

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Fall 2012

EVERYBODY'S ANGRY!!

Anger is a big one. For some people, it's THE big one. It might be what landed you in prison, or ruined your marriage, or drove a wedge between you and your children. You might have lost jobs or friends because of your anger. Even for people whose outer lives are going well, anger can be a trap, sapping energy and stealing any chance at peace of mind.

*Here at HKF, we frequently get letters saying something like: "I know I need to let go of this anger, but **how** do I do it?" Since so many people ask that question, we decided to focus this newsletter on anger and how to work with it. We've asked some of our friends, in and out of prison, how they work with anger. We've quoted some well-known authors, too.*

Our hope is that in reading these thoughts about anger, you will find help, ideas, inspiration. You will know that you're not alone: anger is present in almost everyone. And you will see that, although we can't offer you one perfect answer that will make anger easy to work with, many people have found ways to conquer anger's destructive power in their lives. If they can do it, so can you.

Anger is
like
drinking
poison
and waiting for it to kill
your enemy.



From the song "Everybody's Angry" by Bo Lozoff, © 2005

Big man's angry knowing big don't count,
Little man's angry 'cause he hasn't found it out.
Poor man's angry he can't have it today,
Rich man's angry he ain't happy anyway. ...
Even Jesus was angry at the moneychanger's sin,
The moneychanger's angry right back at him.
Anger, anger, everywhere I see,
Everybody seems to be angry to me,
Anger, anger at the drop of a hat.
Well it makes me angry and I don't like that.

Discovering The True Nature of Your Anger

By Author and Buddhist Teacher Thich Nhat Hahn

Anger is like a blazing flame that burns up our self-control and causes us to say and do things that we regret later. When someone is angry, we can see clearly that he or she is in hell. Anger and hatred are the materials from which hell is made. A mind without anger is cool, fresh and sane. The absence of anger is the basis of real happiness, the basis of love and compassion.

When we are angry, we want to think about the person who is making us angry—his dishonesty, cruelty, and so on. The more we think about him or listen to him, or look at him, the more our anger flares. His hatefulness may be real, imaginary or exaggerated, but the fact is that the root of the problem is the anger itself and we have to come back and look first of all inside ourselves. It's best if we don't look at or listen to the person whom we consider to be the cause of our anger. Like a fireman, we have to pour water on the blaze first and not waste time looking for the one who set the house on fire. So we avoid thinking anything about the other person. At the moment you become angry, you tend to believe that your misery has been created by another person. You blame him or her for all your suffering. But by looking deeply, you may realize that the

seed of anger in you is the main cause of your suffering. Many other people, confronted with the same situation, would not get angry like you. They hear the same words, they see the same situation, and yet they are able to stay calm and not be carried away. Why do you get angry so easily? You may get angry very easily because your seed of anger is too strong. And because you have not practiced the methods for working on your anger, the seed of anger has been watered too often in the past.

All of us have a seed of anger in the depth of our consciousness. But in some of us, that seed is bigger than our other seeds—like love or compassion. The seed of anger may be bigger because we have not practiced in the past. When we begin to cultivate the energy of mindfulness, the first insight we have is that the main cause of our suffering, of our misery, is not the other person—it is the seed of anger in us. Then we will stop blaming the other person for causing all our suffering. We realize she or he is only a secondary cause. You get a lot of relief when you have this kind of insight, and you begin to feel much better.



Margie, formerly incarcerated and currently the Executive Director of "Into The Solutions," a nonprofit organization serving delinquent youth

When I was first incarcerated, and still in the midst of my 28-year heroin addiction, **the only emotion I ever felt was anger.** It was the only feeling I even knew about; everything else was drowned out by drugs. In an anger management program, my teacher told me to go to each bed in the dorm, and hear that woman's story for ten minutes without making any comment. I listened to stories of women being raped, abused, beaten. From that, I learned empathy: other people had feelings, too. That's when I started on my road to recovery.

Gabe, on parole in NC

With my 19 years in prison I had plenty of opportunities to work on my anger. **I know my meditation practice helped me not to react on impulse** even when I still became angry.

I think another thing that helped me was prayer—Real Prayer. I can remember many times in dealing with prison staff as well as inmates who seemed to always have it out for me, that prayer really changed things—or should I say changed *me* enough to where things seemed to change. I can't really explain how or why, all I know is it worked. So many times when I had a problem with someone—a loud, complaining, hateful inmate or a guard always giving me a hard time—I prayed for them and whatever was going on with them. And I recognized that they are people on their own path with their own struggles, instead of just praying for the situation to get better. Even though at times I knew I was right and had a good excuse to be angry with someone, I prayed to not add to their pain. Every time, within a few days, things got better, or should I say, I was no longer angry.

From With You On the Path

By Buddhist Author Dolma

If you're serious about conquering your temper, you're going to have to work very, very hard—and probably to some degree for the rest of your life. I'm saying this upfront not to be scary, but because I think it only fair that people have a clear understanding of what's involved in what they're undertaking.

Why is anger a problem for which there is no quick fix? Whatever the reason, it has become a habit, and habits, as you know, are not easy for us humans to break. So if you really want to change—and change is possible—then you have to be prepared to put a lot of effort into it. Change is possible because of the very nature of our mind. The very fact you recognize that you have a problem with anger means that there's a part of your mind which is anger-free—enough so that it is able objectively to examine the rest of your mind and say: Anger is a problem for me; I'm out of control. So you have a place in your mind from which you can see yourself clearly and make the changes necessary.

I can mention some of the reasons anger is a problem for so much of the population generally: first, we beings are under the mistaken impression that it's things/people out-



Forgiveness is unlocking the door
to set someone free
and realizing you were the prisoner.

Max Lucado

side ourselves that “force” us to lose our temper. Now, while it’s true that external things act as a helping factor in stirring us up, those things are not the ultimate determinant of why we get angry. The ultimate factor is our-

selves, our own tendency, sometimes from birth, to take offense at every little thing and to believe that it’s the guy or situation out there that is offending us, rather

than we who are allowing the upset to arise in ourselves. We’re under the illusion that it’s stuff outside ourselves that is making us angry, rather than we ourselves who are *choosing* to become angry. When we realize that we have the ultimate control over whether we choose to be angry or not—that puts us in the driver’s seat.

You might say, aren’t there things so terrible out there that anyone in the world would get angry—things like the 9/11 attacks, for in-

stance? No, not everyone in the world got angry over that. The truly wise people felt saddened, yes. They knew it was a tragic situation, but they didn’t waste time with anger. Instead of spending precious hours and energy on anger, many of them set about doing

constructive things: setting up relief funds for victims, feeding the firemen and police who labored and sacrificed so much at Ground Zero, or providing counseling for folks who experienced the devastating loss of friends and relatives.

So the truth is that where emotional reactions are concerned we are, whether we realize it or not, making our own choices. And

once we decide to take responsibility for those choices and **respond** to problems, rather than **react** to them, we can gain control over ourselves.

This not only makes us nicer people to be with, but is incredibly personally freeing.

The next major reason we get angry: expectations. We generally feel that a person or thing “should” be a certain way. That’s expectation. And when we hold these expecta-

tations, then anything which goes against our mental concept of what is right, kind, proper, or whatever, becomes a reason for us to become angry. Now, you could say that in an ideal world things “should” be this way and that. Parents

“should” always adore their kids, husbands “should” be thoughtful of wives, wives “should” be faithful, but the reality is each of us has entered this world not only with his or

her own talents and gifts, but equally with his and her own limitations and biases. So practically speaking one can’t hold any expectations at all, because we never know what the other person is or is not capable of, or what circumstances he or she will be caught in.

Let’s take a specific example—you catch your girlfriend cheating on you. In an ideal world people don’t cheat on other people they’ve made a commitment to. BUT...you’re

dealing with a human being who was acting understandably for her, in her context, as she saw it. She may have cheated because she is 1) lonely; 2) trying to make you jealous; 3) starved for male attention because her father neglected her when she was growing up. Whether one of

these reasons or some other reason was at play, it was your expectation of fidelity that made you so sad and angry when you found out she was behaving otherwise. And why did you expect fidelity? Because 1) that’s how you heard things “should” be (but only are in a perfect world); 2) because you didn’t know this woman very well and didn’t realize that screwing around was a tendency of her nature;

or 3) some other reason.

You may ask: “Does that mean it was okay for her to act that way?” No, but it was understandable given her character. You may then ask, “If I don’t react in an-

ger, what am I suppose to do—just take her crap?” No, but you can handle this situation without wasting precious energy on anger. You could just say to her, “you have disappointed me deeply. I thought you were committed to me

Dan, formerly incarcerated, Hillsborough, NC

When I look back at the very angry person that I was when I first started my Dharma practice, I remember my teacher being patient with me. She told us to begin our practice with having compassion with those closest to us (family, friends, etc.) and expanding that outwards to all beings. I scoffed: “But Venerable, why is it that those closest to us are the ones who seem to push our buttons so easily?!” She kindly responded: **“Well maybe if our buttons were not so big, people would not be bumping into them so often!!”**

Waylon, inmate in Spanish Fork, UT

When I first came to jail I had a lot of hate bottled up inside of me. I have read all four of the books by Bo, and I have to say “wow.” I realized that the power my anger has is only what I fuel it with. I have learned to **forgive the ones who have harmed me and forgive myself** for the harm I caused. In doing these things my anger has almost died, and I feel more whole than I have ever felt in my life.

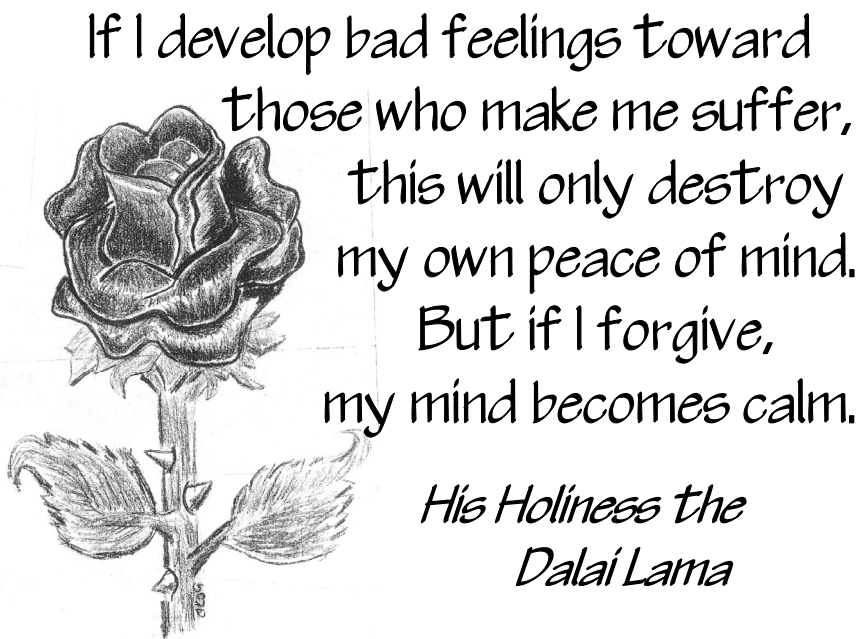
Tall Tom, formerly incarcerated, Houston, TX

I have learned that my feelings are not instructions. I do not need to act on what I am feeling. ALL feelings are transitory. “This too shall pass.” I used to believe that there was such a thing as justifiable anger, but today I know that **anger keeps me separated** from my more loving and compassionate self. Prayer, meditation, and talking to a spiritual friend are ways of accessing a less fearful and angry spot on the planet. When I get angry now I can usually not open my mouth or raise my hands. That old counting to 10 is still a good method.

exclusively, but I see you're not. Since fidelity is very important to me—an essential on my checklist—it's best that we part." Then, my friend, though you may feel very hurt, and understandably so, you don't get yourself into a heap of trouble through anger. Instead you're free to move forward and knowing infidelity is unacceptable to you, seek someone else who treasures loyalty as much as you do. On the other hand, if you have children with a partner who makes this mistake, do the best you can to heal and trust her again, since that will be best for your children.

In many cases there is a probability that things will go a certain way, but never a dead certainty. This is where you're in for a lot of work, because it's human nature to hold big expectations within ourselves. So to break the grip expectation has on you, you have to work with your own mind every day, over and over, checking to see that you're not secretly harboring expectations over things that may or may not turn out as you anticipate.

One of the important points is not to be angry at yourself over your own anger. The problem of anger is only compounded when we say to ourselves, "I shouldn't feel this way." Like Hell we shouldn't! It's normal to feel anger, but the crucial thing is to not act on it. And once you've learned to calm your mind and reason things out during practice, it'll begin to carry over into difficult situations. Our habits are strong, but it can be done.



If I develop bad feelings toward
those who make me suffer,
this will only destroy
my own peace of mind.
But if I forgive,
my mind becomes calm.

*His Holiness the
Dalai Lama*

Rick, inmate in Florida

I'm still battling anger and the depression associated with it. It's an ongoing battle, sometimes I'm on top, sometimes the bottom, sometimes just hanging on. I really don't think it ever goes away. I believe it's so entrenched that it's a part of me, like a finger or a foot—something I have to deal with daily. I liken it to an illness—something along those lines. It can't be cured but with persistence and care it can be managed. **The management starts before I get out of bed** [Rick uses the practice on page 5] and continues throughout the day with intervals of relaxing meditation until bedtime when once again I repeat my affirmation against anger. There are others here who are working with me on this and we talk mostly at the end of the day, discussing events of our day, trying to examine how we would handle these different situations. Listening to others' ideas and opinions are helpful. My biggest reason currently for anger is the helplessness I feel fighting my legal battles. The lawyer that took all my money never looked at the evidence that proves my innocence. So here I am after 4 years still trying to find a way to clear myself. I'm angry at everything. It's something I'm aware of daily and have to control. I've seen the results of those who can't keep their anger in check. So even though it's very difficult I'm doing the best I can. Thanks for caring.

Robert, formerly incarcerated, Naples, FL

After many long years of meditation and work on myself, I am aware when anger flares up and **I can catch myself before anything bad happens.**

Lee, inmate in Cross City, FL

The article on anger in your spring newsletter was really very good and very familiar too. I never really knew I was angry. I had to come to prison three times to figure this out. Am I angry at my parents, who were both raging alcoholics? Am I angry at my wife, who now wants nothing to do with me because I was never there for her? Am I angry at myself for not staying out of prison—again, for the third time? Until I started to meditate daily I let these resentments eat at me day in and day out. **Now I find myself kinda happy.** Since I started meditating I've decided to take my life back. Since I've been meditating, I have been finding out just who I am. Lee, the loving, caring, spiritual, outgoing person who made a few mistakes. Before, I was mean, angry, selfish, didn't-give-a-fuck-about-no-one Lee.

The main reason that we have been able to enjoy our life is because we individually made the decision that healing was more important than revenge.

Peter and Sunny, now happily married. Before they met, each of them spent many years on death row for crimes they did not commit.



PRACTICE: A Few Seconds a Day

By Bo Lozoff

Here's an almost effortless practice that will definitely change your life for the better if you are willing to commit just ten to twenty seconds a day to it.

The moment we realize we are awake – I don't mean after getting up and going to the bathroom, or after lying there thinking of all sorts of things; I mean the *first moment* we realize "I'm awake" – the brain is in a very raw and open state and can imprint things very deeply. So in those first few seconds of "awakeness" every day, say a prayer or state an intention that reflects your spiritual path. Something like, "Lord, may I be more compassionate today than I was yesterday—may I be more forgiving."

It takes fewer than five seconds to say the thought above. And then you lay there for another ten seconds or so to let it sink in. The brain very powerfully imprints this thought as your *first identity* of every day. All through the day it will come back to you and challenge you and remind you of your spiritual intentions. Before you are busy being a man or woman, convict or citizen, young or old... you have imprinted a profound spiritual thought into your brain. Believe me, it will make a difference in your life.

And it only takes a few seconds. There is no one, anywhere, who does not have the time to do this practice. Every one of us wakes up every day and stays in bed a few seconds as we realize we are awake. It doesn't take long to train ourselves to do this practice; it'll come automatically after the first week or two. The only requirement on our part is to *commit to doing this every day*. That's how the brain will imprint these intentions and prayers the most deeply.

The prayer or intention should be simple, fewer than 20-25 words, something a child can understand. And it should be *the same words* every day for at least a few months at a time in order for the brain to imprint it deeply. Don't lie in bed and start thinking of what to say; that gets the mind too involved and active. Choose the words in advance and stick with the same ones for a few months or longer, until you are guided to change or alter them.

You can also end your day with the same sort of practice: Lying on your pillow waiting to go to sleep, you just check out the same way you checked in: "Lord, may I be more compassionate tomorrow than I was today; may I be more forgiving." [If you're working on anger management, you could use these words: "If I feel angry today, may I control my response and act kindly.]"

And although it is simple and almost effortless, beginning and ending each day, seven days a week, can change your life. Give it a try!



Richard, inmate in Maury, NC

My friends claim that I'm the angriest Buddhist in the world, so this is a great topic for me. The first step for me is accepting that the outside world is not the problem—my own selfish delusions about how life should be and how others should act is the cause of my anger. Admitting my own faults is the hardest for me. On particularly bad days, strenuous exercise helps: running a couple extra miles, pushing crazy amounts of weight, or holding a yoga asana for a little longer. I also try to **focus on helping others**. I know being of service to the next man is the best thing for any ailment—those 12 step programs are 100% right about recovery coming with service. We're all prone to bad moments and I spent too many years as an addict with my lonely companion being rage. I'm far from perfect and I struggle every day, but I'm living. For what it's worth, I wake up thankful to have one more day to do some good.

Arjun was a full-time volunteer with Human Kindness Foundation from 1998 to 2001, after spending 23 years in prison. He died of leukemia 5 years ago. This originally appeared in Yoga Journal in 2002:

The wreckage from Arjun Nicastro's fury couldn't be so easily fixed, but that made his turnaround all the more remarkable. Imprisoned at age 17, he escaped and, while out, shot and killed a man during a drug theft gone awry. Back in prison, this time with a life sentence, he tried to escape again. He was caught once more and sent to solitary confinement for more than a year. But the man who walked out was different from the one who had been locked in. Anguished about a future that seemed as limited as his six-by-eight foot cell, Arjun was floored one day by the realization that his predicament **was entirely self-created**. For the first time, he felt the weight of the suffering his behavior had caused others—his parents, those he had robbed, the family and friends of the man he had killed. He also realized that if he had ruined his life, he had the power to fix it. He started the repair job on the spot, by committing to stop reacting thoughtlessly to his anger....

Arjun began practicing Lozoff's teachings daily. His new spirituality turned an incorrigible hothead into a model inmate. ... Anger, he says, "is not what I want to put out in the world. There's enough already. I don't need to be adding to it."

Thanks to the artists who provided the flower drawings for this newsletter:
 Daniel Williams, Corcoran, CA (pg. 1);
 Dustin O'Dell, Newtown, CT (pg. 2);
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 Robert Wamsley, Live Oak, FL (pg. 5);
 Brian Johnson, Holden, WV (pg. 6);
 Leon McCord Jackson III, Abilene, TX (back cover).

LETTERS

Dear Sita,
 I'm sorry, Sita, but I started hating these people here with all my heart. It's not fair how they treat us here. I know you've heard all that before, but honest to God, they treat us like shit. Not only do I have to pay to send some of your books back, but I had the right form enclosed as they asked. I could say more about the treatment here, but I don't know if you want to hear me, and I think you already get why I'm so pissed.
 J

Dear J,
 Your books are on the way again, and we think they'll get through this time, but there were some things in your letter that I want to talk to you about.
 I truly understand why you hate the people

who won't let you have our books. I'm sure that most people hearing your reasons for this hatred would agree. However, my dear friend, could this be the time for you to put your faith and trust in people who have made the spiritual leap and start using the practices they teach? Dearest, you'll always have a perfectly justifiable reason to keep hating. The more justifiable the anger feels, the more you need to focus and practice. Years ago I got a letter from a guy inside whose leg was shot off—literally amputated—by a guard who hated him. Of course, no one would blame him if he were angry and bitter. But after years of this attitude, he realized that his anger and bitterness were ruining his life, and he asked us what he could do to start letting them go so he could have some peace of mind.

Letting go of my own anger and hatred has literally changed my life. At one point, I had to make a decision to trust an elder who said that the time to let go of my anger is now. So, dearheart, reflect on this. There are many practices in our books to guide you in this direction, but you have to make your decision or else you'll always think that you have a justifiable reason to hang on to hatred. I hope this is the time for you. Work very hard at this, dear, and you'll begin to feel some peace.
 Love and blessings, Sita



Dear HKF,
 I'm at a loss for words. For the first time ever, I have cried from just reading several pages of your book, *Just Another Spiritual*

Book. I have never felt anything like this before. I just couldn't stop crying. I am lost, scared and very lonely. I have been locked up for the past 2 ½ years, and I'm less than 4 months to getting out of here. I have charges pending from another county, so as of right now, my life is in limbo. As most inmates that I have met, I have lost my faith in anything at all, but I know God is there for me. I have also lost my wife because of me being in here. I have done time before but never with a wife and 2 kids.

I have read letters from other inmates and it seems like a lot of us have the same thing in common—a hatred for our wives. I wouldn't do anything to hurt our kids, but I'm scared of what I could do to my wife. I have been dealing with these thoughts for over a year, and all of that pain and hatred is still there in my heart. I have recently started writing my wife again because of several good conversations we have had over the phone. Well, as always I get some kind of false hope that we can work our marriage out and make it last. Wrong again. I want to know how I can get over this hurdle in life. I have no one to talk to about my problem—at least no one that gives me any good advice that is.

Thanks for your love and understanding of the inmates of the world. Please keep me in your prayers.

K

Dear K,

I'm so sorry about how much pain you're in. We are concerned about you and your family, so please take this letter seriously. It's wonderful that you let Bo's words move you so deeply. We're really glad you found the book, and that you have already made such good use of it.

I am concerned about your fear of what you could do to your wife, and about your hatred of her. You say you would never do anything to hurt your children, so start with this very important fact: if you hurt their mother, you will be hurting your children very badly. It's not two separate things. Even if you get away with it, even if no one ever knows who hurt her, hurting your wife IS hurting your children.

Now here's how to take this seriously: do not go anywhere near your wife until you are sure that you are ready to stay calm, sober, drug-free, and peaceful. Ask a friend

or social worker to help you visit your children without being in direct contact with your wife. Do not carry a weapon of any kind. Being around her before you've handled your hatred is like playing with a loaded gun. Don't do it.

Work on yourself, using Bo's books, anger management classes, 12 Step programs, or any other tools you can find. Work hard, and practice daily. Learn some strong tools to use when you get angry. Until you've had a lot of practice and at least a month of clean/sober time, do not be around your wife. After that, keep up your practice, and if you begin to get angry, get yourself out of the situation before your anger gets strong. No matter what the disagreement or situation, it is far better to walk away than to stay and put yourself and your family in danger. Think about how many people we've heard from *after* they went through situations like this, with tragic results. We know that awful things can happen to good people, and we don't want that to happen to you.

We wish you all the best, Catherine



Dear Gabe,

I've caused so much pain. I try so hard to live for today, in the moment, but I can't shake the past. The more I try to leave it in the past, it just comes a million times worst. Is it because I'm trying to avoid it with meditation instead of dealing with it? It feels like the more I try to meditate or do something good to get over the pain, it just overpowers it. It's only been eight months so maybe I just need to let it all sink in instead of moving on so fast. I'm not saying I'm giving up, because I know if I do, I will be in a world of pain. In your nineteen years, you said you spent ten years feeling sorry for yourself. Is that how long it took you to start healing? I read Bo's books every day, and they do inspire hope and faith, but everyone's journey is not the same. Also the crime I'm being charged with is the worst possible crime anyone could commit!! I'm sure you agree. Well Gabe, that's it for me.

Peace and love, M

Dear M,

So glad you wrote us back--you should be receiving *Lineage* pretty soon. Like all of

Bo's books, I encourage you to do more than just read the words. Take them to heart and DO something about the connection you feel when you read them.

First, I want to say that eight months is not a very long time--the real changes you're longing for may take a lifetime to work on. This is your journey, friend, and in or out of prison, with support of family and friends or alone, it's really up to you what you do with your struggles. There's a difference in finding a peace in all this mess, than just trying to move on and get over the pain.

You're not supposed to get over it. That shouldn't be your goal. With the hurt that guys like us have caused others, the only way we're ever going to sleep at night without crying ourselves to sleep and hating ourselves, is to live our lives trying any way we can to give back. The healing isn't just for you. Just as I owe the people I've hurt for what I've done, I believe you do as well. Even if they never see you again and hate you, you still got to do your part.

You asked about my 10 years of feeling sorry for myself, and looking back on it, at that time I didn't realize I had a choice to do something about all my wrongs. I felt like what's the use because I still killed someone and I was still in prison and the world still hated me. Then I found Bo's teachings and all things were made new again--I discovered there was hope after all. You've got Bo's books now, so you don't have to take as long as I did. I really pray you don't spend 10 years waiting around. All of our crimes and stories are different, but the process is still the same, the feelings and pain is the same, so don't get caught up in thinking you're different because of your charge. You're not. This is still an opportunity for you to make a better life and I hope you take it.

You got your work cut out for you, M. But as someone who still fights the fight you're fighting, I know it's worth the effort.

Keep working with Bo's books, I promise you will find all the help you need. Meditation was a big key for me and helped me slow down enough to see all this with a bigger view, so keep at it. See for yourself. If a sucker like me can turn things around, I know you can as well.

Peace and blessings, Gabe



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We send over 300 free book packages each week to inmates who request them. www.humankindness.org

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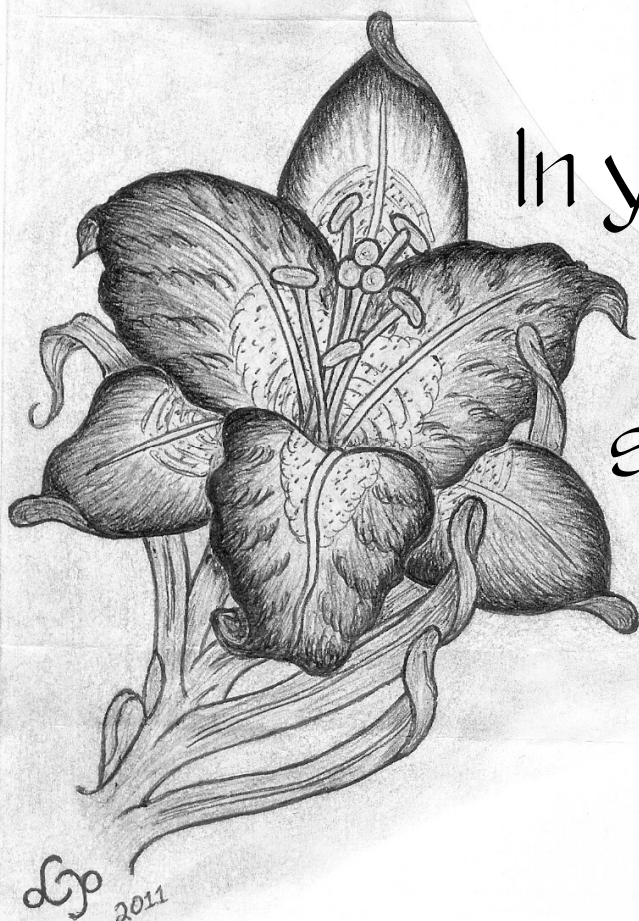
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In your anger
do not sin...
search your heart
and be silent.
Psalms 4:4