

# Human Kindness Foundation

*a little good news*

*Christmas 2000*

## FOLLOWING GOD

Sometimes God reveals *all* the wisdom of doing a certain action, and the listener becomes so overwhelmed in contemplating that, that he is unable to perform it. Lost in the infinity, with no ability to understand, or *do*, anything. God then reduces the wisdom portion, and makes a small bridle to fit over the listener's head to lead him by. The size of the bridle is important when you're dealing with a stubborn camel. Too heavy, and he'll lie down and refuse to move. Too light, and he'll ignore it. God gives attention to an individual's balance.

-- Jelalludin Rumi, 13<sup>th</sup> century mystical poet

**D**ear Family,

Last March, during a lecture I was giving in San Francisco, someone asked a question about spiritual practices, and especially about the practice of silence. During my answer, I heard myself say, "Actually, I'm beginning to make plans to go into silence for one year." My rational mind immediately thought, "What!!? Holy cow!," because the statement did not come from there. It came from that deeper place of intuition, and was quite a shock to the rest of me. But I have been strengthening my intuition for over thirty years now, so it would not make much sense to ignore it when it comes through so loud and clear, would it?

When I came home from that trip, I said to Sita and the rest of our community, "It sounds like I'm going into silence for a year, so let's start discussing how and when." We didn't rush into it, we treated it neither as an urgent command nor as something to be laughed at. We simply took it seriously and began to plan for it.

What a relief it is to follow our lives rather than to lead them. What a relief it is to trust in God's guidance without needing to analyze and justify. Many of us pray for guidance, but do we keep mind, body, and spirit clear and open enough that we will be able to sense the guidance when it comes? And when we do sense it, are we willing to follow it even if it sounds scary or inconvenient?

Most of us have been exposed to a lot of messages on leadership and following: Leadership is good, following is bad. "Think for yourself! You don't want to be a sheep, do you?" There are books, tapes, videos and seminars to help us develop our leadership skills. There are no books, tapes, videos or seminars to help us develop our ability to follow others, or to follow a path. We prize "blazing our own trail; creating our own path."

But the ability to think for ourselves, to blaze our own trail, to lead the way for others, is only valuable if we *also* have the ability to *follow* a path, *follow* a guide or a set of commandments or vows, precepts, laws, etc. If we *need* to lead, we will lead ourselves into ego trouble.

I am happy to be a follower. I follow the basic principles of kindness and mercy at the heart of all great religions. I follow the Good Red Road of the Native Americans. I follow the advice of elders whom I trust and admire. I follow the wisdom found in scriptures, sacred stories and writings by teachers and masters. Some people refer to me as a spiritual leader, but it seems to me that any so-called leadership is merely sharing what I follow. Like the Buddha once said, "When a finger points to the moon, look at the moon, not at the finger."

Three billion people saw the 2000 Olympic Games on television. Not a single athlete won the gold without following a coach's instructions for many years. Thousands of potentially great athletes do not make it to the Olympics because they are not able to *follow* well enough to develop their greatness. Maybe they are unwilling to follow a strict training regimen. Maybe they are unwilling to follow a coach who yells at them or treats them harshly. The athletes who compete at the Olympics get there only by following.

Of course, there's good following and bad following. Olympic athletes follow instructions to bring out the very best in themselves. Their skill is within them all along, but needs to be awakened and polished. A good coach knows this, and works with each athlete as an individual. Some basic principles apply to everyone -- good diet, enough rest, stay limber, be focused -- and then there is the uniqueness of each athlete's strengths and weaknesses which require an intimate level of trust and communication between coach and athlete.



God works the same way. There are basic principles that apply to everyone – not harming others, living modestly, being honest, respecting creation – and then there are our unique needs and callings that require more intimate, personalized divine coaching. If we follow those first basic principles for a while, what happens is that our intuitive mind, or intuition, gradually develops, and this is where the more personalized coaching takes place to bring out our individual best.

Our rational mind is the one that thinks, analyzes, compares, plans, and counts. The intuitive mind *senses* the truth, without needing to figure anything out. Intuition is a beautiful link between human and divine. It is the place where God coaches us in that “still, small voice” mentioned in the Bible. But it is very difficult to receive any intuitive coaching from God if our egos are filled with pride or desire, if our minds are perpetually noisy and undisciplined, if our bodies are full of alcohol or drugs or junk food.

In other words, intuition is naturally inside of us, but it is not free for the asking. Like athletic abilities, it requires a lot of effort and discipline – in this case, to keep mind, body and spirit in a healthy balance. But it is nothing short of *wonderful* to have good contact with our intuition, following God’s guidance for our lives rather than figuring things out constantly with our minds.

It has been several months now since I heard myself say that I will be spending a year in silence. I’ve relaxed around the whole thing and allowed the same intuitive forces to guide the how’s and when’s. Right now it looks like it will be September 2001 until September 2002, and that I will be kicking it off with a forty-day solo retreat. Forty-day retreats were pretty popular in the days of Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, so it seems like a good way to move into silence.

People have asked whether I’m looking forward to it. Not really. I’m sure it will be pretty hard. My life revolves so much around speaking, singing, counseling – which is probably why God has called me to a year of silence in the first place!

People also ask whether I think it will be valuable. Of course I do. I trust my Coach. Will I continue to write? I don’t know. Will I communicate with a chalkboard or notepad to counsel people? Again, I don’t know. But I trust those answers will come as the time approaches.

I mention my year of silence merely as one example of what it means to follow our lives, to follow God, once we strengthen our intuition enough to start trusting inner guidance. It may sound extraordinary or extreme to many people reading this newsletter, but on the journey to enlightenment, spending a year without speaking is no more than a petty detail. Years from now, it’ll be a passing sentence: “I spent a year in silence long ago.” No big deal. No one will pass out when I mention it.

What is a big deal is to live in a way that transforms us into God-realized beings, or fully awakened beings. No inconvenience is too great for that journey. God, or Life, or whatever you want to call the highest, deepest force, has opportunities just waiting for us. I will probably learn things during my year of silence that I can’t even conceive of right now (that’s why I don’t bother to try).

I do know that our personal self, the one who is mainly directed by the rational mind and comes up with constant desires and fears, does not have what it takes to lead us into the heart of God. We need help from inside and outside in order to do that.

Like Olympic coaches, the purpose of following books, teachers, mentors, churches, spiritual practices and other resources is to help awaken and strengthen that inner, intuitive guidance. Following any genuine path will lead us to our own inner awakening. God is within every genuine path, and God is within every one of us as well.

But it *definitely* takes external help and advice to make any progress. Do not be so arrogant that you try to find your own route through the millions of lies and distortions your ego will throw your way. Especially do not trust your anger or greed or prejudices or fantasies. We all need advice and practical methods for getting our lives into the classic groove of living spiritually.

And we need to beware of a false sense of intuition which is nothing more than the ego making excuses to be impulsive or self-indulgent. Real intuition usually does not feel certain, it feels like a hunch. It does not try to justify itself; it has no interest in convincing the rational mind of its validity. But when you relax your mind, it may arise softly again and again to give you another chance to follow it. All of us have had the experience of screwing up badly, and saying “Damn! I *knew* that would happen! I *knew* it!!” That’s intuition.

Following intuitive guidance can be a very tricky process sometimes, but ah, the rewards! Following God. Knowing we are guided and cared for, being prepared for an inner awakening rather than just getting old and confused and lonely. No contest. And it’s so much more interesting than trying to figure it all out for ourselves, I promise! God’s plans for us are infinitely juicier and more creative than the security-money-sense pleasures scenarios our ego-minds tend to come up with.

*Last note:* Some readers tell me they do not relate to the word “God.” I could just as well have titled this “Following Life,” and substituted the word “life” for every mention of “God.” Life guides us, life is intelligent, life is a great and holy force moving deep within us as well as around us. A rose by any other name is still a rose. A force that is vast and wonderful and mysterious exists, I promise you. Call it what you will, but let’s try not to get thrown off by words.

Love, Bo



## PRACTICE: RESTING IN THE COMFORT OF YOUR FAITH

Many of us say we have faith in God. We say we believe in prayer, we believe that God loves us and has a plan for our lives. But do we actually walk through the day feeling comforted, protected, and secure in those beliefs? Do we go to sleep at night knowing God is with us and is guiding us? Jesus said, "Take comfort and be of good cheer. I am with you always." Notice the two verbs, "take" and "be," suggesting that it is up to us. We must *take* comfort from His presence, not wait for it or hope for it. He is delivering the good news to our doorstep, but it is clearly up to us to open the door and let it in. So this practice is to take comfort in an active way.

One of my students told me she goes to sleep every night feeling confused and fretful. I asked her whether she believed that God knows and cares. She said yes. I asked her whether she believes her Guru knows and cares. She said yes. I asked her whether she believes that I know and care about her. She said yes. I said, "Well then, when you go to bed each night, why do you not feel as safe and protected and guided as a little child in a loving home? You have God, guru and teacher, you have these powerful forces watching over your life and your spiritual progress, why are you not enjoying them? If you go to bed each night feeling alone and confused, then what is the difference between having spiritual guides and not having them?"

It had not occurred to her that feeling comforted and safe was up to her. I made it clear that I was not talking about a guilt-driven sense of gratitude like "Oh, I know I should be happy for all I have been given." No, no. That's a concept. I don't care about concepts. I'm talking about snuggling up to your pillow *feeling* the comfort and good cheer of one who knows he or she is being watched over with great tenderness, even though many of our trials and tribulations may seem harsh.

So the practice emerged from that conversation. The practice is for night-time at first. When you go to bed, calm yourself with a few deep breaths, and then *feel* the smile creep over your face, the security, the protection and guidance that you believe you have. If you are a Christian, then it is Christ's promises and presence you smile over, realizing you are never alone, even in that moment. If you are a Buddhist, it may be the Triple Refuge you smile over, or your confidence in your Buddha-mind awakening. Whatever faith tradition you revolve around, the smile is the same. You are on a path and you are known and loved. *Enjoy* it! Not conceptually, but right here and now. Every night, go to sleep feeling cared for and confident of your path or your faith.

This is a subtle and often difficult practice, because it may seem too simple or even silly. But it is not. You may have to call your own bluff about whether you really have faith in anything or not. If you do, then you should feel better when you go to sleep than someone with no faith in anything, shouldn't you? Well, then, why don't you? It is up to you to begin allowing yourself to "rest in the comfort" of whatever you believe in. Don't neglect this important component of the spiritual path – *resting* in your faith.

An old Native American  
wiseman once said  
there were always two dogs  
inside of him fighting —  
a good dog and a bad dog.

When asked,  
"Which one wins,"  
he replied,  
"The one I feed."

*As told by Father Ar*

If you begin to go to sleep each night doing this practice, you will notice a big difference in your energy and attitudes. You will not feel so isolated, even if you're in a lockdown cell twenty-four and seven. You will be taking time each day to *feel*, to enjoy, the companionship you sincerely believe you have. What good does it to do to "know" you're not alone, and yet not enjoy the company? Like Wang Yang Ming said thousands of years ago, "To know and not to do is in fact not to know." I encourage you to try this deceptively simple practice and learn what it means to take comfort and good cheer. When it becomes easier to go to sleep every night feeling guided and cared for, then you will be able to extend the practice into the day as well.





# LETTERS

[editor's note: the following is from the same "R" whose correspondence with Bo was featured in our last newsletter. He is 27 years old, serving life without parole + twenty years for three murders and two robberies committed when he was sixteen.]

Dear Bo,

Greetings brother! I just want to say thank you; for being a friend, for caring, for sharing your wisdom and insight, for your dedication to those of us society thinks are not worth it.

Thank you for providing me with the tools to aid me in changing my attitude and my life, and for not pressuring me, but letting me do it in my own time and my own way. I am doing great! I got me a job as of 9/5/00, so I get to spend most of my time out of my cell, instead of being locked down 23 hours a day. I have been reading your books every day, meditating, praying, and studying, and I'm changing in many subtle ways. My attitude is improving, the lines in my face are fading, I don't feel so angry all the time, and many other things are changing as well.

Am I still struggling? Of course I am. But I have a goal now that I am struggling for, whereas I was just going blindly before. I am staying focused and not letting the everyday little annoyances get to me. Even the police say they can see a major change in my attitude. There are some who don't like the fact that I have a job and I am out where I can get to them. But I don't let it bother me, I just smile and go on.

I realize I have a long journey ahead of me, and I am just beginning. But I have no doubt that I will make it through to the end. I have never done anything half-assed and I'm not going to start now. I have put 100% effort into screwing up the last 27 years of my life; I intend to put 110% into making sure I don't make the same mistakes again.

Is it easy? Hell no! We are creatures of habit and in my opinion, a habit is the hardest thing in the world to break. So I must overcome each habit one by one, and replace the old habit with a new, good habit. It is hard, but with each old one I replace, it becomes a little easier. I am really enjoying this though. I came to the conclusion that I was helping this

system that I detest, to oppress me and destroy me. I was working for them. They just sat back and watched me do their work for them for the last 11 years. If I decided to raise hell, they could control it whether it took 5, 10 or 50 of them. Now when I just smile at them, they don't know what to do. They try to get to me, to piss me off and make me screw up. And when they see they can't, I love it!!

This may sound kind of childish, but I enjoy it anyway. They get so much pleasure out of me screwing up, I figure I deserve to get a little pleasure out of not screwing up.

As I told you in the past, my most serious problems are an intense anger and hatred – for this place, for the system, for society, and for me. Well, I still hate the system, it is a degenerative, destructive system. I no longer have so much hatred for society, and I no longer hate myself so much. I mean yeah, I screwed up, but there's no use bitching about it forever. I did it to myself, now I have to move on. Hating myself won't do any good.

As for the police, well, why lie? I still hate the s.o.b.'s with a passion. But they hate me just as much, so we have a great relationship.☺

The anger is another story. I still have a lot of anger in me, but I'm learning to control it, and not let it control me. I am using it as my energy, my motivation, instead of letting it destroy me. I think anger and love are the two most powerful emotions. Both have motivated people to do great things, to make major changes, to become stronger, better, and both have caused many people to do stupid things.

I am not a very loving person, so I will use my anger to my advantage. Maybe that sounds kind of crazy, but it works.

My friend, I hope this letter finds you healthy and happy. God bless you, Sita, and everyone else at HKF. Thanks for being there.

Love & Peace brother, R

Dear R,

It's good to hear from you, and especially to hear of the changes going on your life. You have a great way with

words, and as I mentioned in my last letters, a good ability to express your honest feelings. I don't know if you keep a journal or diary, but I would recommend it as a useful spiritual practice for you.

I think you're doing great, R. You know you're going to be in prison for a while and you know your own strengths and weaknesses pretty well. Your motivation to do good time instead of bad time is strong. You have a good mind and good heart. You have spiritual friends and teachers. And the most important thing is, you know you have a long way to go.

A few little pieces of advice I have from reading your last letter:

First, as you continue to do spiritual practices which open your heart and clear your mind, you will be less satisfied to harbor hatred and anger toward anyone, even the system or the guards. You may have to oppose their values and their conduct all your life, but you will find a way to do it as a brother rather than as an enemy. A person may decide I am their enemy, but they do not have the power to make me consider them my enemy. My only enemy is my own ego-mind.

Second, it is true that you should not hate yourself, but be a little careful about the idea of "moving on" after taking three lives. It is not necessary to make it like "out of sight, out of mind" in order to stop hating yourself. Humility and remorse are very different from self-hatred, and they are very valuable on the spiritual journey. Work with my story "The Saddest Buddha" in the book *Lineage & Other Stories* for more work on this teaching of "staying with" what we have done, and still becoming holy.

Finally, you said "I am not a very loving person," but I disagree. I feel a lot of love in your letters. We are all loving at our core. You want and need to love people and to love life, and you already sort of do. It'll be nice when you admit it to yourself. That's the journey you are on, just like me.

Your Loving brother, Bo





[editors note: The next three letters came from the same institution, and show the power of one person making changes in himself. The first letter is from EFT, and the other two are about the influence he has had on others.]

Dear Bo and Sita,

I want to let you know that your book We're All Doing Time is one of the best books in this world, it helped me to get my life together. This book has taught me so so much, thank you so much from my heart and soul.

I'm doing 2 years. I have done 5 months already. I lost everything. I love my kids, my lady, my family. I'm also H.I.V. I wanted to die, or kill myself, but your book showed me the right way of life and how to live it. Words could not say the love I have for you. I'm no longer alone. I have you as my family Thank you.

with love and mad respect,  
Sincerely yours, EFT



Dear Bo,

Well I'm writing because I saw a friend one day crying so I went to him and asked him what is wrong. He told me nothing, but I saw a book in his hand. The book name is Just Another Spiritual Book. I asked him if he was crying because of the book, he said yes, but it was Tears of Happie. So you'll see I want these tears, cause he is not the same man. You know him as EFT. Any way could you help me, I need the book he got. I want the light he has in life.

Thank you, RB



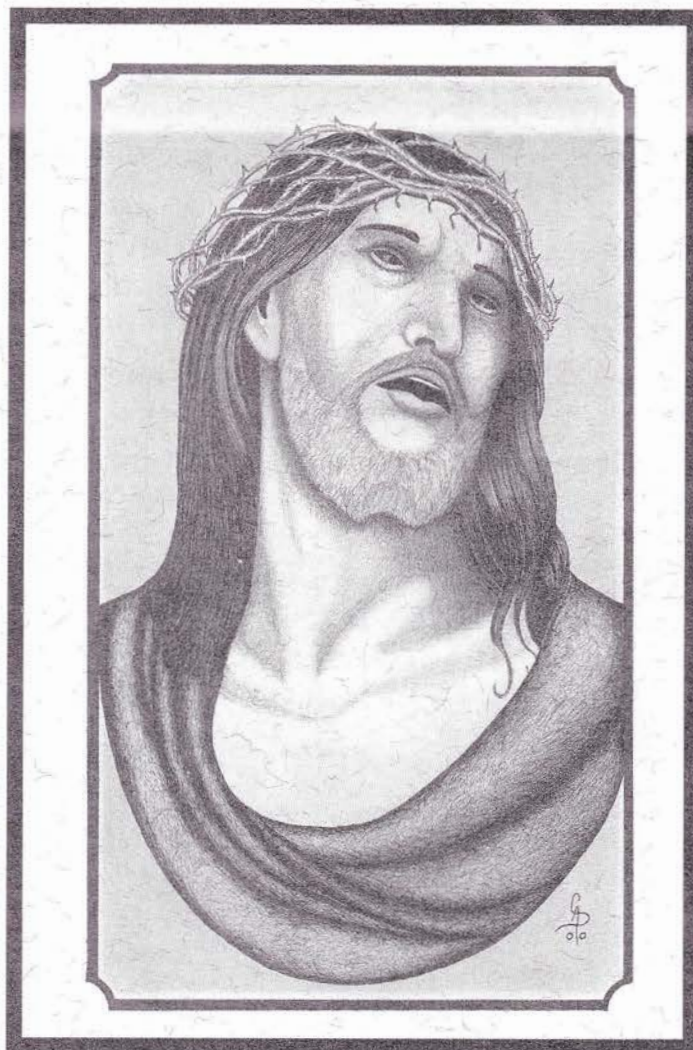
Yo Bo whats up? May God be blessing you and Sita forever.

I came to find out about your book from an inmate here. This inmate was one bad mother at one time, but not no more. His name is EFT. He's going around, telling people the wonderful work you do. Anyway he's not the bad mother he used to be. Wow, we all see a big change in him. Anyway, me and my cellmate want to know if we could get what EFT find. I want it bad.

Could you help us please, E&J



Miguel Angel Almaguer Jr,  
Cotulla, TX



Rob Caprood, Columbia, SC



## GOOD WORKS

### James Muhammed Taylor, founder of "PAR" (People Against Recidivism)



At twenty-nine years old, James Taylor felt like a loser with no way out. After a lifetime of drug abuse and incarceration, he found himself sharing a cheap bottle of wine in an alley with a homeless man. Drunken friendship turned suddenly into a fight when the man drank more than his share, and James went from petty criminal to murderer when the man's head hit the pavement and he sustained an injury which led to his death.

Now, at fifty-eight, Muhammed, a name which expresses James's spiritual transformation, is a lifer at Graterford, PA, and the recipient of the Pennsylvania Prison Society's "Prisoner of the Year" award for his work with PAR. PAR was created in 1993 to help offenders combat the root causes of recidivism in their lives through better planning and decision-making. PAR especially reaches out to youthful offenders early upon arrival into the prison system, encouraging and supporting them to take responsibility for their own thinking and behavior both in and out of prison.

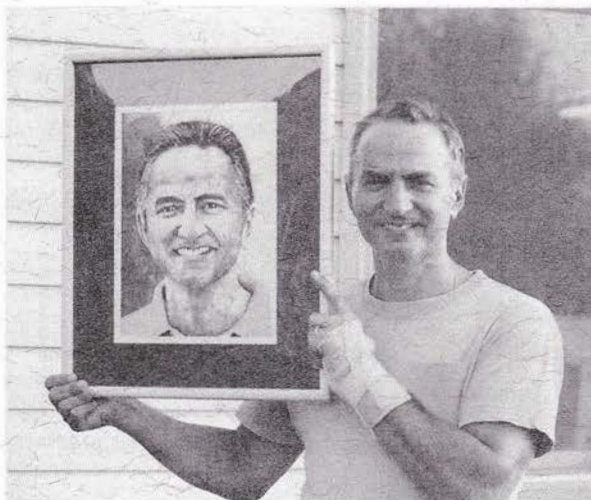
PAR has already helped many prisoners prepare for their return to society. Because of the current meanspirited political climate toward parole, Muhammed himself has already served almost thirty years on his life sentence, and holds little hope of being

released unless he can win an appeal on his original conviction. Well-deserved parole has virtually ceased to exist for lifers in many states.

Muhammed certainly hopes to be out on the street someday to expand the work of PAR into the community. But he refuses to be embittered. He says, "I've come to believe that the severity of my punishment was the Creator's way of helping me find my true self and discover my life's purpose. I am able, in here, to positively influence young men who are just like I was, living in chronic despair and hopelessness, trying to numb themselves through alcohol and drugs."

For more information on PAR, on Muhammed's appeal, or to reach him personally, write him at:

James Taylor AF-4120  
PO Box 244  
Graterford PA 19426



#### A LABOR OF LOVE

Bo received quite a surprise recently at the end of a prison workshop in Stillwater, Minnesota. Prisoner Tim Eling came forward to present him with a watercolor portrait based on the photo that appears on the back of *We're All Doing Time*. We wish we were able to reproduce Tim's painting here in color, because it is truly a beautiful work of art. And somehow, without ever having met Bo and having only a tiny black & white photo to work from, Tim did an uncanny job with colors and shading. Thanks, Tim.



# NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

## PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

Three staff members of Human Kindness Foundation are travelling to India from November 2<sup>nd</sup> through March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Sita, Joanne and Ferzin will spend those four months doing spiritual practices, meeting teachers, and visiting ashrams (spiritual centers).

There are two ways you can be significantly involved in their trip: First, please keep them in your prayers. The more inner riches they find, the more they will have to share with us and the world when they return. Second, please understand that they are three of our key office staff and therefore we will be operating with a skeleton crew until they return. It would help greatly if you keep your letters as brief as possible between now and spring.

One other thing – since Joanne is mainly responsible for putting our newsletters together, our Spring '01 newsletter may be a little late (April or May). Sita, Joanne and Ferzin send their very best blessings to you, and they send their hopes that you have a wonderful, spirit-filled Christmas season and new year.

## ALABAMA PRISON WORKSHOPS

In early September, Bo and Micheal led two workshops in the maximum-security prison where Micheal served thirteen of his twenty-three years of confinement. It was a moving experience for everyone involved, especially Micheal and his many close friends who are still doing time there. Sita and Joanne attended also, and they were all given a tour of the unit – and the tiny cell – where Micheal and his friend Rick (still there on a life without parole sentence) served seven years with each other. Rick is now one of the coordinators of the new drug treatment unit for 200 men, and is a beacon of light in a very nasty place. Any prison staff who may read this, please understand how valuable it can be to bring ex-cons back inside when they have found a new, positive way of life.



Micheal (on left) & Rick

## FREE MEDITATION RETREATS

If you are a staff member of any correctional institution and are interested in attending a ten-day Vipassana (insight) meditation retreat, a sponsor in Florida will help to cover your expenses. Ten-day courses are offered year round at several S.N. Goenka centers in the U.S. Information about Vipassana can be found on the Internet at [www.dhamma.org](http://www.dhamma.org). For more details, call (904) 782-1069.

## FREE BHAGAVAD-GITA LESSONS

American Gita Society now offers lessons on the "Bhagavad-Gita" to all prisoners. The Bhagavad-Gita is that famous chapter of the Mahabharata wherein Lord Krishna instructs the warrior Arjun in the deepest mysteries of Life and Spirit. Send a business size (9.5" x 4.2") Self Addressed Stamped Envelope to:

American Gita Society  
511 Lowell Place  
Fremont, CA 94536-1805

## PAULA GORDON INTERVIEW: 'LIFE PRACTICE'

A one-hour interview of Bo on the Paula Gordon radio show in Atlanta is now available on CD. This interview is *not* prison-oriented, but more a "state of the union" conversation about American culture, family life, etc. We do not have copies on tape (only cd's) and we cannot afford to send the cd's for free, so for the time being, these are available only for purchase (\$15+\$4 s&h). It is a timely and lucid interview relevant to people in all walks of life. (Use Code CLP when ordering.)

## KARMA BOOK STILL AVAILABLE TO PRISONERS

Once again, 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. (Please check your regulations to make sure you can receive the book. Also, be sure to tell them about any special requirements.) Write:

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

*a little good news*

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# Human Kindness Foundation

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