

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Summer/Fall 1999

THE TWO QUESTIONS

A friend of mine got out of prison on the last day of 1997. He was thirty-seven years old and had been in prison since he was nineteen. Because he was on a 90-year sentence, he had spent his whole prison time in one old maximum-security facility in mid-Florida which has a very tough reputation.

In all those years, William (not his real name) was never encouraged to get a G.E.D. or any other education or skills training. There were precious few programs offered at his prison because all the inmates there had such long sentences that the state felt, "Why waste the money? They're never getting out of here."

When the state did release him, they let him out the gate with a short-sleeved shirt and fifty dollars. This scenario is repeated every day all over the United States. It's an embarrassment before God and a mockery of the idea that the state is giving folks like William a "second chance." How much of a chance does he have with fifty bucks and no skills or education?

But William had practiced meditation for many years while he was inside, and after improving his reading skills he studied many spiritual books. He developed a prayer life. He became a quiet, kind person. So he had no intention, when he was released, of giving all that up and turning back to crime. He had made the Big Change. Crime was no longer an option.

William hooked up with some good people doing nonprofit work in the community, and he found a place to live and work with them for awhile. He wasn't making much money, but he got room and board and began learning how to cook, bake bread, do some light carpentry, and occasionally speak to community groups about his own "before & after" story, which was very well received.

Because he had done so much spiritual practice in prison, William assumed he would have no difficulty adjusting to life outside of prison. Everyone else said, "After spending your whole adult life in a tough prison, you'll probably hit some hard challenges out here." But William would always smile and say he was just glad to be out, and nothing would be rough about life out here at all.

It was around February when the first wave of depression hit him. William had no idea what was going on. He

slipped deeper and deeper into silence, shutting out the people around him just like he would have done in prison. But these people were his friends, not his jailers. They had been expecting him to hit some rough spots and they were ready to help him through them. But William did not yet know how to ask for or receive such help. He closed off and became grim. Everyone would try to talk with him, ask him questions, and he would respond in short, unfriendly grunts. And being tall and muscular and prison-hard, he could be pretty intimidating when he was feeling unfriendly.

The main thing that was going on was confusion and pride. William had no idea why he was depressed, and he was too proud to admit it. He had spent so many years fending for himself, trusting only himself, figuring everything out for himself, that he didn't know how to handle this in any other way. Several of his friends and co-workers became angry with him, taking his rejection personally. And of course, that made matters worse.

By March of '98, William was actually saying "Maybe I should just go back to prison." And he was also saying, "Every night when I go to sleep, I pray for God to let me die before I wake up. I have nothing to live for." Here's a good-looking, intelligent, healthy, thirty-eight-year-old man with a whole lifetime of freedom opening up to him, and he just wanted to be back in prison or dead. Sad and amazing, but not surprising.

Please don't think this couldn't happen to you. Life out here is not really a bowl of cherries, like you may assume when you're aching to be out of prison in the "free world." The free world is not so free. It's tough. It's confusing. It's exhausting. People are working themselves into the grave and have very little to show for it. Everybody is incredibly busy, but few people are happy with how they spend their time. William had a lot more time in prison to pray, read, meditate and relax than he did out here. He had a lot more privacy in prison, and a lot more time to himself. I'm not suggesting prison is better, I'm just urging you not to fantasize about how easy it will be when you step through the gates.

Things got worse and worse for William, and finally I had a few talks with him when it seemed that he just wasn't going to come out of this tailspin by himself. His

co-workers and I had already given him plenty of pep-talks, all to no avail. The only thing that came to me to say to him was this:

"William, I want you to think very seriously about two simple questions. If you can truthfully answer 'yes' to both questions, then I know you're going to get through this. If your answers are 'no,' then I don't know what else to say to you. Here are the questions:

- 1) Does God know what you're going through?
- 2) Does God care?"

Those two questions can be a self-test to see whether you are a person of faith or not. Pick out your biggest problem or obstacle in life. If you honestly believe that God knows and cares, then you are a person of faith. If you do not believe that God knows and cares, then you may have some serious problems facing you.

I know that William is truly a spiritual person, and so for him, those two questions forced an undeniable "yes" on both counts. And once he admitted to himself that he does believe God knows and cares, then he no longer felt alone and no longer felt like he was just going crazy for no

purpose at all. He realized that God must be pushing him to learn something and no matter how hard it was, he felt that God would help him through it.

In William's case, what he was being pushed to learn had to do with pride and with real friendship; being able to admit that he was scared and confused, being able to accept love from the people around him; not having to be Superman. He saw a psychiatrist once, but left there saying, "If I'm going to talk about what's bothering me, I'd rather do it with friends."

We may never understand completely why William broke down so deeply after a couple months' freedom. It could probably be explained in a hundred different ways. If you think you clearly understand it, you're being foolish. It doesn't matter to understand it, as much as to face it with honesty, faith and support from friends. I'm happy to say that's what William finally did, and now he has been out for nearly two years, he has a good job and many friends.

Like all of us, he still occasionally has rough times. But he remembers the two questions. He remembers that his answers are "yes," and so he knows he's never alone or unloved. And that may be all we need to get through the rough times when nothing else seems to help. ■

Love, Bo

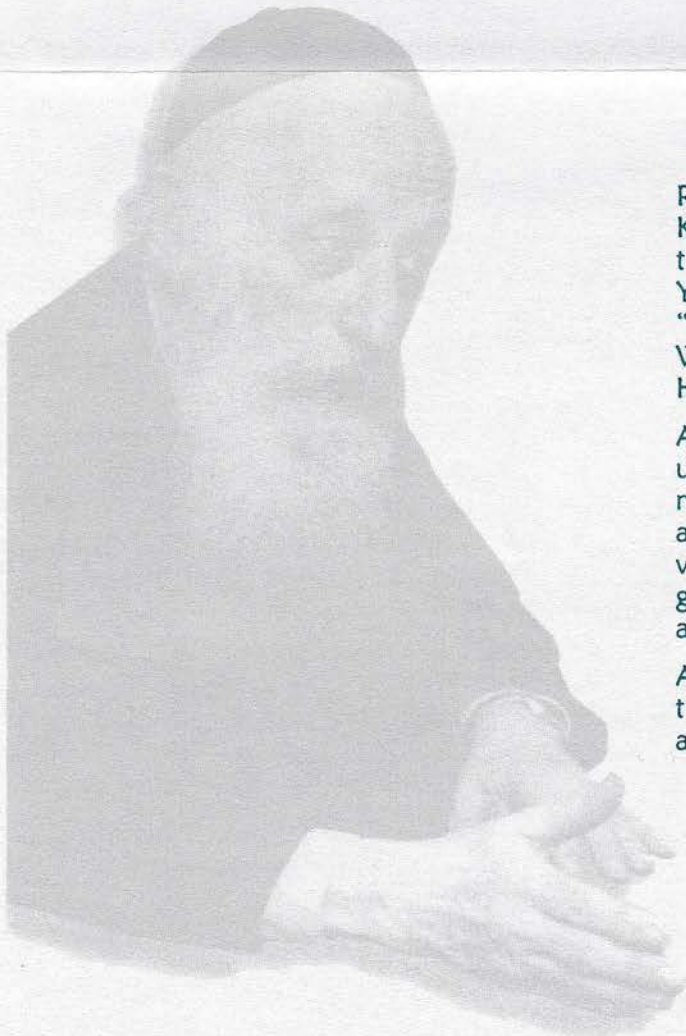
FUTURE KINDNESSES

Rabbi Baruch of Mezhibozh was reciting the prayer before Kiddush Friday night, and as he read, "I thank You G-d for all the kindnesses that You have done for me, and for those that You will do for me in the future," he paused and reflected, "Why must I thank G-d in advance for future kindnesses? Why not just wait until those kindnesses occur, and thank Him then?"

After a few moments of meditation, Rabbi Baruch said, "Ah, I understand. When those kindnesses in the future occur, they may be packaged in a manner that I will not recognize them as kindnesses, but perhaps experience them as suffering, and I will then not be in a position to appreciate them and be grateful for them. That is why I must thank G-d for them in advance."

After a few moments, Rabbi Baruch began to weep. "How tragic," he said, "that G-d will be doing kindnesses for me, and I will not be able to recognize them as such."

— From *Not Just Stories*
by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D.



PRACTICE: Creating a New, Post-Littleton Civilization

This may sound like a tall order, or too far-fetched for a “practice page” in one little newsletter. But in truth, creating a new civilization is what we do, like it or not, every day of our lives. For the past few hundred years we have been fascinated with machines and technology, and so that is the flavor of the new civilization we have created. It is an incredible success technologically, far beyond the wildest dreams of our ancestors who started down this path. New words and phrases for this new civilization have become common speech — radio, television, audio, digital, airplanes, computers, the Internet, cell phones, software, interactive, virtual reality, microwave, bits and bytes, silicon chips. The list could go on for volumes.

Tragically, this new civilization has spawned other words and phrases as well: generation gap, latchkey kids, assisted suicide, road rage, clinical depression, drive-by shootings, school shootings, super-max, post-traumatic stress disorder, prison-industrial complex, private prison, three-strikes, mandatory sentencing and many others. These are some of the new words involved with the human side rather than the technological side. As Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). We have treasured the high-tech side of life more than the human side, and so we have created a civilization where we can phone a friend from an airplane, while our children have become the most confused, angry and violent people on the face of the Earth.

As sad as the high school shootings were in Littleton, Colorado, it was equally sad — and frightening, too — to see our society’s response. After the first week’s ceaseless replays of interviews with survivors and victims’ families, the second week’s coverage focused on the question, “How can we prevent future Littletons?” The guest of choice was Janet Reno. Not Billy Graham. Not Mr. Rogers. Not the Dalai Lama. But Janet Reno, whose expertise consists of guns, police, courts, prisons, metal detectors. These are our *children* we are strategizing against, without considering that perhaps we need to bring the giant monster of high-tech civilization to a halt for a few days or weeks or months and ponder why so many of our children are going crazy.

One eighth-grade schoolteacher told me recently that one-half of his students were on psychotropic medication — either Ritalin, Prozac, Lithium or something similar which children in other countries have never even heard of. This is not a minor blip on the screen. This is a problem of our civilization. A problem of how we spend our time, how we determine our priorities, how we see life’s purpose. There are many people in the world who live in humble conditions and spend half their day just getting clean water, who are happier than we are and whose children are happier and more well-balanced than ours. Something is dramatically wrong with our civilization. Every day, each one of us either helps to maintain this dysfunctional civilization, or helps to create a new one.

Our own priorities will continue to create new civilizations, so if we are dissatisfied with the current state of affairs, we need to change our priorities. One of our staff members, Micheal, often says, “Just pay attention to the inches, and the miles will add up.” Creating a new civilization comes from creating a new day, a new hour, even a new moment. If you are a slave to consumerism and you waste time, energy and money on escapist activities, then you are going along just fine in the civilization which the corporate powers of the world hope to maintain. If you decide to step aside from the insanity today, and to focus your time, energy and money on kindness and good works, then you are joining many others in creating a new civilization which is not so anti-life.

One of the morning invocations in our community is, “**May my actions today reflect my deepest beliefs.**” Another is, “**May our work and friendship today be of benefit to all beings.**” We say these things and mean them, and try to hold ourselves accountable during the day. If our humanity does not soon catch up with our technology, we will be no more than a curious footnote in world history about a civilization which reached dizzying heights of gadgetry and then went mad before destroying itself. Please recognize Littleton for the serious wake-up call it is. Today, by your example, help to create a post-Littleton civilization which is happier and healthier. Dedicate your life today to the common good. Seriously begin to dismantle selfish priorities and replace them with nobler ones. We are responsible for civilization. Where our treasures are, there will our hearts be also.



LETTERS

Dear Bo, Sita & HKF:

It's been a while since I wrote, so I thought I ought to check in. I've now been "out" of prison for 13 months & life couldn't be better. That's not to say that there haven't been struggles, because there have been. But, though I've run into hurdles & challenges, I know that they are part of my journey.

Don't know if you recall Bo, but when I last corresponded, I told you that I was committed to trying to get some

employment working with "ex-offenders" or in a related field.

I ran into a lot of resistance because of my felony record. Most of the jobs I applied for were with the state or with private agencies who worked with the state. For nearly a year, there were "no takers" when it came to hiring me.

When I was first released from prison my wife & I discussed how we thought I should handle employment opportunities. We agreed to go with,

"telling the truth" up front, about my past, to all potential employers. We never doubted that we took the proper approach, but on more than one occasion, I was frustrated by the constant "No's" that I was hearing from prospective employers.

Then, one day, I finally caught the break that I needed. I faxed a copy of my resume & a cover letter to an agency regarding a counselor position. Amazingly enough, as soon as they received my resume, the CEO called me and set up an interview that same evening. I went out & interviewed & was offered the position that same night. It was incredible! After diligently trying to find a job that I wanted for nearly 12 months, it all happened for me in a matter of a few hours.

So...what do I do? Well, I am a substance abuse & domestic violence counselor. And guess what else? The agency that employs me has a contract with the DOC & I work mostly with guys on parole or probation, or others who are on court order. How about that for irony!

My boss said that the reason that she hired me was my cover letter. She said it was my honesty that got her attention & impressed her. She also liked the fact that I had gained so much spirituality & sobriety while in prison. The things I teach now are lessons & wisdom I learned while incarcerated. The wisdom of the saints & sages, as related by people like you & many others are my foundation.

I wanted you to know, Bo, Sita & HKF, that I landed on my feet. And I want you to share my message with others. It works, it always has. Just persevere & be honest. I wish I would have learned that lesson years ago, but then, think of the journey I would have missed.

It's true, you know... the journey is the reward!

Gotta close for now. Thanks for all that you've done to help me see my path. God bless you all.

Love to you all, F (Florida)



by Vic José



Bo,

In my last letter I told you I was having a lot of people talking shit and making comments about me, because I do my Hatha Yoga exercises on the yard every morning, well that has gotten worse. About a week ago, I was out on the yard and I was in position on the grass, with my eyes closed just listening to my mind change 100 channels a minute meditating and somebody threw a large rock at me and I had to get stitches in my face. I don't know who or why it happened, but it came from a crowd of people, "the only crowd close enough to me," also this particular crowd are the main people who make fun of me all the time. But it hasn't stopped me. I just do my same routine with my "eyes open" from now on. Although I don't know for sure who did it, I've noticed some of the people have started to keep a distance from me, I think they thought I would roll up and leave, but instead, I stayed, and I'm not angry at anyone. I've never even said one word to those people, about the incident. I have a smile for everyone, and I mean no harm to no one, I'm quiet, I work, I go to school, I work out/stretch/meditate, I don't get mad. Believe me this is hard, but I maintain!

I think because of these things, I don't fit in here and people try to use me as a scapegoat! I'm not going to give up Bo, I feel good inside, without dope or

money, I'm starting to like L for once! I would never have known how to start this road without you!

Please take care,

You & Sita & Josh and all the rest.

Your friend, L (Arizona)



Dear Human Kindness Foundation:

I literally devoured the books *We're All Doing Time*, and the *Lineage and Other Stories*. I was in awe, beside myself, literally speechless.

Right now we're on lock down, which really turned out to be a blessing. It gave me time to really read re-read and comprehend. I'm hooked!

My life is in shambles. The way it looks I'll wind up spending the rest of my life in prison. I'm a paraplegic due to a homicide detective throwing me down a flight of concrete steps fully chained in shackles, and handcuffs. So I'm wheelchair bound, I wear diapers and am forced to catheterize myself to manually empty my bladder. Until now I've found my life a hopeless pile of shit, and was close to throwing in the towel, but from you I've found a new hope to ponder. I truly appreciate you taking the time to help me.

You've given me hope where there was none. You've given me a reason to strive onward in spite of my obstacles, of being wheelchair bound, & imprisoned. For this I could never say thanks enough.

THANK YOU ALL!

Sincerely, C (Illinois)

Dear Bo & Staff,

I just wanted to say "THANK-YOU" very much for sending me another copy of *We're All Doing Time* (my original copy was lost when I was transferred

from another prison). Your book and your meditation techniques literally saved my life! I have been on Thorazine and Halodol and Cogentin, among various other PSYCHOTROPIC drugs for the past 7 years. I was a complete Zombie! I have spent most of the past 10 years in Mental hospitals and prison, due to drug addictions from the streets (cocaine, meth, heroin).

But "THANKS" to the love and help I received through your books, I'm well now, and have been clean, and off medication for a year now. I spent this last year in the "hole." Due to a "fight" out on the mainline that nearly cost me my life! I "dedicated" this past year in the "hole" to studying your books, and praying and meditating. And also Pranayam techniques! It really works!!!

... I'm paroling soon and I decided to write to a nonprofit agency in my hometown recently, and ask if I could "possibly" become a volunteer when I get out. I wrote and told them I would be staying at a nearby homeless shelter. I recently received their "wonderful" response! Not only did they say yes I could become a volunteer and work for them, but they also told me that I could come and live on the grounds...!!! Isn't that great?

I'm going to be their gardener!! I am so "happy" that I can't even express how grateful I am to you and Human Kindness Foundation!! I will simply say "THANK-YOU" by fulfilling my goal in life to become of service to my fellow human beings, as best I can. Well, my friends, I just thought I'd share some great news with you! ... I'm so proud. Not of myself but of what you guys and God have done for me! THANKS again Bo-N-Sita-N-Josh-and the entire H.K.F. staff!!! I love you all!!!

Yours Truly,

The Peace "Panther" (California)

After continued study and practice of *Deep & Simple*, I can honestly say I haven't felt this much freedom, hope or the "glad to be alive" feeling since the Beatles.

— A (Missouri)

GOOD WORKS

"Dr. Bo" Is Good News for Us All

Our Good Works recognition this time goes to the Chicago Theological Seminary, one of the oldest and most respected divinity schools in the U.S.A., for its courage in awarding our own director, Bo Lozoff, an honorary degree — a Doctor of Laws (LL.D.) — at its 1999 commencement ceremonies. With Bo's unorthodox background and no degrees or academic credentials to his name (he was kicked out of college after one year in the early 1960's), it must surely have raised some eyebrows when the Seminary's Board of Trustees decided to bestow such a high honor upon him. They deserve heartfelt gratitude for all of us who care about prison work.

In a formal presentation at Hyde Park Church in Chicago on June 5th, Professor Robert Moore, who nominated Bo for the doctoral degree, said in his speech to the 1999 graduating class and their families,

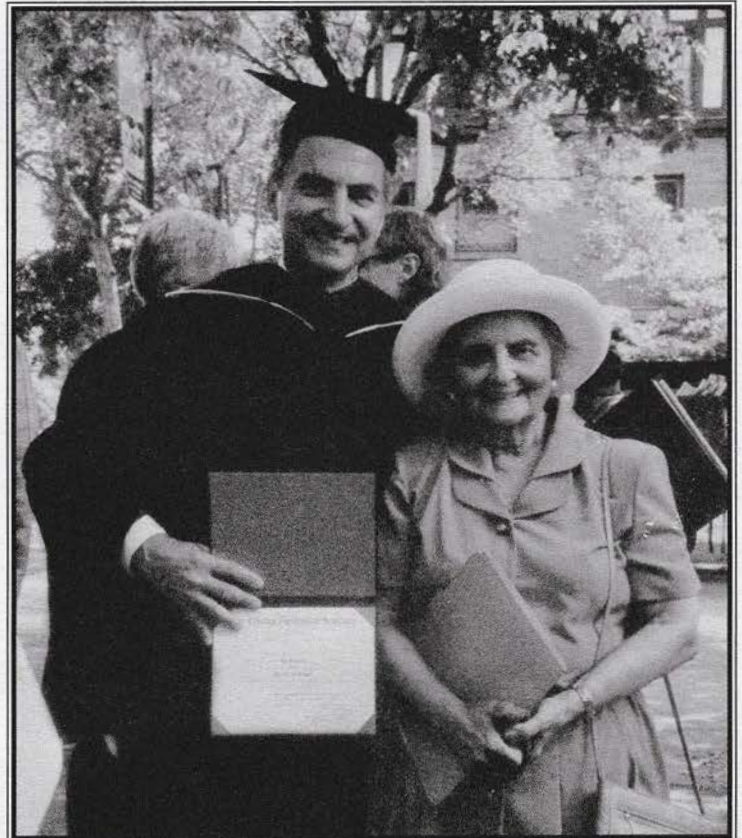
"In this time of increasing narcissism and greed, we who are committed to building interreligious communities dedicated to spiritual and social transformation feel a deepening need to discern those places where God's transformative love and light are breaking forth into our world. In presenting this candidate we are calling attention to such a place.

The work of Bo Lozoff, we believe, is a powerful manifestation of the transforming and liberating work of the Spirit in our world..."

And the President of the Chicago Theological Seminary, Rev. Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite, added,

"Bo Lozoff, through your creative leadership and compassionate action...you and your co-workers have shown us how spiritual methods and resources can offer powerful means of engaging and challenging the growing destructive power of the Prison Industrial Complex."

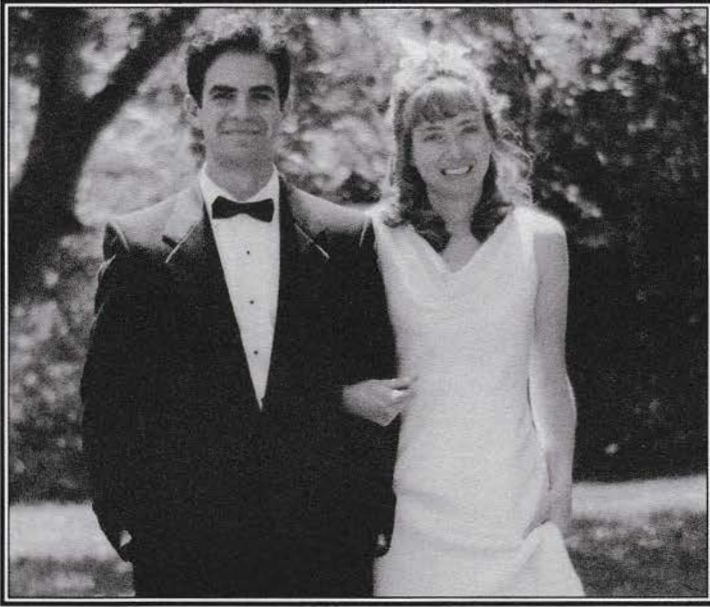
Of course, we are all thrilled for Bo to have been awarded this degree, and we are especially encouraged that a major institution like the Chicago Theological Seminary would express such a strong stand against the Prison Industrial Complex. By honoring Bo's work, they are honoring your participation and support as well, and acknowledging the work we are all doing together to try to bring sanity and mercy into a system gone mad. Thank you, Professor Moore, thank you Dr. Thistlethwaite, and Congratulations Dr. Bo! And to all of you readers, may this milestone strengthen your commitment and hope whenever your spirits begin to sag. And may it give our dear friend, Bo, even more influence and credibility as a spiritual elder in these troubled times.



Molly Lozoff with her son, the Doctor.

NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

JOSH & MELISSA LOZOFF!!!



On May 15th, Josh Lozoff was married to his long-time girlfriend, Melissa Thompson, in a beautiful outdoor ceremony right here at our headquarters. Father Murray Rogers came all the way from England to perform the ceremony. Josh and Melissa wish to express their deep gratitude for all your blessings and good wishes. They are both on our board of directors and will continue to be involved with our work as they settle into this brand new chapter of their Great Adventure. CONGRATULATIONS JOSH & MELISSA, and may you enjoy many years together as a shining example of your generation's spiritual activists.

NEW "SACRED READING" TAPE

For the first time, Bo has put some of our community's favorite morning readings on audiotape. The readings come from many spiritual traditions and help us to see classic truths in fresh, sometimes challenging ways. Original music by Ron Kristy is interspersed throughout Bo's readings to make this tape a truly delightful experience. Now available for \$8 (Code ASR), or as always, free to any prisoner who is able to receive tapes.

SACRED READINGS FOR CHILDREN

After the "Sacred Reading" practice appeared in our last newsletter, several people asked us for recommendations of such books especially suited to children. One of our favorites is *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S. Lewis. Another is *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de St. Exupery. The William Buck editions of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (available from our catalog), India's two most popular sacred stories, were not written for children, but are entertaining enough to hold their interest.

Do you have favorite sacred readings for children? We'd like to compile a list of them to keep on hand, and we may even carry a few such books in our catalog if they are not widely available. Please drop us a brief note to share your top picks.

UPCOMING TRAVELS

Bo has several speaking engagements this fall, as shown below. Whenever possible, Bo will be giving workshops at nearby prisons or jails. If you are a prisoner in one of these areas, be on the lookout for a flyer at your institution.

Also, as always, any last-minute updates or changes will be posted on our website at www.humankindness.org

Texas: September 3rd-5th Bo will be a featured speaker at the SouthWest Yoga Conference in Austin, TX. For more information, call them at 1-888-501-YOGA.

New Mexico: October 7th-10th Bo, along with another HKF staff member, will participate in the Prison Working Group meeting sponsored by the Nathan Cummings Foundation and Threshold Foundation. This closed conference takes place at Upaya, in Santa Fe.

Washington D.C.: October 15th-16th Bo will participate in the National Interfaith Conference on Restorative Justice. This event is sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, in cooperation with the NAACP and several other groups, and will take place at the Washington Cathedral. For more information, call (202) 537-6546.

California: November 12th, 7 PM, Bo & Sita will be at the First Congregational Church in Berkeley. This talk will be given free of charge (any donations will go to the Buddhist Peace Fellowship Prison Project), and is open to the public. For more information call BPF at (510) 655-6169.

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.

© 1999, Human Kindness Foundation

Human Kindness Foundation

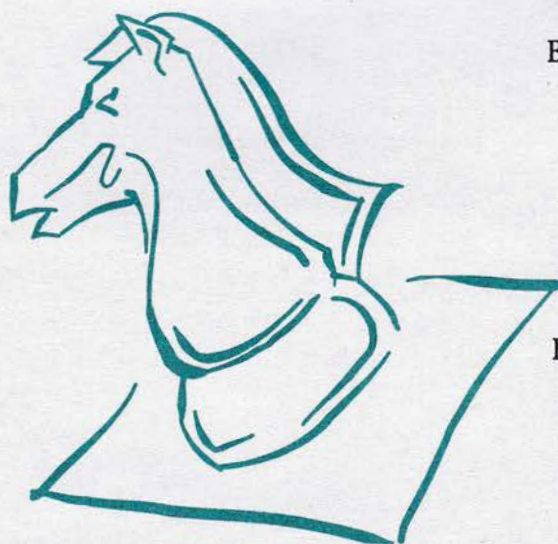
RR 1 Box 201-N
Durham NC 27705
www.humankindness.org

Sponsor of the Prison-Ashram Project

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Durham, NC
Permit No. 205



recycled paper



Tripping Over Joy

What is the difference
Between your experience of Existence
And that of a saint?

The saint knows
That the spiritual path
Is a sublime chess game with God

And that the Beloved
Has just made such a Fantastic Move

That the saint is now continually
Tripping over Joy
And bursting out in Laughter
And saying, "I Surrender!"

Whereas, my dear,
I am afraid you still think

You have a thousand serious moves.

— Hafiz (1320-1389)