

# Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Spring 2000

## PAST THE BOILING POINT

Dear Family,

A young woman spoke with me recently about her struggles with irritability, negativity and anger. She has several recurring health problems which affect her ability to eat and digest, or even to get a good night's sleep. Sometimes she has headaches or stomachaches that last throughout the day. On top of all that, she is in her first year of marriage and living in a new place, far away from her birth family and all her old friends. She is usually sweet-tempered and positive, but last week, in her words, "I really 'lost it' when I got home from work each day. I put up with everything all day long, but then coming home and realizing I still had to make dinner and do all my household stuff, plus relate to my husband and his problems – and he had a bad stiff neck last week so I was expected to help care for him as well – well, I just didn't have enough in me. I took it out on him even though I promised myself I wouldn't. I just couldn't help it; I went past my boiling point."

This led to an interesting discussion about the difference between psychological work and spiritual work. Many of our psychological needs or problems are exactly the same as our spiritual needs or problems, so the work is the same. But every now and then, the psychological level of our experience can be very different from the spiritual level, and so the work may be entirely opposite. We must bear in mind that the goal of psychological work is to have a healthy and happy life, while the goal of spiritual work is to know God. Psychological work is about the individual in relationship to others. Spiritual work is about *transcending* that individual self in union with God. God-realized people are not merely psychologically healthy human beings. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said to an interviewer, "Sir, you seem to suggest that the Buddha was just a nice man. That is not the case."

If we see the young woman's situation psychologically, we might say, "Now dear, you need to make time for *you*. Take a bubblebath, treat yourself to a massage or a weekend at a spa, tell your husband to take care of his own stiff neck." We might say, "Don't feel guilty for popping off at your husband; after all, you were having a hard week. A person can only handle so much."

The spiritual problem with that popular advice is that it reinforces several false and limiting beliefs, just when we have a golden opportunity to move past them.

The first false belief is that negative states of mind are caused by forces outside our control – illness, rotten nights' sleeps, bad drivers, sick children or spouses. If people and circumstances can cause us to "lose it," then we are doomed to be slaves all our lives to the shifting moods and actions of others. Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist who survived a Nazi death camp, said the best truth of human nature he had learned was this: There is one thing that no oppressor can take away from us – our choice of how to respond.

We have free will. Even if we are tortured, starved, raped. There is a deep "soul power" in us that can rise above, move beyond, see God in the larger picture, and respond with dignity and courage in the face of *anything* that the world can hit us with. This "rising above" is not the same as *fighting* our emotions. My young woman friend said she had tried to fight against her anger and negativity. It's easy to understand why that approach fails. If we hold a false belief that a bad night's sleep, or bad day, or bad week, "*makes us cranky*," then whom are we fighting, other than our own beliefs? Fighting ourselves is a no-win situation. With effort and self-honesty, we can examine and discard the false beliefs instead. Our spiritual work is to surrender to God within every circumstance, and draw on God's power to see us through it.

The second false belief is in our own limitations – "I can only handle so much!" The great teachings say that we never get more than we can handle. Do you believe that or not? If so, then act like it. What happens when water goes past its boiling point? It cannot handle the heat anymore in its heavy form, so it becomes steam instead. It doesn't cease to exist, it merely shifts its nature into a lighter, less limited form.

When we get to our boiling point, we can do the same thing. In a single breath, we can remind ourselves that God knows exactly how much we can take, and furthermore, it is no one *other* than God who is presenting us with these difficult challenges now. Many of us pray to be strong, to be wise, to be in tune with God's will. Well, our trials and adversities are not



accidents or curses, they are in fact the answers to our very own prayers. God gives us the opportunity to act human in a very small sense of the word, or to act human in the most divine sense. When the young woman enters her home after a hard day and sees the work that lies ahead of her, she can *breathe* in God's presence, and smile at those trials instead of run from them. God is messing with her head, that's all. She can cheerfully do whatever she needs to do, and see that it is not beyond her at all. She is beyond it. Nothing bad happens. She does her housework and then has a much-needed rest.

When she is able to do this, then the psychological level of her life rests within the spiritual, rather than vice-versa. This is a very important step of spiritual awakening: **First God, then the self.** Most of us settle for "First the self, then God." We adopt the latest psychological beliefs about our limitations, boundaries, traumas, hormonal swings, moods, needs and so forth. Then, within that context, we cultivate a very conditional spiritual life. When the two conflict, when we reach our boiling point, we tend to throw away our lofty spiritual ideals until the crisis is over.

We must reverse this process, so that when we reach a boiling point we drop the psychological self entirely and remember God. Then the young woman walks into her home dead tired, sees the work in front of her, and says – not to her husband, but *to God* – "You've really got it in for me today, don't you, Lord? Well, you know what I want, so I guess you also know what I need." She takes a few deep breaths, and then watches herself cook dinner, clean house, do dishes, care for her husband; and she finds she is bigger, deeper, kinder and stronger than she may have thought. We are not small.

This same young woman said to me, "But when I was a young teenager, I never let anyone know I was angry, I

did everything asked of me, I let people take advantage of my kindness. And it did not make me wiser or freer. I was a mess. I was codependent. I became bulimic. I didn't take care of myself. It was horrible. How is this any different from that?"

It is *very* different, because her teenage behavior had nothing to do with knowing God. Her life was being lived on a psychological level, and not a healthy one: "First other small selves, then my small self." And of course, since others are never satisfied, she never got around to taking care of herself. But when we shift to "First God, then the self," God takes care of us. We realize that we are not small and needy, we are servants of the One Great Force, and we clean house for God, take care of God's stiff neck, cook dinner with gratitude from God's own pantry. And we know that God eventually gives us time to rest, to heal, to play, and to have fun. Like every dollar bill says, "In God We Trust." It is that trust that helps us endure a hard week at the office or the Nazi death camps; a rejection from the parole board or a year in solitary.

The psychological/emotional dimension of life is the child, while the spiritual is the parent. Look around and see what a mess the world has become from the child dominating the parent. Each of us has the opportunity and ability to turn that around in our own lives and, hopefully, in the lives of our children. Like anything else worthwhile, it takes effort. Right there and then, in the moment you reach a boiling point, turn inward toward God rather than lashing out at the world around you. Consistently let go of false beliefs until they no longer trigger your moods. God knows, God cares, God sets you up in all sorts of dilemmas for your own good. Just remember this, and try to act accordingly.

Love, Bo

## ☞ ACT GREAT ☜

What is the key to untie the knot of your mind's suffering?

What is the esoteric secret to slay the crazed one whom each of us did wed  
and who can ruin our heart's and eyes' exquisite, tender landscape?

Hafiz has found two emerald words that restored me  
that I now cling to as I would sacred tresses of my beloved's hair:

**Act great.** My dear, always act great.

What is the key to untie the knot of the mind's suffering?

Benevolent thought, sound and movement.

— *The Gift*, by 14<sup>th</sup>-century Sufi poet Hafiz



## PRACTICE: ABANDONING BLAME

Following Bo's article, this practice can be a very powerful tool for letting go of false beliefs about who or what controls our moods. We recommend you take this vow for at least one month, and repeat it aloud at the beginning of each day. If possible, let a few friends know about your vow so that they can help remind you if you seem to be slipping.

**I pledge to stop blaming others for my negative states of mind.**

**I pledge to stop blaming circumstances for my negative states of mind.**

Throughout the period of your vow, notice any irritability, anger, depression, bitterness that may arise in you, and look honestly at what you *claim* to be the source of it, which is usually someone else or something happening around you or to you. Remember the vow, and discard your false belief that such-and-such is bumming you out. Such-and-such does not have the power to bum you out. Take 100% responsibility for your negativity. If you continue to be sad or mad after letting others off the hook, that's okay, at least you know that it belongs to you, not to them. It's okay to have a down day. Just know that it is your own personal thing, not anyone else's (and strongly resist the temptation to make any important or dramatic decisions on that sort of day).

Your life will change tremendously if you sincerely work with this vow for a while. Stop yourself in mid-sentence if need be, but stop blaming anyone or anything for whatever may be going on inside of you. You will be amazed by how much peace and power are gained by abandoning all blame.

### THE SAD GAME

Blame

Keeps the sad game going.

It keeps stealing all your wealth—

Giving it to an imbecile with

No financial skills.

Dear one,

Wise

Up.

— *The Gift*,

by 14<sup>th</sup>-century Sufi poet Hafiz



Artwork by Barbara Peterson, Tucson, Arizona





# LETTERS

John Boudin

Waynesburg, PA.



J.D. Boudin

Bo,

I've been really struggling lately. Why is it that nothing good ever happens to me? It seems I have the worst luck in life. I try so hard to have a positive life, but it seems I'm trying so hard but nothing comes of it.

I try to do my best in here so I could have a good chance in getting parole, but it seems something bad always has to happen to ruin it. I go up for parole again in February. But the only thing that will hurt me is, I've had two major write-ups since then. It just seems like everything is going all down hill lately.

I have about 1 yr. & 5 months left till I flat, and I have a feeling that's exactly what they're going to make me end up doing. Every night I go to bed crying. I try so hard to hold it in during the day time, but it's becoming so hard. What do I do Bo? I feel like I have no heart, because it's been shattered so many times. In the past, I would drink to soothe my pains. It helped, but it just made things worse in the future.

Just like when I try to get in a relationship with someone that is so special to me. I show them that I am a good person, but I must not be good enough. I know this is the worst I've ever been, but I don't see anything getting any better any time soon.

I just wanted to let you know how I am doing. Well, I'm going to stop for now.

Sincerely,

T (South Dakota)

Dear T,

Sorry to hear you're feeling so bad.

You said you always try to live a good life, but nothing comes of it, like getting parole. That's a major misunderstanding that is causing you a great deal of self-pity and suffering. Don't live spiritually in order to "get something" out of it. Live spiritually because it is the right thing to do. You're upset that life is not "repaying" you. Life brings you what you need; you act however you act because it's right. Period.

Whether it's parole boards or relationships or anything else, the sages and saints have laid down the basic rules of life for us to follow if we are wise, and to ignore if we are foolish. It has nothing to do with what comes of it, although much does come of it when you stop demanding it to be so obvious or immediate. You are having a crisis of faith, that's what this is called. You need to decide whether you're a person of faith or not. If you are, then live by the ancient rules, respect everyone you deal with, and do your practices, and

accept the lessons that life brings without thrashing about in self-pity.

This decision about faith may be one of the most important decisions in your life, and it could be the main reason things have been going so poorly for you. Are you a fair-weather seeker? Or are you in it for the long haul, through thick and thin, as I am?

I pray that the Christ spirit touches you deeply this season, my friend, and humbles and softens your heart. Will you let Him in? Look around and start focusing on the needs and problems of others and you'll get back on track.

We'll pray for you,

Bo



Dear Bo,

Thank you, to everyone involved with the Human Kindness Foundation, and to you especially for your insight and your determination.

My wife and I received the books that you sent to us. We are both grateful. We are practicing the principles within.

A lot has happened here in a very short time Brother, and it is simply the will of God at work in our lives. My wife and I were facing hundreds of years and all at once at our trial the prosecution



made mistakes that were so critical that all of my wife's charges were dismissed if I would take 10 years. Of course I took the 10 years so she could go free.

But we still have to go to Ohio to face robbery and kidnapping next, which is 40 to life there. So we are only out of one fire and into another. If she gets out of that one she will be free. But I will go on to Florida, Texas, and Oregon to face robberies and 2 homicides. I thank the Lord that at least she will most likely go free. And I am happy I have weathered this California storm, but I'm afraid deep inside, and I hurt in my heart for all I have destroyed in the name of heroin addiction.

My wife asked me, "Tell me when all of the pain will go away and my tears will stop falling from my breaking heart, missing what we had."

God—this tore me up. How does one honestly answer that question? Bo, I'm

scared that Florida will kill me, and honestly, I never murdered nobody. They think I did, and I know who did, but I can't tell on anyone, but I'm afraid I'll die if I remain silent. I wonder, would this person ride the lightning for me?

I believe the Lord will only allow me to die when it is my time Bo, but I'm still afraid ... I guess that faced with death all must feel some fear ... others have walked this road before me, I just have to draw on their strength. Right?

Love to you all Brother.

Your friend, D (California)

Dear D,

So sorry to hear how many cases you have before you settle in somewhere. You ask some tough questions, and there are no easy answers. You can't take back things you have done. But remember, if you are taking murder rap for someone else, that is a choice

you are making of your own free will, and so you should either do it and accept the consequences with great self-dignity, or else you should clear yourself by naming the guilty party.

If you choose not to name anyone, then be satisfied with the choice you have made, whether it means a life sentence or riding the lightning. If you are doing what you feel is RIGHT, if you are doing what you sincerely believe in, then leave the rest up to God and be at peace with yourself.

With all your charges, it seems pretty certain that the answer to your wife's question about having things like they used to be, is that things will never again be like they used to be. I had a big wreck and really messed up my body big time. That was 34 years ago, and every day I still pay for it. We can't make things go away once we have done them. But we can choose to have faith that it is never too late to become deeper, wiser, more loving people.

Your wife and you need to adopt a deeper philosophical or religious view which helps you accept the changes which are now out of your control, and to do all the right things that are under your control. Grieving over the past, or over what can't be, will not get you or her anywhere.

You're right, D – others have walked this road, and you must draw on their strength and wisdom. That's what all my books are about. But it takes serious spiritual *practice* as well as reading about it. The best people who ever lived have all done it. You can too. Things will never be like they were, but they can be truly wonderful again if you both discover how deep life really is. That's your only hope now. We are all on that journey together and we will be your friends forever.

Bo



Blessed Be To All,

I received my first free spiritual books ever from you. I now truly and sincerely express my deepest thanks. I have read *We're All Doing Time* twice since opening the shipping package, and I consider myself a hardcore inmate with 45 to life, and I must truly confess after I had finished it the first time I was drenched with tears of Bliss. Just understanding that someone such as Bo could understand a murderer like me with complete love.

I am of Chinese, Spanish, and Indian descent, 44 years old, and a very miserable man inside and your stories touch me very deeply. I approached my commanding officer and did a very shocking thing in front of several of my peers. I said "good morning sir", and he ask me to come into the security office and asked me if I was high on drugs.

I said I am stoned on a book I received days ago. He followed me to my cell with several fellow inmates watching, all knowing I had not spoken to any prison officials in 11 years 5 months (not a good word at least). When we got to my cell I lifted my pillow and showed him my only gifts in 13 years in prison, *We're All Doing Time* and *Lineage and Other Stories* of which I feel like the Saddest Buddha in many ways. The guard asked me if he could read *We're All Doing Time* during his lunch break and I told him please make sure I get it back before I lock in and he did, and *left a pack of cigarettes* on the book under my pillow.

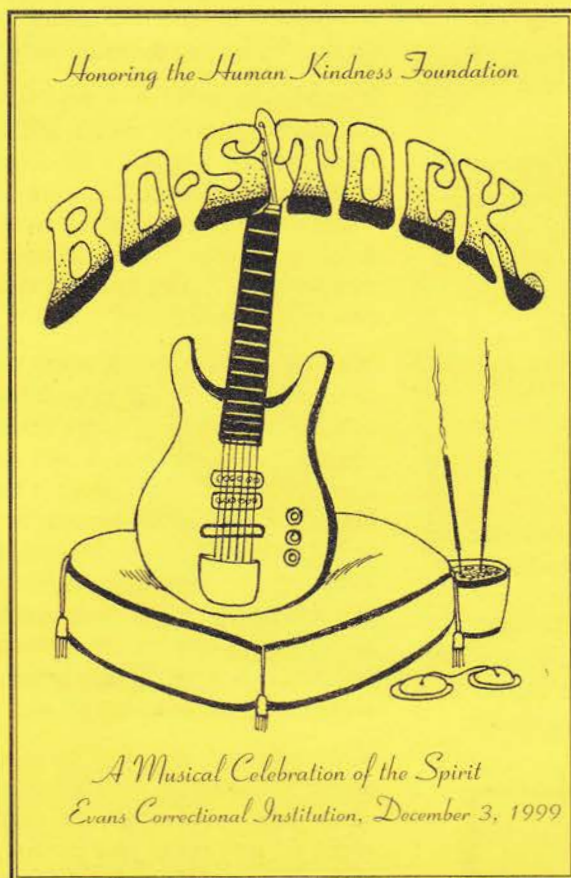
Bo, I begun a change I have been searching for, for almost 28 years of my life, that I can not even begin to understand. I thank you for entering my life through the gift of these free books.

You will forever be in my thoughts -N- prayers every winking moment,

Forever a friend, O (Wisconsin)



# NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS



Charlie Whipple. SC

## SEEKING PEACE STILL AVAILABLE

Last year we offered a new book for free to prisoners, called *Seeking Peace*, by Johann Christoph Arnold. This is a deep, challenging book from a true spiritual elder, and is still available for free to anyone inside (also for sale in our catalog, \$10). Simply write us and ask for the book.

## GATHERING OF EX-CONS FOR SHOW OF SUPPORT

Brother Tommy Waites, ex-con and associate minister of Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, is planning a gathering at the Alabama State Capitol in June (possibly the 23<sup>rd</sup>). His goal is to invite many ex-offenders and their families to Montgomery to show state officials and lawmakers that people can change, and ex-offenders can be productive citizens.

If you or anyone you know is an ex-offender who is out and doing well and may be interested in participating, please send the names and number of individuals to be registered to the address below. You will then receive a mailing on the time and date of the event.

Rev. Tommy Waites  
523 5<sup>th</sup> St  
Montgomery, AL 36110  
(334) 272-8622 or (334) 262-7879

## THICH NHAT HANH BOOKLET

When Vietnamese Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh gave his first U.S. prison talk in the Maryland Correctional Institute with the kind help of Bo and Sita, a tape recorder was allowed in. A booklet of that talk is now available, called: *Be Free Where You Are*.

The talk was steeped in deep compassion, concern and understanding of the nature of suffering and is an offering of the profound, simple and sweet practice of mindfulness. If you would like to receive a free copy of this booklet or any other books by Thich Nhat Hanh, write to the address below, and specify what you would like.

Parallax Press Prison Dharma Talk  
PO Box 7355  
Berkeley, CA 94707

[If you are not incarcerated, contact Parallax Press at 1-800-863-5290 for pricing.]

## UPCOMING TRAVELS

Bo & Sita will be on the West Coast (California & Oregon) from approximately **June 6<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>**. The scheduled events as of this printing are as follows. (Check our Website for the most up to date schedule. [www.humankindness.org](http://www.humankindness.org) )

**California:** June 9: Burlingame — Bo is a scheduled speaker at the Mercy Center for a contemplative Hindu/Christian retreat titled "The Cave of the Heart". If you are interested in attending the retreat, contact Mercy Center, Attn: Dick Shinn, (650) 340-7474.

June 11: Berkeley 10am-3pm — Prison Volunteers Gathering, sponsored by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship Prison Project & the SF Zen Center Outreach. For more information or to register (please register by May 25<sup>th</sup>), call Gabe Fields at (415) 255-6535, or write to him at [sfzcoutreach@yahoo.com](mailto:sfzcoutreach@yahoo.com)

Prisons: San Quentin, plus two in Soledad.

**Oregon:** Salem — An informal gathering with Bo & Sita. Contact Amazing Grace at (503) 581-3705 for time and location.

Prisons: Oregon State Prison, Salem

## 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.



# WEEKEND RETREATS AT KINDNESS HOUSE

Human Kindness Foundation plans to host several free annual retreats at Kindness House, our headquarters. The purpose of these retreats will be to provide a sense of community to specific populations (see below). At last year's corrections workers retreat, about thirty-five people from all over the country came to meet and become friends, do a few days' spiritual practice with the Human Kindness Foundation community, exchange stories and survival tips, and re-energize themselves for the challenges ahead. The participants were so grateful and enthusiastic, we decided to offer a similar weekend for ex-cons, and separate retreats for corrections volunteers and corrections staff (to allow for more people to attend).

The format of these retreats will be very relaxed in order to give people maximum time to get to know each other. There will be group spiritual practice to begin and end each day, group meals, and an open discussion led by Bo Lozoff each evening. No schedule during the day at all, other than what the participants plan with each other – from special-interest discussion groups, to volleyball, to just hanging out with a person or persons you feel drawn to.

If you think you may be interested in attending one or more of these retreats, *please fill out this form and let us know*. Then, we will make sure you receive details of times and dates as soon as they become available each year.

- ☐ *Full Time Corrections Workers:* For anyone working 30 hours or more per week in a correctional facility (paid or volunteer).
- ☐ *Part Time Corrections Workers:* For anyone working less than 30 hours per week in a correctional facility (paid or volunteer).
- ☐ *Ex-Con Retreat:* For anyone who has done time in prison, jail, youth facility, etc.

Name, Address, Phone, & e-mail: (Be sure to check off the appropriate box(es) above.)

[If you are currently in prison, please do not fill out this form unless you will be getting out this year.]

✂ Cut here and return to Human Kindness Foundation.



Michael B Yates, Abilene, Texas

*a little good news*

is a publication of 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 and workshops and the other projects of the Foundation.

© 2000, Human Kindness Foundation



# Human Kindness Foundation

RR 1 Box 201-N  
Durham NC 27705  
[www.humankindness.org](http://www.humankindness.org)

*Sponsor of the Prison-Ashram Project*

Address Correction Requested

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



recycled paper



Deborah Hayner, San Francisco, California

What happens when water  
goes past its boiling point?

It cannot handle the heat anymore  
as liquid water, so it becomes steam instead.

It doesn't cease to exist,  
it merely shifts its nature into a lighter,  
less limited form.

When we get to our boiling point,  
we can do the same thing.

— *Bo Lozoff*