living. We die as self-centered little insects and we are born into Life as children and servants of the Living God.

Love, Bo

GOOD WORKS

Inmates Help Local Students

(submitted by Robert O'Connor, NY prisoner)

Inmates at Sullivan Correctional Facility are providing a big assist to students afflicted with physical and learning disabilities. Eight inmates are transcribing books to cassette tapes for approximately sixty students with severe disabilities. Since September 1996, more than thirty-five textbooks and other books have been transcribed onto 114 tapes. The inmates have also provided accompanying worksheets for students and their teachers. Social worker Denise Patti said, "This program has proven to be very, very beneficial. The students and instructors



From left: 'Old Dove,' Dennis McKelvey, Denise Patti, Doug Johnson and Robert O'Connor

have been thrilled with what they've received and it's really made a big difference in the classroom." Even Glenn S. Goord, commissioner of the Dept of Correctional Services, acknowledges that these maximum-security inmates are "giving something of value back to the community." He adds, "We expect this successful program to expand further." If your state has no program like this, perhaps you can get the ball rolling by showing this little article to a staff member and asking them to check into the program at Sullivan.

In Loving Memory of My Friend Bill *(submitted by Ron Baker, Florida prisoner)*

Bill Enter committed many crimes which led to a 15-year prison sentence in the early 1980's. Instead of an ending, this was a beginning which would lead to a transformation affecting thousands. Taking advantage of any treatment programs offered by the state of Florida (most of which are no longer offered), Bill finally landed in a treatment facility in Gainesville where he lived and worked constantly to change himself for the next three years.



Bill Enter

In March of 1987, Bill walked out of prison a changed man. Rather than a life of selfish crime and schemes, Bill, then 40+ years old, committed himself to helping others. He created an organization called "Some Friends" to help fellow offenders live productively in society. Some Friends still exists today and continues to touch those deemed untouchable by society; maybe one is your neighbor. Bill also volunteered in parole-mandated co-counseling and in the "Kairos" programs, going back into the very prisons from which he came to spread love, forgiveness and a better way.

On his way home to Florida from a Kairos weekend in a prison up north, Bill had a motorcycle wreck on a lonely highway in Maryland and died. Bill was my best friend. What greater legacy can a man leave than a legacy of love and service which will continue to touch others long after he is gone?

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Lozoff,

I've written to you many times, but never sent any of the letters. I wrote in confusion and self-pity and offered only excuses. This is my final attempt.

I learned of you through We're All Doing Time, lent to me by my caseworker. Though I read it only a few times, I believe you truly give of yourselves in advice. It is for that reason that I write today.

I am locked in a vicious cycle. Doctors call it depression, I call it life. I am in a continual battle for control. I hide within myself and fear expression. And when emotion spills out, it's sharp, distorted and evil. I want to learn expression — appropriately, honestly and wholeheartedly.

In an ironic turn of events, I am now an inmate, once was a correctional officer and a police officer. Having before "corrected" now seek "correction." Karma, right?

I was convicted of three sex-related offenses involving three 16 year old boys at a correctional center I was employed at. My offense ranged from fondling to digital penetration.

The two absolute worst things an inmate can be is a cop and a "baby raper." And I'm both.

At many times I attempted to "cure the disease," the 'disease' being my life and its direction — the cure, well simply to 'end' it. Often I would sit at home, the cold barrel of my .45 caliber duty weapon resting at my temple, but courage nor action ever presented itself. Often in prison I yearn to blurt out "I'm a cop & a baby-raper," and allow "inmate justice" to find the cure, but again courage nor action ever presented itself yet.

Fear is the only true emotion I possess. All others are masks or costumes put on for appearance. Now appearance doesn't seem to matter and fear dominates my existence. I fear letting go, thinking nothing and relying on the unknown.

Your book offered hope. Yet fear presides and my irrational self won out. I withdraw and hide then explode and hurt. Help me to break the cycle,

Dear Friends,

It seems that you may be the only people who still care, no one else writes me any more.

I have recently been tested of faith. I received news about a month ago that both of my children, a boy age 7 ½ months, and my little girl, 2 years old, were killed along with both my parents and 3 of my best friends in an auto accident.

I was at first going to cast my life away, but there were the two most important books in my life, the Bible and We're All Doing Time, both of which I used.

The next day as the news of my family's passing hit the yard, an outpouring of inmates came forth to pay their respects. Even my enemies shed a tear as I stood stronger and praised God for taking all I love except my wife. My memory fell back on two things, one of which comes from the Bible, that of Job, and the other of Maury out of the book, We're All Doing Time.

I didn't want to pretend like I was hard as a rock and entrap myself as he was, nor did I want to blame my Lord for that which he has done. Truly it has been hard for I am not a stone, but a man with a heart of flesh and blood! I have shed my tears. But also my praise for the Lord. Everyone here spent a week just letting me read from both books!

I have found so much strength in this and have been so busy, but yours is the only newsletter I have received. No one has written me nor have they been present! So for that you have found a friend! Thank you! May God always bless you forevermore.

Well, all praise to God, all love to all of you. Oh, I forgot to tell you that I won my appeal, and I am going home in 5 or 6 months, and that all goes to you! A few months ago I was with God, but not in peace, by now I would have caught more time, if it hadn't been for your book. Thank you so very much. A friend with endless Thanks and Praise,

C

please. I am, if only for an instant, breaking free from fear and facades and seek help and advice.

Respectfully, M

Dear M,

It's good to meet you through such a sincere letter. You have at least taken a step out of your isolation and depression. I hope our friendship can help you take more of those steps so that you can turn your life's events into compassion and wisdom.

Under separate cover, I'm sending you a couple of books. Besides *We're All Doing Time*, I'm sending a book called *Lineage and Other Stories*. In the title story, *Lineage*, there's a character who shares your sense of secrecy and isolation.

The purpose of all my books is to work with the characters and ideas and feelings until you can make deep use of their lessons in your own situation. This doesn't happen without work and patience. You have already seen that thinking all the time doesn't really help; that's why *We're All Doing Time* is so practice-oriented. Meditation, yoga, breathing, prayer, service, study —

they are a lot different than just thinking all the time.

You can become wise and compassionate. You can allow your experiences to humble you instead of defeat you. There's an enormous difference, and it will take you a while even to understand what that difference is. That's why I'm asking you to trust me for now.

Work with the materials, work with yourself, work with God, but work. Don't give up. You can't take back anything you've done or what's been done to you, so part one is accepting where you are. Part two is humbly recognizing that so long as you have a single breath left, you have both the power and responsibility to become a really good guy, a true spiritual pilgrim. It is never too late. You can do this if you make it the #1 focus of your life.

Your friend, Bo

Dear Bo,

The enclosed artwork is just a small way to express gratitude for what you have done for so many, for so long.

I was arrested here in Egypt in 1986 with a few grams of coke and was given life with hard labor. I applied for appeal and it was rejected. The only thing left to do was to put the shoulder to the wheel.

Right after I arrived at the penitentiary where I was to spend three years of hard labor, I made two discoveries. First, I came to the conclusion that a building is just that, and it only has the meaning that you want to give to it. It could become a home, a school, a monastery, or a prison, depending on how you feel towards it.

At the same time, I also discovered that although I had lost almost everything that is of real importance (a wonderful woman, a beautiful daughter, the respect of my father and my freedom), I found myself the possessor of, perhaps, the greatest treasure a human being could wish for: large amounts of time at my disposal.

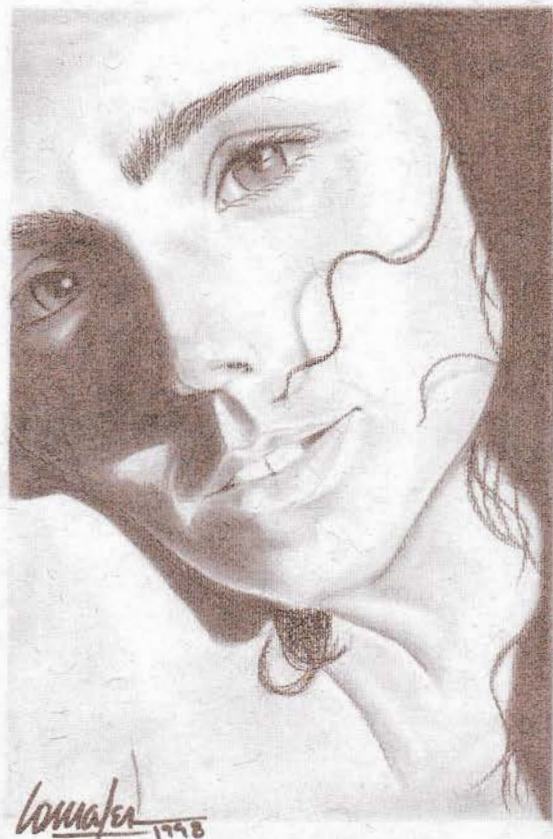
I told myself "Joan, this building will be a school, a gymnasium and monastery for you from now on," and I settled to work. I organized an informal school and began teaching English, French, Italian, Spanish and, of course, drawing. At the same time, I studied Arabic, Greek, Latin and any other thing I could lay my hands on.

Then, with some others, I organized a round table, where every week we discuss current affairs, from politics to art. Meanwhile, a very generous person sent me a pair of racquet-ball racquets and some balls and I began to promote the practice of my favorite sport; after ten years, we have a club with 25 members and have organized at least 3 tournaments a year, besides always looking for ways to replenish our very short

supply of balls, because nobody, except us, plays racquet-ball in this country.

In my spare time, I began writing and drawing and have completed, so far, 16 manuscripts, that include several novels and screenplays and four books to learn English. My embassy is in the process of organizing an exhibition with 120 of my pictures.

So, when one day, six or seven years ago, I read a dilapidated copy of A Little Good News, that was falling apart for so much handling and, a little later, when I read We're All



Doing Time, and understood what the Prison-Ashram Project was trying to achieve, I almost fell off my chair. "No kidding, I thought, so Joan, you have been right all along!"

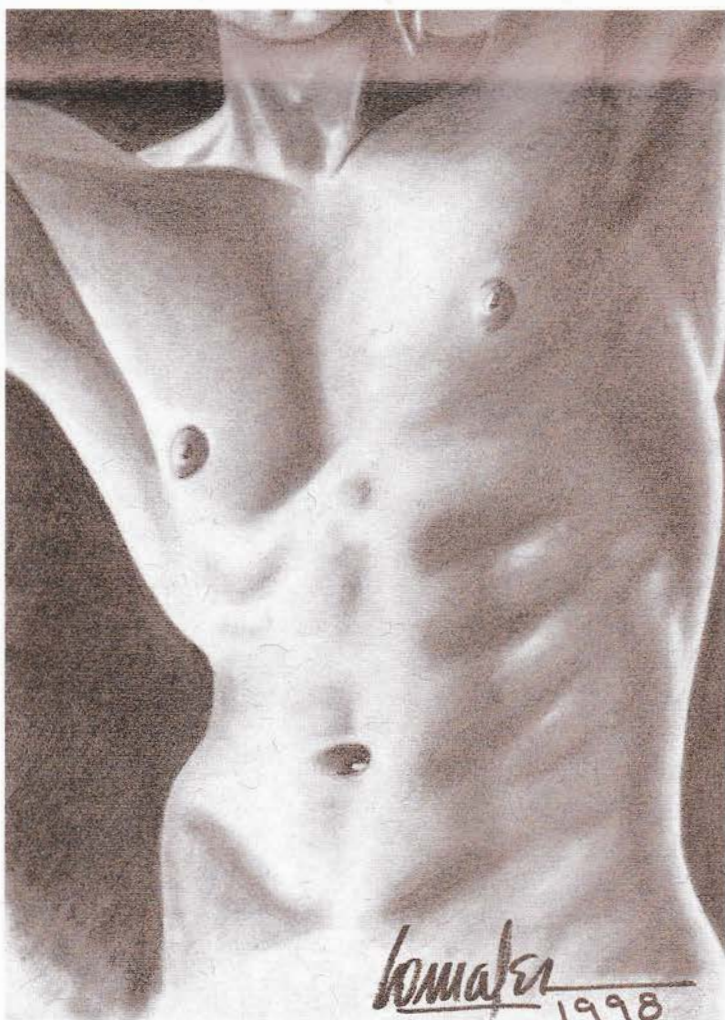
That day I cried tears of pure joy; a great burden was lifted. All those years that I had been fretting if what I was doing was the right thing to do, doubting, and worrying that I was deluding myself, were compensated when someone totally strange, you, told me that, yes, I had been right all along, that the place for meditation I had discovered was nothing new and it even had a name: Ashram.

Then, it sank in that I had to double my efforts, that there is not a minute to waste, that even in the darkest moment of your life the sun also rises for you.

There are still many things to be done, but now we do know that "a building is just a building" and it is up to us to give it the meaning we want. And that thanks to you and people like you, with faith, we have come to realize that the light at the end of the tunnel is brighter than we think.

Thanks to you, to Sita and to all the wonderful people working with you.

Lotsa Love, Joan Corrales

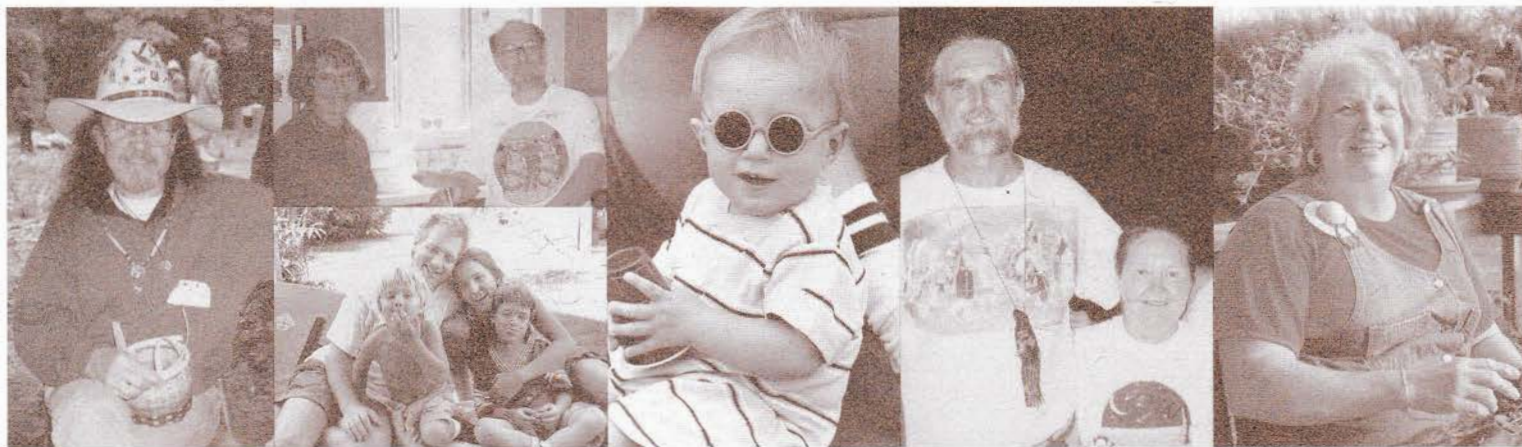


25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

As mentioned in our last newsletter, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Prison-Ashram Project in a variety of ways, which the photos below reflect. We had a weekend retreat in June, which people attended from as far away as England and California; in August we hosted about seventy-five people on a thousands-of-miles walk called the "Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage" (one of the main slavery routes), and in September we wrapped it all up with a big party featuring the reunion of the Bo Lozoff Rock & Blues Band, drawing together friends, successful ex-cons, supporters and other family from all over the country. We also dedicated one wall of the house to feature the artwork and notes from many of you who wrote to share in the festivities. Maybe we'll do this all again on the 50th!



MORE CELEBRATION PHOTOS



NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

SPRING RETREAT FOR PRISON WORKERS

Human Kindness Foundation will host a free weekend retreat for prison workers on **March 19th-21st, 1999**. Whether staff or volunteer, you are invited to come meet peers from around the country who share your struggle to be a compassionate and helpful presence in the harshness of the prison environment. The retreat will be held here at our home base in North Carolina, and we will provide all lodging and meals; all you need to do is get here. Please write us as early as possible if you are interested, so we can get the ball rolling.

NEW VIDEO AVAILABLE TO PRISON STAFF

A new video, *The Altruists*, is an inspiring 30-minute documentary on the lives and work of four recipients of the Temple Award, including Bo & Sita Lozoff. All four work with prisoners or ex-offenders in very different ways. Award-winning documentary maker Elda Hartley has generously made free copies available for prison staff or for program use. Just drop us a note to request a copy. *The Altruists* is also for sale to the general public for \$15.

UPDATE ON INTERFAITH ORDER

In June of this year we created the InterFaith Order of Communion and Community to provide some support and structure for people who wish to get more serious about their spiritual life. Novices and members in the Order take several vows (no smoking, drinking, drugs, etc.) and fulfill various requirements such as one hour of spiritual practice each day and involvement in some sort of service to others.

We have been deeply inspired and surprised by the level of interest in this Order. At present there are over 200 people in their three-month novice period, and several who have already completed their novice time and have become

members. Novices and members come from every walk of life and several countries. If you are interested in getting more detailed information on the Order, drop us a note.

NEW BOOK AVAILABLE TO PRISONERS

An anonymous donor is sponsoring a limited number of free copies of *What Is Karma?* by Paul Brunton, to prisoners in the US and Canada. The book is a positive view of karma from one of our century's most perceptive students of the world's wisdom traditions: What karma is, how it works, its relation to forgiveness and freedom, and how to get it working for you. To request a copy, write:

Larson Publications, Dept K
4936 Route 414
Burdett, NY 14818

UPDATE ON JOSH LOZOFF



Since many of you have known Josh (Bo & Sita's son) since he was a baby, here's a little recent news about his life: Josh left his Hollywood acting career in July '96 and returned to North Carolina to help his folks run Human Kindness Foundation. He is also an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) on our local county rescue squad. Josh was recently promoted to *shodan* (first-degree black belt) in Aikido, and is engaged to be married to his long-time girlfriend, Melissa Thompson. Josh is now twenty-seven years old and sends his deepest love and friendship to you all.

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 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 and the other projects of the Foundation.

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Human Kindness Foundation

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