

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Christmas 2001

WHAT AM I DOING HERE? HOW DO I REALLY HELP?

[EDITOR'S NOTE: the following are e-mails between Bo and his son Josh while Josh was in Guatemala doing volunteer work this past August. Safe Passage is an organization that works with children living around the Guatemala City dump. For more information see the "Good Works" section of this newsletter.]

Pop,

Thank God for being aware of the spiritual journey...

Well, I started working with Safe Passage today. It was a pretty heavy day. My chest was tight for most of the morning. Partially from the conditions, and partially because there is so much they are hoping I can do while I'm here – a bit overwhelming. I keep thinking of City of Joy [a book about Calcutta's slums] as I walk around here.

Another part of the heaviness is hard to describe. I'm used to feeling like one of the good guys. More altruistic, and "holy," and service-oriented than most of the people I'm around. But the director Hanley and her small crew here are better people than I am. That's the closest I can get to describing what I'm feeling. They are truly helping out un-self consciously – they're all too busy to notice how good they are. And they are too busy to notice how good I am to be there with them!

By the middle of the day, my chest loosened up (though it's tightening a bit writing this right now). I began chanting "any difficult work in this world is made easy by Your Grace" over and over. I met a local guy, don Celso, who does some handyman work for the project. He's going to work with me and show me where to buy materials and such. Without any authorization whatsoever, I hired him to help me. I couldn't find Hanley, the project director, to run it by her. And I figured that I'll pay the dude out of my own pocket if it's not in the budget, just to untighten my chest. He's asking about \$100 for a week's worth of work.

Deep down, I'm a little relieved that I can only volunteer here for two weeks. It shames me to admit to myself that I'm not sure if I could handle working here long-term.

Josh

Hi sweetie,

Instinctively I led morning prayers the past two days for your work with the city dump kids. I'm so glad you're there, so glad you're you. And so glad you bring God into the picture and are guided by prayer. And so glad you are

working with people who are "better than you" for a change. Just don't take that off into the deep end.

You have a deep understanding of the mysteriousness of life, and a compassion that can always help even invisibly, just blessing and even congratulating all the suffering ones for the richness of their earthly journey. That isn't a glib strategy for not feeling their suffering fully. I'm proud of you, sweetheart. Don't be afraid to lose yourself in service.

Pop

Hi Pop,

Just a quickie to ask you to keep us in your prayers. It's an intense and difficult place in so many ways. I'll write more later on. It's very rough for me – again in many ways. But luckily there is simple, tangible work for me to do, so I can concentrate on it and not feel overloaded, overwhelmed and over-other things. Keep the prayers coming.

Josh

Hi sweetheart,

You got it. We are praying very deeply for you all. I can feel there's power in it. So hang in there and try to bear in mind that you are in a whole community of devotees moving amidst those difficulties. I would love for one or two of our staff to go with you next year.

I love you, Pop

Pop,

I think the strong prayers had a lot to do with how today went (read on). Keep them coming. It feels nice to know everyone is keeping up with my experiences. I'd love to take some of the gang down with me next year.

Yesterday was pretty rough. It is truly like a crazy ward in there in the afternoons. That's when most of the kids come for *reinforamientos*, which is something like after school help with homework and basically a safe place to go for a few hours. Over half the kids are like little wild things. They literally bounce off the walls. They are locked in each classroom, otherwise they'd just roam around and hang on windows. There's a lot of sweetness in many of them, too, but the attention span and energy/noise level is unlike anything I've ever seen. If they were in the US, probably two-thirds of them would be medicated.

The first day rattled me, as I wrote you, but I didn't write much about the kids. That's because I hadn't yet really tuned in to them – I was focusing on my respect and awe



Josh doing magic with the kids in Guatemala

for the staff, the bleakness of the conditions, and the feelings the whole thing brought out in me.

So day two was about noticing the 250 living reasons for the project. Like I said, there is a lot of sweetness, which I'll get to. But for instance, one kid named Reynaldo – and by kid I mean about 11 or 12 – attacked me. Apparently he's pretty troubled. We'd had some words when I wouldn't let him climb my ladder, and then he climbed anyway and walked out on the very unsafe roof. I yelled at him, and when he got close enough, I grabbed him by the shirt and yanked him off the roof. A few minutes later, when my back was turned, Reynaldo came after me. If he'd had any strength, it would have been a drag. As it was, he was easy to contain, but people had to hold his feet while I wrapped myself around him to hold him still while he was kicking and yelling.

Then I started crying while I was holding him. The tears were surprising, but at that moment, I just felt very bad for Reynaldo. Also I felt that I probably could have handled my end of it better, without any anger. Plus I was probably dealing with the emotions of the whole last two days. In the Guatemalan culture, crying is so rare for a man to do, the people around us thought he'd hurt me. So I had to try and explain (all in broken Spanish, of course) that I was just sad for Reynaldo and for the situation. Meanwhile we're all still holding him and he's still swearing and fighting.

Then I had to go into each classroom to do some repair work, and being in each room was draining and intense. Out of about 10 -15 in each class, maybe two are actually sitting in chairs doing something. The others are climbing on the tables (3rd-5th graders), making off with my tools. It's hard to describe. I honestly couldn't figure out how the teachers there lasted one week. At the same time, I was so grateful that the project existed. I can only imagine what these kids would be up to if they didn't have this place to come to. Apparently many of the kids have virtually no structure in their lives, other than coming to the project. And, of course, all live in extreme poverty.

I was so fried by the end of the day. I left a bit early, took the standard 1½-hour bus ride back to my apartment, and crashed. I awoke this morning with tears in my eyes and a huge sense of dread. I chanted the whole way walking to the bus and just kept praying for help. The buses are almost too corny a stereotype of a 3rd-world bus – dirty, old, packed to the gills. Only thing missing is the chickens.

The person I was supposed to meet at the bus stop didn't show. So I ended up taking the bus alone for the first time – almost certain that I wouldn't know where to get off. And Guatemala City is as huge, busy and harsh as a city can get. I stood like a sardine for almost the whole 1½ hours, trying desperately to see out the window for any recognizable landmark. I kept going back and forth between crying and being angry at... whatever, I don't even know what. The people next to me, the kids at the project, the singers of the horrible Mexican pop music they blast on the buses down here. Finally I started praying "please let this soften me instead of harden me.

It's about time to soften up a bit, and, boy, this could be the time." So that began to help. Then I just silently cried the rest of the way.

Finally, I have no idea how, I found myself getting up, and squeezing my way toward the front of the bus. I got off at exactly the right spot! I couldn't help but feel pretty watched over at that point.

Still, It was a long walk through very unfamiliar and not-too-safe streets. Somehow, I found my way very easily, and even stopped to show a magic trick to a couple of the dirtiest, most raggedy kids you've ever seen.

So I felt much better when I actually arrived. Then the day went really well. It was like a fog lifted. I had a great time getting to know don Celso. Every shop we go into, he tells the shopkeepers that I'm from the United States, *but* I know how to work hard. I had a pretty productive day – (and relaxed into what a pretty productive day is here in Guatemala – walking a half-hour downtown for two screws from a hardware store which wasn't even open).

And today I noticed the sweetness in the kids, instead of the wildness. I spilled PVC glue all over my bare arm, and a boy spent about 10 minutes helping me peel it off. We both worked on my skin in complete silence. It was so sweet – he was more sensitive around all the little hairs in my arm than I was. It was very, very dear.

I noticed how needy all the kids, even the older boys, are for affection and hugs, any kind of attention. I still can't put a hammer down anywhere and expect it to be there 10 seconds later, but it amused and softened me instead of frustrating me.

I came back tonight very different. I feel protected and cared for, and that's exactly what I asked for in my meditation this morning – so that I could be of most service there. Now I can focus more on them than on me. I forgot yesterday, but remembered today, your main advice to me before I came here. You told me "remember that your presence is your main contribution. The work you do down there is number two."

So that was today. Tomorrow, who knows? It's wonderful to be receiving this guidance from you. I can't even express how important that is. I love you very much. Pray for me, and especially for all the garbage dump kids, and for Hanley and the others who work there.

Love, Josh

Hi sweetie,

Boy, what a writer you are. Thanks so much for your blow-by-blow description of the beauty and misery of God's Guatemalan mystery. And remember the lesson Sri Ram learned in Prasavana cave – never fall prey to despair. Discouragement is the great enemy. There is a reason for all of this madness, and it is not our business to know it. We serve with the humility of bailing out the ocean with a teacup, but what better is there to do?

It's a mystery, not a problem. And that can be your little contribution to the flavor of the stew: knowing it is a mystery, not a mistake. Move beyond all your ideas, and

simply respond to every energy God sends your way. Be a man of peace and wisdom and compassion, knowing it's not at all the point to figure anything out. Just be present in each encounter. Trying to deal with the whole thing is what will throw you. We are seriously praying for you, sweetheart. I'm glad you can experience the support.

I love you so much, Pop

Hi Pop,

Thanks for your guidance and perspective. It has been a challenging time. Yesterday went smoothly and sweetly. Today was tough. I got pretty rattled in the middle of the day and had to get outside and walk around. You know things are rough when walking around a garbage dump feels like refuge.

I had a few moments of expressed frustration before I left. I turned it inward fairly quickly, but I felt pretty weak at not being able to "be a man of peace and wisdom and compassion." I certainly didn't take it like Aikido energy. I did return to the school and work the rest of the day. I don't think any of the kids who saw me get upset held a grudge. They just kept asking me to show them more magic. (Their favorites are when I make 25 centavo pieces turn into \$1 coins, and when their signed card came out of my mouth.) Tomorrow I lead a painting crew. No kids will be there, so I have until Monday to deal with that energy again. I'm in it for another week, no matter what. So I have a few more opportunities to see them as little Christs in distressing disguise. Sometimes I do.

Prepare everyone for my appeals for contributions to the project. All the money goes to work right away and they're always in need. I love you. Thanks for being there, and thanks for going into retreat and silence for all these kids, even though you don't know them. They need you.

Josh

Hi sweetie,

So good to hear from you and to keep track of your adventure in the "Dump of Joy." I'm sharing all this correspondence with the community, and everyone sends all their love and warmest affection.

I was walking down the road this morning and I thought "Oh, I really want to remind Josh of Mother Teresa's quote about 'seeing Christ in distressing disguise.'" I guess I didn't need to remind you of that one.

I do feel very in tune with you these days, so please know that you are never alone. And we eagerly await your return, even if you do hit us all up for cash. Maybe several of the gang here will go back with you next summer.

I often remember that line from *Starman*, that we humans are at our best when things are at their worst. How incomprehensible it is that sometimes more beauty can be found in those city dumps than in Beverly Hills. I'm so glad life is a mystery and not a problem.

I love you, Pop

Hi pop,

Things are going well down here. My emotional handling of the situation has evened out a bit. I'm contributing a good deal, despite the short time I have here, so that's easy to focus on. I've connected with some particular kids. A few are helping with some of the repair jobs, and I may pick one to help me build shelving tomorrow.

I have been feeling deeply grateful that I have skills that allow me to help in this way. Hanley has been so happy to have this long list of repairs get checked off. I watch her gratefulness as if it were toward someone else, because it's really appreciation for my abilities, not for me. More than ownership over those skills, I just feel lucky to have them and value them. The Buddha knew what he was talking about when he put "to be able" as the number one quality for a good life. Thanks for your part in my handiness.

I'll be home in less than a week. Life is certainly a mystery. There is nowhere that is more true than in the Guatemala City dump. Of course there's probably nowhere that it's less true either. I keep seeing spiritual reminders right when I need them. My love to all. See you next weekend, God willing.

Josh

GOOD WORKS

Safe Passage for Children in Guatemala

In 1997, a young American named Hanley Denning traveled to Guatemala with the intention of doing a year or two of volunteer work before returning to the states and continuing her education and career plans. A trip to the huge landfill – the garbage dump – in Guatemala City changed her plans forever. In her words:

"I had lived and worked among the poor in Guatemala for the past two and a half years but nothing prepared me for the horrors I saw in the Guatemala City garbage dump. Thousands of people of all ages spend long days scavenging through the garbage in search of something to eat or sell. The poverty among the people is extreme and the area in which they work is very dangerous. Theirs is a daily struggle for survival and a reality from which I could not turn away."

In December 1999, while still in her twenties, Hanley created Safe Passage (Camino Seguro) to provide hope and assistance to the children living in the dump. Safe Passage helps the poorest of Guatemala's children break out of poverty in a dignifying and permanent way, primarily through education. In Guatemala, public school students have to pay for their own

uniforms, books, school supplies and enrollment fees. As a result, many poor children can't afford to go. Safe Passage provides support to help offset school expenses.

Safe Passage also operates a center that offers educational reinforcement and activity programs for about 250 of these children. The kids come to the center before or after school for help with homework, sports activities, and a healthy meal. For many of the kids, the project is a refuge from lives marked by extreme poverty, abuse and neglect. Situated in an area plagued by drug abuse and crime, the activity and educational program provides the children with an alternative to being on the streets... a safe place to study, learn and play.

Hanley is truly a selfless servant. She works around the clock and has poured most of her own money into the project. The project gets by on private donations and a few small grants. She now has a small staff of teachers and social workers who work with the children and their families. Volunteers are always needed to spend time directly with the children, work in the office, or do any number of other things. Hanley is particularly looking for people willing to stay for six months or more, but even week-long helpers are needed and put to good use.

With further funding, Hanley hopes to extend the reach of the project to include additional assistance for families in the form of clothing, supplies, medical care, connections to various community services, and an opportunity for the children to partake in field trips outside the dump. "I have a larger vision for these kids," Hanley said, "but right now the most important thing is that the children are excited about learning, that they are going to school every day and that they have a desire to continue."

For more information, contact:

Safe Passage
PO Box 1706
Tualatin, OR 97062
USA

Telephone 1-800-326-0016

Or e-mail Hanley directly at hanleydenning@hotmail.com

Josh Lozoff would also be happy to talk with you directly about his experience there, especially if you are interested in volunteering with Safe Passage. Contact him through the Human Kindness Foundation office or at joshlozoff@hotmail.com.



Hanley in Guatemala

A NOTE FROM BO

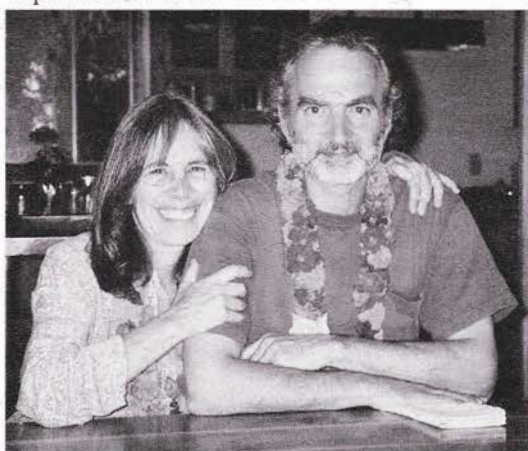
Dear Friends,

I'm out of forty-day retreat now and very grateful for your blessings and prayers. Believe me, I used them up! It was a rough but valuable time for me, and I'm glad I have eleven more months of silence to let it all sink in. I feel and hope that some big changes have begun, which is what I had asked for.



Bo looks at the lists of names of people praying for him.

On learning of Sept. 11th just a few days ago, I realized that my personal journey cannot be separated from the madness in such behavior. If I want a safer, saner world, I need to keep



Sita and Bo on October 12th, the day Bo got out of retreat.

doing my practices, prayers, remembering my values, helping others, and root out the very core vibration of selfish separation in my heart. It's that separateness that is hijacking and bombing and expressing so much anger and hatred in the world. Your separateness. My separateness. That's the real war.

It becomes very clear when we are stuck alone with ourselves without any distractions. It is so precious to be a human being and to cherish others and treat them well. We are nothing on our own. We need each other very much. My deepest prayer is that we start acting like it.

Your friend & brother, Bo

LETTERS

Dear Bo,

It was a real blessing to receive "Just Another Spiritual Book" and "Deep and Simple." I have something going on in myself that I am having trouble with and I could use your help.

I am 33 years old and an alcoholic for at least the past 10 years. I denied this for several years, as well as the fact that I do not operate emotionally on the level of my age. 2 weeks ago I received a 20-year prison sentence for child molestation. A year ago I would have laughed at anyone who said I would be in this position, for I saw anyone who was convicted of that as less than human.

I have 2 15-year-old daughters (they are half-sisters) who do not live with me and whom I've never been a traditional father to; the younger of the two was almost 12 when I met her for the first time. The three of us have always had a relationship of friends and confidants instead of as father to children. Back in December, after several hours of drinking and pot, I had consensual sex with the older daughter, L, who was already sexually active and who had previously made provocative comments and gestures (I thought it was jokingly).

Afterward, I was torn between feeling repulsed by the whole episode and by feeling pleased at the closeness and joy we both experienced. Even now, I cannot bring myself to view this as the monstrous, evil act that society tells me it is. I do regret the pain and the turmoil this has caused everyone involved and that I have now lost my daughters (the court ruled I am to have no contact with either of them.) Bo, does this make me this evil monster who takes advantage of innocent children? The problem in my case was not that I was turned on by children; it was that I saw her in the same way she saw herself, as an adult.

I don't understand how this all happened and all the prison system sees is a "sex-criminal." They see this case the same as if I climbed in a window and raped an innocent, virginal, 5-year-old. I have confessed my actions to both God and the authorities and I have received forgiveness by God. I have found peace that I know comes from God yet I am worried sometimes if I really have that

peace or if I am in a state of denial. I really need some help and guidance in how I can have lasting peace and bring something positive forth. I laid all this on you because I trust you and because I feel I can get a real answer from you and not some pat, clinical answer that means nothing to reality. Please respond soon because I don't know when I will be shipping out to prison. Thank you for your caring and your inspiration.

Love, peace, and kindness M

Dear M,

Yeah, I hear your conflict, my friend. Sexual issues are probably the most complex of all human endeavors, and especially when it comes to mature minors, sincere love and affection, man's laws, God's forgiveness and so forth. You certainly have my sympathy and I do not see you as someone who crept into a window and raped a five-year-old. I think it's terrible that we lump everyone together like that.

On the other hand, you clearly described that the "consensual" sex you and your daughter had, came about after several hours of drinking and smoking pot. So first of all, can you really say that a fifteen-year-old who is drunk and stoned can make an intelligent consensual decision in that state of mind? And secondly, how good a father were you to be drinking and smoking pot with your young teenage daughters?

I have no trouble believing that L made provocative remarks to you in the past, or had even come on to you. But part of you being the adult and her being the kid is that you are the one who is supposed to say something like, "Gee, sweetheart, I'm really flattered and even tempted, but this is something we could terribly regret and that could even get me sent to prison."

And in a sober state of mind, maybe that is exactly what you would have said. I hate that you received a twenty-year

sentence, I really do. But it might be helpful for you to see that twenty-year sentence as being not just for the one act of sex with L, but for a whole drunken, selfish, stoned lifestyle that put you at odds with the Big Laws of Life – in other words, we are supposed to be here to help

others, to raise healthy, wholesome children, to be mature members of society. Basically, your apathy toward all of that has caught up with you. God has given you a new assignment because you were not respecting your last assignment very much. And now you have the opportunity to do this one well or poorly.

Doing it well is what all my books and tapes are about. You have been handed some lemons. Many people have taken these lemons and made really good lemonade from them. You can too. I hope you decide to do it. You say God has forgiven you for sex with L. So there is no need to feel like a monster or anything like that (by the way, even the guy who does rape a five-year-old is not a monster, but that's a whole other conversation). I do hope you keep L in your prayers and pray that she not be hurt by your immaturity and selfishness in that one drunken night. And use your time to become a bigger and better human being who does not drink or get stoned and uses better judgement toward the common good.

Look at my books again with a fresh eye and apply what you read. We're on your side, M.

Love, Bo

Dear Bo,

I received the newsletter and your note today and my heart was warmed by both. Sitting, here, waiting to go to prison, with a 20 year sentence, I try to do my part to be of service to others when I can. I reached out to you because I truly felt that you, as well as the rest of the HKF family, were the only people I could turn to who would give me advice, counsel, encouragement, and love. I am pleased that I was proved correct and received all these, without being judged!

Love and Peace, M



Envelope from
Demetrius Harrington

[editor's note: We share the following letter with you as a reminder of how much difference one person can make, no matter where you find yourself.]

Dear Bo and Sita,

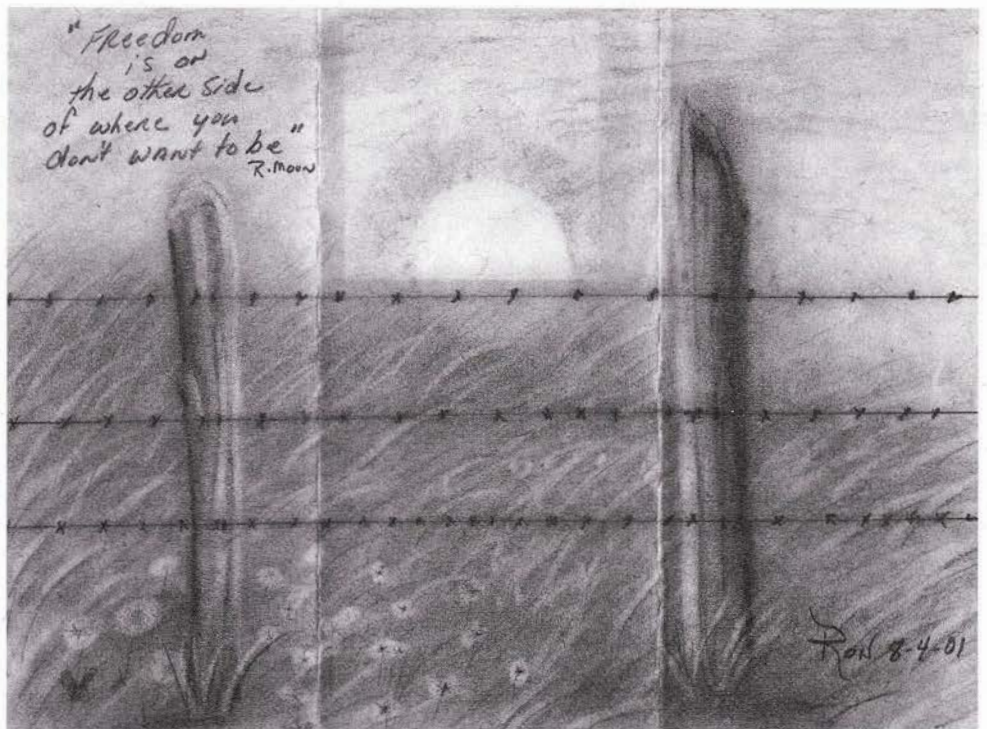
My name is T. I'm locked up at x prison, I'm also in the hole, where I have been for 2 years now, and I won't be getting out of the hole no time soon, My hole time runs till 3-04-07.

So, Bo and Sita I know y'all are wondering, how did I get so much hole time? Well, to be honest my attitude and behavior and anger, abusive language threatening the officer, but let me explain a little of why I'm the way I am.

See Bo and Sita, I have been locked up for 18 years now, I have lost all of my loved ones. My wife marry again, my kids do not write to me anymore, it's been almost 5 years now since I have heard from them, the d.o.c. has treated me very badly, so I have been taking my anger out on everybody around me. The other inmates in the hole would love to get their hands on me, because I be starting a lot of bullshit, with the other guys in the hole, the reason why is because I want everybody to feel the way I do.

Bo and Sita don't none of the guys here likes me... I would like to share something with y'all that happen to me not too long ago. I was gangerwarring with some of the other inmates, when a officer came up to my cell and gave me this note, so I thought that it was another misconduct.

Artwork by Ron Moon in Florida



But it turn out to be a letter from another inmate, now Bo and Sita I told yall that all the inmates hated my guts, least that's what I thought. So when I open up the letter I was truly surprised to read what this inmate wrote to me. Listen to this, this is what he wrote:

Hi, T, could you please do me a favor, please smile, because God loves you, and so do I. And then he wrote "good things come to those who hold their peace."

Now I did not understand none of this, I thought someone was playing a joke on me. The same day that I receive this letter it was store day so, to my surprise again the same officer came up to my cell and gave me all this brand new stuff, so now I'm really wondering what's going on.

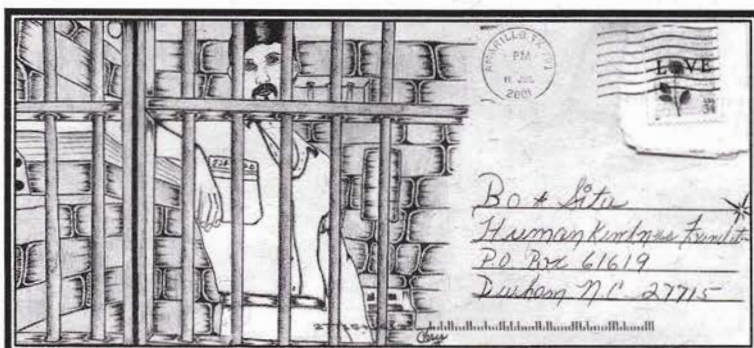
Now Bo and Sita I need to let y'all know that I do not have any outside support or any money on my books, I been living off the state, so when I receive all this stuff it just blew my mind, so later on I receive another

letter from that same inmate and it said I told you good things come to those who hold their peace, so Bo and Sita it was that inmate who bought all that stuff for me from the store...

So, Bo and Sita, all that day I was feeling all these strange feelings. I did not know what to do so I just set quietly on my bed and kept my peace for the rest of that day. The next day he sent me this Bible scripture from Proverbs 16:7 it said, "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." So, me and that inmate been talking a whole lot lately, he told me that he used to be just like me, angry all the time very hateful and unkind, and then that's when he started telling me about y'all and how y'all help him with his anger and hate. He said he started reading y'all books and practicing y'all teaching.

So Bo and Sita I need to let y'all know he is the most peaceful guy in the hole, I also would love to feel that kind of peace and serenity. He told me that y'all could help me too, so please send me y'all books too, I would truly appreciate it a lot. Bo, and Sita please help me.

T



Top envelope by Paul A Walsh in Maryland
Bottom envelope from Chris Ingerman in Texas

NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

RESEARCH STUDY

A research study concerning stress caused by going from the free world culture to the prison culture is looking for people who are: 1) **First-Time** inmates 2) at a **Maximum** or **Super-Maximum** security State or Federal Institution, 3) with **three months or less** time served. The research study is being done by an inmate in Iowa, working towards a Doctorate.

The survey will take approximately 30 – 45 minutes of your time. A self-addressed, stamped envelope will be provided, and all responses will be strictly confidential.

If you meet the three requirements and are interested in participating, please send a postcard or letter with your name, number and complete address to (**no later than February 15, 2002**):

Psychological Research Associates
Michael Lee Hood, Ph.D. Cand., Dir.
PO Box 1002
Bolivar, MO 65613-1002

FREE BHAGAVAD-GITA LESSONS

The American Gita Society now offers lessons on the "Bhagavad-Gita" to all prisoners. The Bhagavad-Gita is that famous chapter of the Mahabharata where 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

TEACHER AVAILABLE IN NORTH FLORIDA

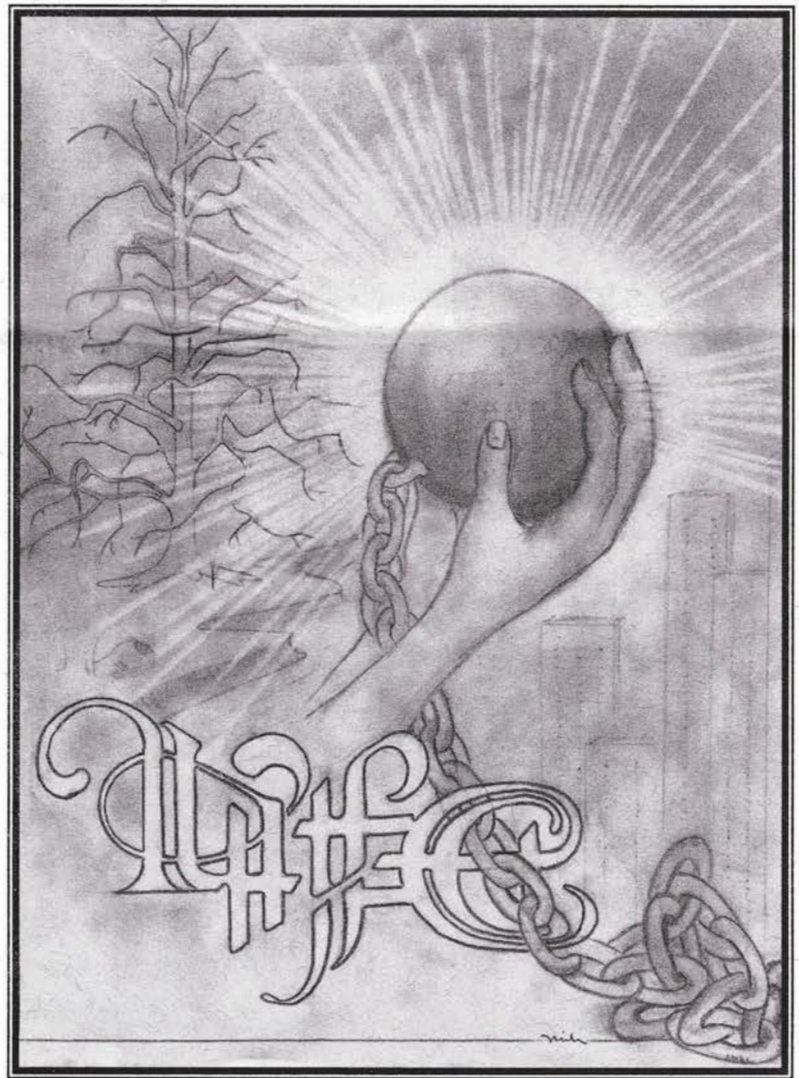
Free Dharma teachings (meditation, Buddhist spirituality) are available for prisoners and institutions in North Florida. For more information, call 904-782-1069 or write:

Dharma Teacher
5725 NW 237 Terrace
Lawtey FL 32058



Envelope by Vicente Florez, Texas

Artwork by Michael J Graton, Massachusetts



a little good news

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HAPPY HOLY DAYS FROM ALL OF US AT HUMAN KINDNESS FOUNDATION