

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Fall 2001

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS...

[EDITOR'S NOTE: By the time you read this, Bo will be entering into deep retreat to begin his year of silence. Please keep him in your prayers. It is unlikely he will be contributing to our newsletters until the winter of 2002, but we will continue to publish them as usual — this coming Christmas, spring/summer and next fall. We have some very interesting excerpts and interviews in mind to replace Bo's main articles. Father Arseny is our first, following Bo's greetings.]

Dear Family,
This being the last newsletter I will be contributing to for about a year, I just want to express my gratitude for your support, blessings, and prayers. As I said in the last newsletter, I am definitely not taking "time off" or anything like that. My prayer is to move into the next level of spiritual awareness and service. What that may look like is a complete mystery to me. All I know is, God is calling me from the inside, "Hey Bo; time to go deeper for the benefit of all beings." The rest is blind faith.

On September 1st, along with my community, I will be doing sacred chanting pretty much throughout the night. When we finish chanting on the 2nd, I will enter into silence until September 21st, 2002. I'll



begin silence with a forty-day retreat in our new hermitage in the far woods of our property. It's a 12'x12' cabin (see photo) without electricity or plumbing. I will not be reading or writing, nor have a clock or watch or calendar. My retreat will begin with fasting for about a week or ten days (just water), and everything else is unknown after that. I don't know whether I will eat or not, whether I will walk outside or not, when or for how long I will sleep, meditate, pray, etc.

Sita and Josh will come to fetch me on October 12th. I may have gone through so many changes, we are not planning any details of what my daily life will

look like for the rest of the year of silence. We are all curious. I am profoundly grateful to have a wife, family and community who are willing to jump into this Great Adventure with me (and take on a lot of extra work to enable me to do this). And grateful for your prayers as well. I value them tremendously.

So long, dear friends...

Bo Lozoff

FOUR BOOKS AVAILABLE, FREE TO PRISONERS AND STAFF

For over 27 years we have been working with prisoners, mainly through Bo Lozoff's writings, including *We're All Doing Time*. We have also come across books by authors other than Bo that we wanted to make available in prisons. At present, we have four such books that have either been donated in large quantities, or that we have printed in conjunction with the original publishers. Two of the books are Christian, a third is from a Buddhist friend on death row and the other is about a well-known Burmese political prisoner. We are offering

these books for free to prisoners, corrections facilities, and staff.

Our most recent book, *Father Arseny—Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father*, is a gripping and compelling book of unshakable faith in the face of imprisonment, torture, and seemingly boundless misery. Father Arseny spent nearly thirty years in Russia's "death camp" prisons for the crime of being a priest. His faith and courage can bring the reader to a new depth of understanding.

Excerpt from FATHER ARSENY, Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father

Punishment cell No. 1 was a tiny house that stood by the entrance of the camp. In this house were several rooms for solitary confinement; there was also one for two people which held a narrow board instead of a bed. This board was less than 20 inches wide. The floor and walls were covered with sheets of metal. The whole room was not wider than three quarters of a yard and two yards long. Outside it was minus 22° F and windy, so it was hard to breathe. You had only to step outside to become immediately numb. The occupants of the barracks understood what this meant: certain death. Father Arseny and Alexei would be frozen within two hours. No one had ever been sent to that cell in such cold. Occasionally, someone was sent to it when temperature reached minus 21° or minus 22° F, but only for 24 hours. The only ones who stayed alive were those who could jump up and down the whole 24 hours to keep their blood from freezing. If you stopped jumping, you froze. And here it was minus 22° F, Father Arseny was an old man, Alexei had just been beaten up, and both men were exhausted.

Father Arseny and Alexei were dragged to the punishment cell and shoved inside. They both fell, cracking their heads against the wall. It was pitch black inside. Father Arseny stood up and said, "So, here we are. God has brought us together. It is cold, Alyosha, and there is metal all around."

They heard the outer door close, the locks click, the voices and steps of the guards fade away. The cold seized them and constricted their chests. Through the small window with iron bars the moon shone its milky light into the cell.

"We are going to freeze, Father Arseny," moaned Alexei. "It is because of me that we are going to freeze. We are both going to die. We need to keep moving, to jump up and down, but it is impossible to keep that up for 48 hours. I already feel so weak, so battered. My feet are already frozen. There is no room here, we cannot even move. Father Arseny, we are going to die. They are inhuman, it would be better to be shot!" Father Arseny was silent. Alexei tried to jump, but it did not warm him up. It was hopeless to try to resist such cold. "Why don't you say something, Father Arseny?" Alexei shouted. As if from somewhere very far away Father Arseny's voice answered, "I am praying to God, Alexei!" "What is there to pray about when we are going to freeze?" Alexei muttered.

"We are here all alone, Alexei; for two days no one will come. We will pray. For the first time God has allowed us to pray aloud in this camp, with our full voice. We will pray and the rest is God's will!" The cold was gradually conquering Alexei and he was sure that Father Arseny was losing his mind. Making the sign of the cross and quietly pronouncing some words, Father Arseny stood in the ray of moonlight. Alexei's hands and feet were numbed by the cold; he had no strength in his limbs. He was freezing, and no longer cared.

Through the numbness and pain from the blows he had received, Alexei could clearly hear the words Father Arseny was saying: "O Lord God, have mercy on us sinners! Ever-merciful God! Lord Jesus Christ who because of Thy love became man to save us all. Through Thine unspeakable mercy save us, have mercy on us and lead us away from this cruel death, because we do believe in Thee, Thou our God and our Creator." And so the words of prayer poured forth, and in each of these words lay the deepest love and trust in God's mercy, and unconditional faith in Him.

Alexei started listening to the words of the prayer. At first he was perplexed but gradually he began to comprehend. The prayer calmed his soul, took away the fear of death, and united him with the old man standing beside him.

"O, Lord our God, Jesus Christ! Thou didst say with Thy purest lips that if two or three agree to ask for the same thing, then Thy Heavenly Father will grant their prayer because, as Thou didst say, 'When two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them.'" Alexei was repeating these words after Father Arseny.

The cold had taken over Alexei completely; his entire body was numb. He no longer knew whether he was standing, sitting, or lying down. But suddenly the cell, the cold, the numbness of his whole body, his pain from the blows he had received and his fear all disappeared, Father Arseny's voice filled the cell, but was it a cell? Alexei turned to Father Arseny and was stunned. Everything around had been transformed. An awful thought came: "I am losing my mind, this is the end, I am dying."

The cell had grown wider, the ray of moonlight had disappeared. There was a bright light and Father Arseny, dressed in brilliant white vestments, his

hands lifted up, was praying aloud. The clothing on Father Arseny was the same as on the priest Alexei had once seen in church.

The words Father Arseny spoke were now easy to understand, they had become familiar—they entered directly into Alexei's soul. He felt no more anxiety, no more suffering, no more fear, only the desire to become one with these words, to understand them, to remember them for the rest of his life. There was no more cell: now they were in a church. How had they gotten here? And why was there someone else here with them? Alexei saw with surprise that there were two men assisting Father Arseny. Both were dressed in the same bright vestments and both shone with an undefinable white light. Alexei did not see their faces, but sensed that they were beautiful.

Prayer filled Alexei's being. He stood up and started praying together with Father Arseny. It was warm and easy to breathe, and happiness filled his soul. Alexei repeated everything Father Arseny was saying, yet he was not simply repeating, but praying together with him. It seemed that Father Arseny had become one with the words of his prayer, but Alexei understood that Father Arseny had not forgotten him and was helping him all the while, helping him to pray. The certainty that God existed, that He was with them, came to Alexei. He saw God with his soul. At times Alexei thought that perhaps they were both already dead, but the firm voice of Father Arseny and his presence kept bringing him back to reality.

How much time had passed he did not know, but Father Arseny turned to him and said, "Go, Alyosha! Lie down, you are tired. I will keep praying, you will hear me." Alexei lay down on the metal-covered floor, closed his eyes, and kept on praying. The words of prayer filled his whole being: "...will agree to ask anything, it will be given to them by my Heavenly Father..." In thousands of ways his heart responded to these words: "gathered in my name..." Yes, yes! We are not alone," thought Alexei from time to time as he continued to pray.

All was peaceful and warm. Suddenly out of nowhere his mother appeared. She covered him with something warm. Her hands took his head, and she pressed him to her heart. He wanted to speak to her; "Mama, can you hear, can you hear how Father Arseny is praying? I've learned that God exists. I believe in Him."

As if she had heard him speak, she answered him, "Alyoshenka! When they took you, I also found God. This is what has given me the strength to live."

Everything that was awful had disappeared, his mother and Father Arseny were near him. Words of prayer which had been unknown to him now rekindled and warmed his soul. It was important not to forget these words, to remember them all his life. "I never want to be far from Father Arseny. I want always to be with him," thought Alexei.

Lying on the floor at Father Arseny's feet, Alexei listened, half-asleep, to the beautiful words of the prayer. Father Arseny prayed, and the two others in bright garments prayed with him and served him. They seemed amazed at how Father Arseny could pray. Father Arseny no longer asked for anything, he only glorified God and thanked Him. How long all this lasted no one could say.

The only things that remained in Alexei's memory were the words of the prayer, a warming and joyful light, Father Arseny praying, the two others in clothes of light, and an enormous, incomparable feeling of inner renewing warmth.

Somebody struck the door, the frozen lock squealed, and voices could be heard from the outside of the cell. Alexei opened his eyes. Father Arseny was still praying. The two in garments of light blessed him and Alexei and slowly left. The blinding light was fading and the cell at last became dark and, as before, cold and gloomy.

"Get up, Alexei! They have come for us," said Father Arseny.

Alexei rose. The head of the camp, the doctor, the main head of the special sector, and the Major were coming in. Somebody behind the door was saying, "This is inexcusable—someone could report this to Moscow. Who knows how they will look at this. Frozen cadavers—this is not the modern way."

In the cell stood an old man in a patched up vest and a young one in torn clothes with a bruised face. Their faces were calm and their clothing was covered with a thick layer of frost.

"They're alive?" the Major asked in amazement. "How did they survive here for two days?" "We are alive, sir," said Father Arseny. All looked at each other in amazement. "Search them." "Come out!" shouted one of the supervisors. Father Arseny and Alexei walked out of the cell. The supervisors removed their gloves and started frisking them. The

doctor also removed a glove, put it under Father Arseny's and then Alexei's clothing, and, to nobody in particular, said, "Amazing! How could they have survived? It's true, though; they're warm." The doctor walked into the cell, looked around it and asked, "What kept you warm?" "Our faith in God, and prayer," Father Arseny answered.

"They are simply fanatics. Send them back to the barracks right away," said one of the supervisors in an irritated voice. As he was walking away, Alexei heard somebody say, "It's amazing. In this cold they should have lived no more than four or five hours. It's unbelievable, considering that it's minus 22° F

out. You supervisors sure got lucky. There could have been some unpleasantness in store for you."

The barracks met them as if they had risen from the dead.

Everyone asked, "What saved you?"

They both answered, "God saved us."

Alexei became a new man, as if reborn. He followed Father Arseny whenever he was able to and asked everyone he could about God and about Orthodox services.

This story was told by Alexei and confirmed by several witnesses who lived in the barracks at that time. ■

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The second Christian book is *Seeking Peace*, by Johann Christoph Arnold. *Seeking Peace* is a deep, challenging book from a true spiritual elder. It has sparked much soul-searching in our community.

Excerpt from *Seeking Peace*

*There is plenty one could write about humility, but there is no substitute for simply practicing it from day to day. It is only through actually opening ourselves to others that we discover the hidden blessings of vulnerability, and only through accepting defeat that we learn to welcome the peace that self-surrender brings.*

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Finding Freedom, Writings from Death Row, is the first book by a prisoner-author we have carried. Masters' writing reflects the transformation he has undergone since receiving the death penalty, his burgeoning Buddhist practice, and his growing capacity to integrate that practice with insight and compassion into his life on Death Row.

Excerpt from *Finding Freedom*

After ten years of incarceration, I had a real fear of calling myself a Buddhist and of being seen by prisoners in a cross-legged position, praying or meditating. ... I had spent almost a year overcoming these doubts, one by one, through my meditation and Rinpoche's teachings. Yet somehow they had all resurfaced on the morning of

the ceremony. ...I just sat still, repeating the prayer to Red Tara, the embodiment of wisdom. ...I remembered what someone had said to me long ago: "All you need is a pure heart. It's what's in your heart that counts the most. Quietly listen for it." This is what I was doing. I felt fortunate.

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*The Voice of Hope, Conversations With Alan Clements*, is a book of conversations with Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of Burma's struggle for democracy, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. In this book, Aung San Suu Kyi gives her vision of truth and reconciliation, democracy and freedom, spiritually-infused politics, engaged compassion, and the force of love. This book has a heavy emphasis on political activism. The book is **HARDCOVER**, so please be certain your facility can receive hardcover books before asking for it.

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If you're interested in ordering one or more of these books, simply fill out the form on the last page and send it back to us. The books are free to prisoners, corrections workers and volunteers. Of course, if your facility has a budget to purchase these books, that would help us fund the free copies. Contact us if you need an invoice. They are also available for purchase by any "free-worlder," except for *The Voice of Hope*, which the author has given us only for free distribution in prisons.

LETTERS

Dear Bo and Sita,

I am currently incarcerated for the December 18th, 1996 stabbing of abortion doctor Calvin Jackson. Doctor Jackson does 'late trimester' abortions on Bank Street in New Orleans. He has been doing so for more than ten years. I was arrested later that same day for fleeing an officer while at another abortion clinic in Baton Rouge. I was later charged with attempted murder and copped a plea-bargain for a twenty year sentence.

I have personally heard Mother Teresa call abortion murder, and what these doctors are doing with taxpayers' money is alarming. During the days of operation rescue I visited one man in jail. Yet, after all, we are not listening to the sit-in protestors. They are even debating partial birth abortion in congress now, and people like Pastor David Wilkerson are predicting God's judgement of the land.

I thought this letter might be of some value to you, as it gives you the chance to shed some light on how important this law

of humanity really is. Even if it is told through the awful lens of my crime.

I have been cursed by Doctor Calvin Jackson's associates and there is a spiritual assignment which I am subject to daily. Yet I proclaim my crime to be one which will launch a person into "spiritual warfare". Meaning that the bars and restraints aren't my worst enemy in here.

There are a thousand reasons not to do what I've done. The burden is on my family now. By the way, I'm married but have no children. Is there ever a time for controlled violence (since I used a knife)? And if not, how do I keep my sanity in my sharp situation? I share with no one why I'm here. I don't want to be the song of the drunkards. Do me a favor, write me back and show me that there really is an outlet of comfort. I will do ten years flat time.

This is an issue that divides so many people. The security officers are divided at times on the subject. Surely there is more to the answer than I'm just flat wrong and deserve to do my time like, say, an armed robber or something like that.

Salutations, "D"

Dear D,

You pose some very tricky questions, for sure. There's an old saying, "Even the Devil can quote from scripture," meaning that any of us can justify nearly anything we ever do by pointing to a verse or story from the Bible.

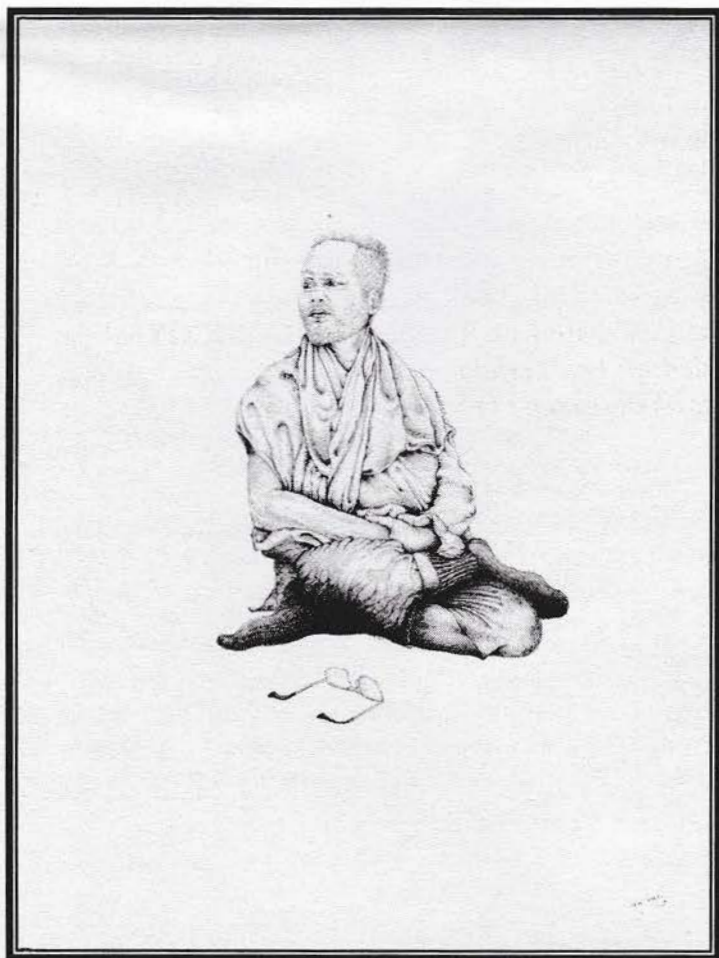
When Jesus saved the adulteress from being stoned to death by saying, "Let he among you who is without sin cast the first stone," He himself was defying the Bible at that time, which calls for adultery to be

punishable by death. The books of the Old Testament, which constituted the entire Bible in those days, also called for the death penalty for working on the Sabbath and many other things that millions of us do nowadays. The adulteress whom Jesus saved was guilty as charged. The law of God and the law of the land were both crystal clear: She should be stoned to death. Adultery was a mortal sin which could not go unpunished. But Jesus, who carried divine authority within himself, chose to show mercy and compassion to her instead. Not only to her, but to all sinners in the way he said, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." In other words, he was basically telling us we not to execute anyone unless we ourselves become perfect. And when we ourselves become perfect, we are so filled with mercy and compassion, we have no wish to execute anyone. We wish to help them change instead.

I have had the Grace to experience Christ's mercy several times in my life - direct, personal contact with Christ. From my own experience of His heart, I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that He does not wish us to commit violence against another. If I had had an opportunity to assassinate Hitler before he destroyed millions of people, I may have done it, but not to punish him or to be God's agent in "giving him what he deserves." If I did it at all, I may have done it with heartfelt sorrow and grief, and total willingness to accept all the consequences of my actions, including imprisonment or my own death.

You are the only one, with God's help, who can feel in your heart whether what you did was wrong. I think it probably was. I think the violence in the pro-life movement has been angry and hateful toward abortion doctors, and that goes way off from Christ.

But that is just my guess. If you look deeply within yourself through prayer and meditation, and you find that your sole motive was very purely to save the lives of unborn babies whom this man would have terminated, and that you honestly feel God wanted you to take this cross upon yourself, then from that moment on, you can have total peace with both your crime and your prison sentence. If God wanted you to do what you did, then He also wanted you to do a flat ten years



Artwork by Bruce McKamey, North Carolina

away from your family. Treat this time as a holy pilgrimage and know that He is with you every step of the way. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me..." If you wind up feeling you did the right thing, then you should never complain about where you are or the loss of your family. Be content with the path God has carved out for you.

If, after prayer and reflection, you feel it was *not* God's will, but rather that you got suckered into a hateful mentality that spits in the face of Jesus's "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone," then you can also find some peace at last. You did wrong out of ignorance, you can thank God you did not succeed in killing anyone, and you can accept your prison time as an opportunity to become a wiser spiritual seeker deeply connected to God instead of acting on the ramblings of the David Wilkersons of this world – whom Jesus Himself scorned constantly. Jesus's message is not one of self-righteousness and anger. The "fundamentalist Christian right" are the new Pharisees who miss Christ by a mile.

D, you are at a crossroads in your understanding and depth as a spiritual seeker. I pray that you use my books as one way to leave your old hard-hearted sense of religion behind, and finally become a true Christian whose heart is filled with compassion and mercy even toward the "armed robbers" and so forth whom you think deserve to be where they are. That is not what our Lord taught us.

Remember Dismas, the thief on the cross next to Jesus. Anyone can repent and be saved at any time. It is never too late. You and I are never supposed to look down our noses at the people around us. They are our brothers and sisters, lost sheep like us looking for the shepherd.

The question of whether you "deserve" to be in prison is irrelevant. God's plan and your own free will have placed you where you are. The only relevant question now is, what do you do with it? Now is the time to strengthen both your faith and your self-honesty, and move onward and upward. We're happy to help if we can. We're all in this together. Thanks for sharing your sincere and difficult confusion with us. I respect your honesty very much.

It's good to meet you, little brother. I would give anything to meet you out here as a free man who has learned his lessons.

Love, Bo



Dear Bo,

I'm writing to humbly offer my encouragement, support, and congratulations on your Year of Silence. Apparently, you've had considerable apprehensive feedback (God bless and keep the nervous nellies—they'll be alright). Being headman of a large, busy service and light-bringing organization can easily get to gobble up one's path. I am proud and reassured that you are choosing to prioritize your spiritual growth. It gives me even more faith and

respect for HKF and for Bo. You all are a large, large light, shining far and long. Raising its frequency to a higher level can only improve the work you all do. Also, I couldn't help but notice the very high vibration of your discourse in our last HKF newsletter. I was really impressed with the patience and understanding you answered the worries with, taking the opportunity to give a lesson on retreats, silence, and vows of practice in general. To those of us who struggle with a regular sitting schedule, it is inspiring to be reminded of the POSSIBILITY of 40 days in retreat and a year of minimalized "push-starting". Also, I want to say that you responded to the two main letters with the greatest of compassion, wisdom, and insight I've seen in an HKF newsletter for a good while—two very different, very demanding letters, at that. It almost seems that even the mere decision to retreat has begun to fill you with more joy and power. Again, I send my strongest supportive energy and offer my deepest respect. May God visit, guide, and dwell within you as you experience this magic journey of growth and rejuvenation...(or whatever it turns out to be!)

Unconditional Love

In my Heart of Hearts,
CW, ECI-South Carolina

NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

PRISONER VISITATION AND SUPPORT

More than fifty percent of the prisoners in federal prisons get no regular visits from family or friends. PVS, Prisoner Visitation and Support, needs volunteers to visit prisoners at a *federal* or *military* prison near their home. Visitors make monthly visits and see three to five prisoners on a visit. If you would like to volunteer, contact PVS at:

Prisoner Visitation and Support
1501 Cherry Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

PAR (PEOPLE AGAINST RECIDIVISM)

Since publication of the article about James Taylor and PAR in the Christmas 2000 issue of *a little good news* (under *Good Works*), James has received many requests from prisoners nationwide (one as far away as South Africa) seeking support from his program. As a result, he is now able to offer his Written Plan of Action project through one on one correspondence. That is the heart of his Day One Parole Preparation course. It is designed to help equip participants with vital information needed to prepare for their freedom. To find out more about PAR, write to:

PO Box 57
C/O James Taylor
Broomall, PA 19008

BOOKS OFFER

Below is an easy way to order the books mentioned in the main article. As usual, the books are for sale to "free-worlders" and free to prisoners or others who genuinely can't afford them, though you are always welcome to make a donation for the books. Since we will be receiving hundreds of responses, please be kind to our small staff, and refrain from writing a letter or making other requests with this form. (Also, allow for up to two months delivery time.) Thanks!

Prisoners or Prison Staff

Be sure to get prior approval if you need it, or send us the necessary mailing slip if required.

Please be certain of your institution's requirements — otherwise we waste a lot of money in return postage. *If you're not going to be at your present institution for at least 2 months, please wait until after you've moved to write for the books.*

☐ Use my address on the back or ☐ Change my address to:

Be sure to include your number if you have one!

Please send me the following free book(s):

[Prisoners: please choose TWO only:]

- _____ ☐ *Father Arseny* translated by Bouteneff
- _____ ☐ *Seeking Peace* by Johann Christoph Arnold
- _____ ☐ *Finding Freedom* by Jarvis Masters
- _____ ☐ *The Voice of Hope* conversations with
Aung San Suu Kyi ****HARDCOVER****
*Be sure you can receive a hardback book
before ordering this!*

STAFF OR VOLUNTEERS MAY ORDER ALL FOUR BOOKS IN ANY QUANTITY – PLEASE WRITE THE DESIRED QUANTITY NEXT TO THE ITEM. BOX QUANTITIES ARE OKAY (Approx. 36 books/box).

Artwork by
Marci Thomas, California

Others – To order one or more books:

☐ Use my address on the back or ☐ Change my address to:

Father Arseny _____ x \$16 = _____
translated by Bouteneff (code BFA)

Seeking Peace _____ x \$10 = _____
by Johann Christoph Arnold (code BSK)

Finding Freedom _____ x \$12 = _____
by Jarvis J. Masters (code BFF)

shipping & handling **+\$4.00**

tax-deductible donation + _____

Total Enclosed (check, cash, or money order) _____



a little good news

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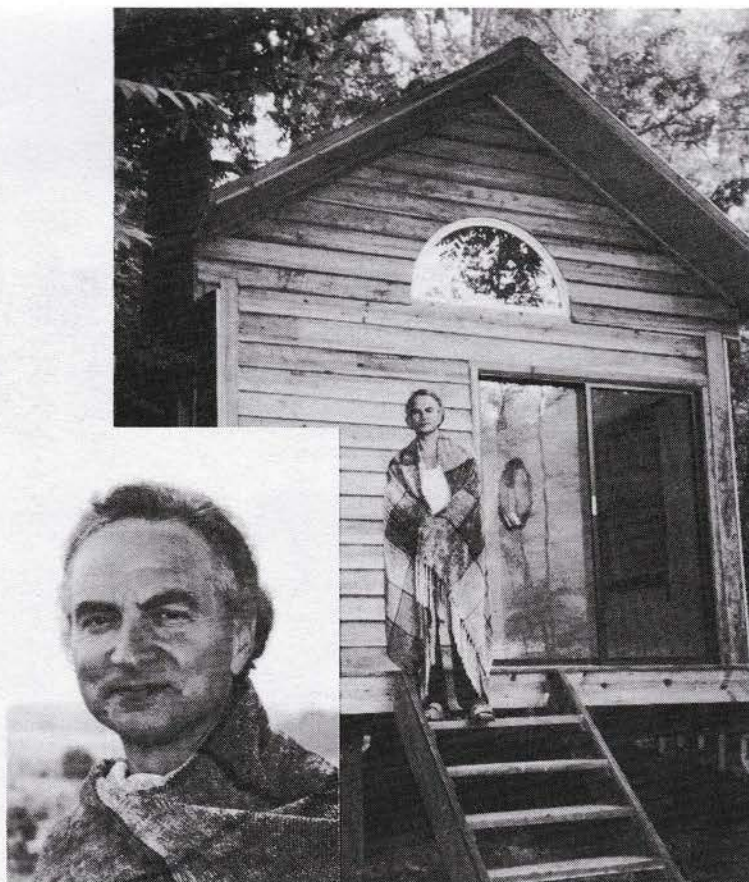
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On September 2nd, Bo will begin his year of silence with a 40 day retreat in this newly built, 12' x 12', hermitage.

Dear Bo –

We seem so frightened today of being alone that we never let it happen. We choke the space with continuous music, chatter, and companionship to which we do not even listen. It is simply there to fill the vacuum. When the noise stops there is no inner music to take its place.

In the late 80's you came to a prison in North Carolina and played music for me and my fellow prisoners. What a great day that was. Now, years later, you will give us an entire year of silent inner music. I will hear you Bo. – Peace be with you brother.

Bo, I understand that what you are going to do is for me, and to be of better spiritual service to us all. This letter is a moment of thanks. ☺

My prayers and heart will be with you throughout your year of silence, as they always are.

Thanks Bo! In faith, I remain

ACP, Atlanta, Georgia

*No one can approach God
without withdrawing from the world*

– St Isaak of Syria