



A Sacred Space

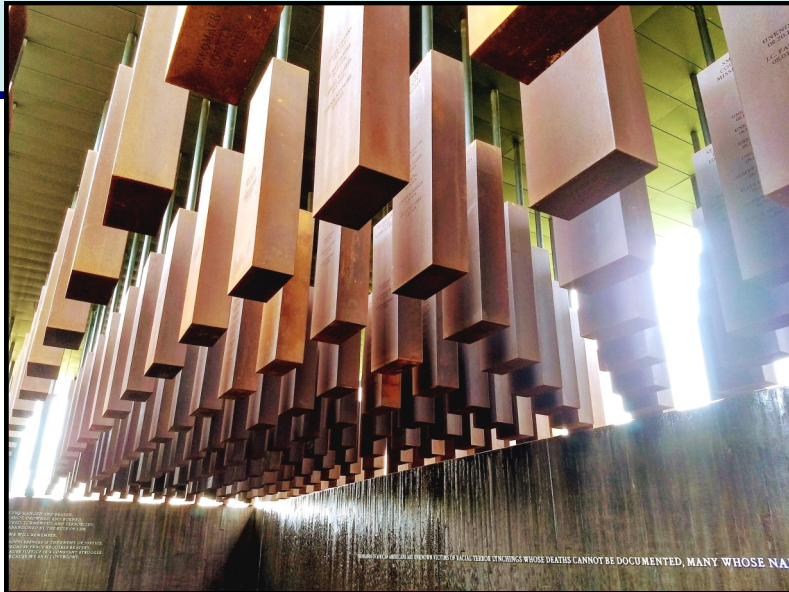
Sita and I went to Montgomery, Alabama, to experience the work of **Equal Justice Initiative**, founded by **Bryan Stevenson** (pictured below). We are grateful for the courage of Bryan Stevenson and the multi-talented people he works with at Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). At EJI's National Memorial for Peace and Justice, steel monuments hang representing each county in the U.S. where a racial-terror lynching has been documented. The names of the victims are engraved on the monuments to honor and remember the people who lost their lives.

From the EJI website: "On a six-acre site atop a rise overlooking Montgomery, the national lynching memorial is a sacred space for truth-telling and reflection about racial terror in America and its legacy."

Why spend time on something this painful? From Bryan Stevenson: "*Intuitively we all like to seek the things that are comfortable rather than uncomfortable. But ... if I want to create justice, then I have to get comfortable with struggle.*" Maya Angelou said "*History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.*"

Spiritual work requires facing the truth. It takes courage to sit in meditation and face our personal truths. It takes courage to face our national truths too. It's hard work that can make healing possible.

—Catherine



There is a strength, a power even, in understanding brokenness, because embracing our brokenness creates a need and desire for mercy, and perhaps a corresponding need to show mercy. When you experience mercy, you learn things that are hard to learn otherwise. You see things you can't otherwise see; you hear things you can't otherwise hear. You begin to recognize the humanity that resides in each of us.
—Bryan Stevenson



From an inscription on the National Memorial for Peace and Justice:

We will remember.
With hope because hopelessness is the enemy of justice.
With courage because peace requires bravery.
With persistence because justice is a constant struggle.
With faith because we shall overcome.



Mary Brown-Bey was given a life sentence at age 15, and did 32 years in prison. She has dedicated her life to faith and service, and she glows with loving energy. Sita and Catherine enjoyed meeting Mary in Montgomery, along with many other committed volunteers at the annual meeting of CURE National. The meeting was held just a few miles from EJI and included visits to the National Memorial and to EJI's Legacy Museum.

“God puts you where He wants you. My life is about service.”

—Mary Brown-Bey

Mary has a remarkable ability to hold big truth. She is a person of faith who is deeply at peace with life and her own painful past experiences. She is an activist, working tirelessly to educate herself and others about policy and the law, and lobbying for justice. There doesn't seem to be any conflict between these for Mary: She is at peace with what is. She works for change.

As a child growing up in Christian churches, Mary studied the words of Jesus, and she still reflects on what God wants for her and from her. Mary quotes John 14:12: “the one who believes in me will also do what I'm doing.” Jesus inspires her to work for justice for all people while living a deeply spiritual life.



Mary says she found the religion of her ancestors when she began practicing Islam while continuing to study and honor the Bible and other religions. “I'm a reader, I need to see what the Bible says. I've gotta go deeper, do my own research, not just listen to somebody else's opinion.”

Mary's years of study and practice are tangible in her presence. She talks quickly and knowledgeably about faith, scripture, justice, law, and love. It is easy to feel her loving energy and enjoy her beautiful smile.



Mary Brown-Bey, Sita Lozoff, and Abd'Allah Lateef at the annual meeting of CURE National. Mr. Lateef was sentenced to Life Without Parole as a juvenile—a sentence that was later overturned. He now works in Pennsylvania as a coordinator for the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth.

Catherine at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.



Love from Sita

Beloved friends,

I've struggled with featuring the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in this newsletter, even though it is a powerfully beautiful and important place. Our newsletter is called "A Little Good News," and I know that many of you are hopeful when it arrives in the mail, that you'll be feeling more love and inspiration after reading it. I have been over the words many times wondering if that could be true with a newsletter that looks at the extremely painful subject of racial injustice. After prayer and reflection, I recognize that I want to make you feel good, yet I know that love and inspiration aren't only about feeling good.

Our Bo gave a sermon at a church in Raleigh, NC in 2007 that I feel might be helpful as we reflect on painful issues. We hope these excerpted words from that sermon will be helpful to you in any life circumstance:

"I'm going to have faith in my life. I'm going to dispense with insecurity. I'm going to have good days and bad days, periods of prosperity and periods of adversity, because that's what it means to be a full human being on this Earth. There are going to be things that come into my life that suck, but then there's that still-point, that rock-like force from God's world that never sucks even in a 24-hour-a-day solitary confinement cell for a crime I did not commit. Sometimes life gets weird but I'm going to trust 'Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil,' because I'm a person of faith." It becomes one of our spiritual opportunities to say, "Do I really mean it? It's my choice: am I actually going to be a person of faith?" We all have this choice we can make. There's some mysterious thing going on in this wonderful universe, where there's God and the ego and a couple of very simple guidelines that every religion agrees on. It has something to do with love. It has something to do with me being a little less selfish every day so this greater force in me can grow and blossom. It doesn't grow and blossom by convincing myself that I'm never going to be sick or harmed. It grows and blossoms from convincing myself God is always with me, and life is not random or chaotic or meaningless. Of course I'm going to have illness and harm and loss. I'm going to go about living in a positive way, but bad things and good things are both going to come, enjoyable things and suffering are going to come, and I'm okay, because I'm in this world but I'm not of this world. I'm of something that we reach in stillness, that frees us from feeling small without tempting us to feel big. Something that frees my mind and heart to wake up every morning and walk through the day, in a way, as a child. "I'm not on top of this game, but I have a chance today to see clearly and to move in truth. Hallelujah, got one more day to try, another day to give it a good go." ...

Religion is not neutral or amoral, religion is always on

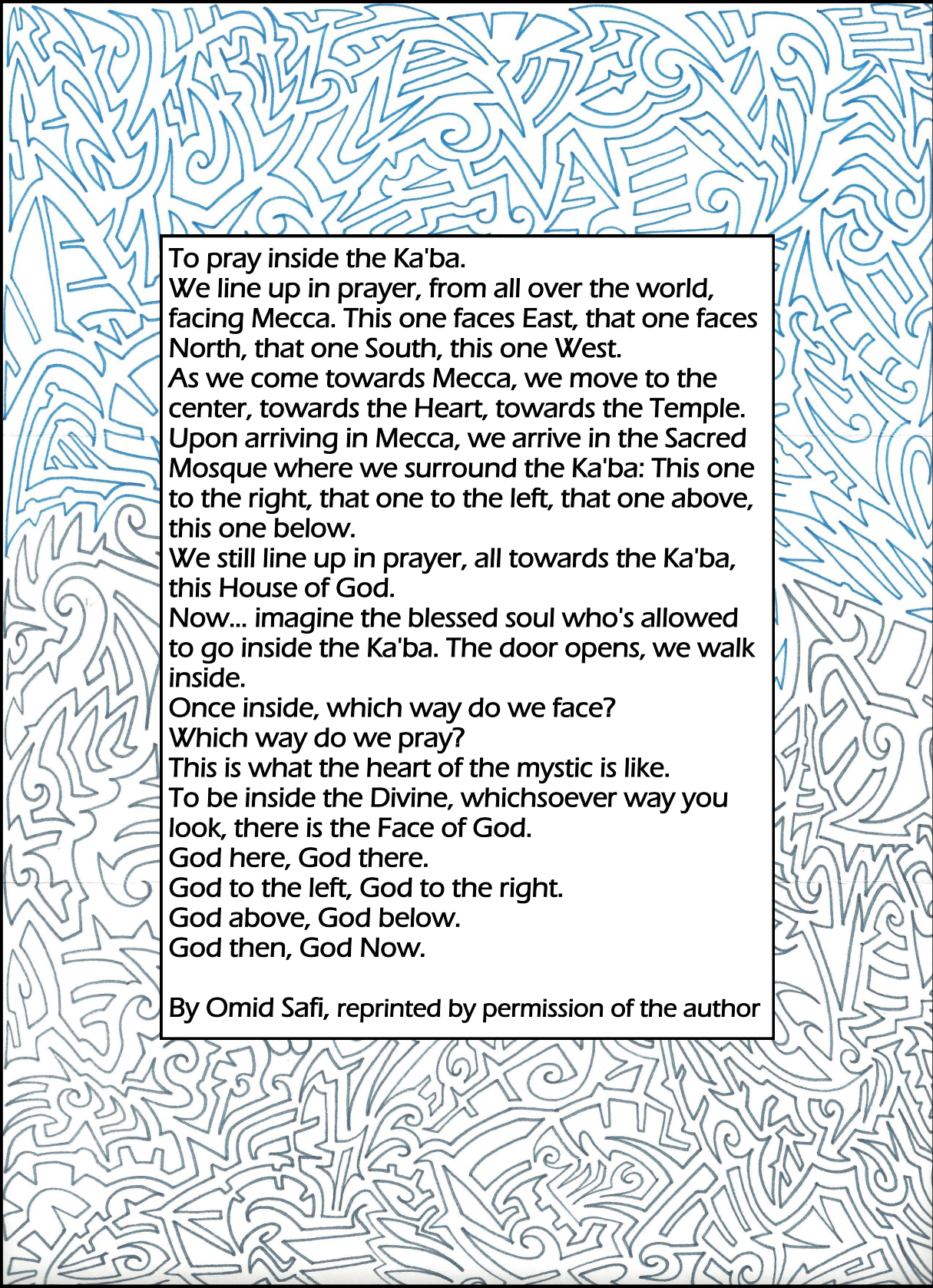


the side of the good and loving. You and I are supposed to be in the world. We're not supposed to hide from the ugliness. We're supposed to be right there feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and sheltering the homeless and visiting the prisoner, but that isn't the world that we are of, it's just the world that we do the work in. Every time we wake up we're clocking in, we go to work. But we live in a place that is above, beyond, within and around all of that. It is always still and always perfect and this is really the heart of religion, is how to gradually—you and me in a daily, practical way—touch our stillness and navigate our way. God Bless You. —Bo

Bo used to say that after a profound retreat or mystical experience, we should pray that things DON'T get back to normal. The purpose of the retreat was to change! Catherine and I pray that our visit to EJI, which felt as profound as a retreat or pilgrimage, will continue to deepen in us. We pray that the work of EJI and Bryan Stevenson will have more and more impact on hearts and minds throughout our country. We pray that things don't get back to normal, but move more toward justice and reconciliation every day.

—Love, Sita





To pray inside the Ka'ba.
We line up in prayer, from all over the world,
facing Mecca. This one faces East, that one faces
North, that one South, this one West.
As we come towards Mecca, we move to the
center, towards the Heart, towards the Temple.
Upon arriving in Mecca, we arrive in the Sacred
Mosque where we surround the Ka'ba: This one
to the right, that one to the left, that one above,
this one below.
We still line up in prayer, all towards the Ka'ba,
this House of God.
Now... imagine the blessed soul who's allowed
to go inside the Ka'ba. The door opens, we walk
inside.
Once inside, which way do we face?
Which way do we pray?
This is what the heart of the mystic is like.
To be inside the Divine, whichever way you
look, there is the Face of God.
God here, God there.
God to the left, God to the right.
God above, God below.
God then, God Now.

By Omid Safi, reprinted by permission of the author

Our thanks to the artists: Montgomery photos by Beth & Catherine; Bryan Stevenson photo by permission of Equal Justice Initiative; pg 3: Robert Tidwell, Austin, TX; pg 4: Scott Hanson, Ridgeville, SC; pg 6: John Sanger, Hominy, OK; pg 7: Jason Bruni, Graceville, FL; pg 8: Creative Commons License, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toni_Morrison_2008.jpg and Ben LaSala, Delmont, NJ.



Being Love...

Beloved family,

Many of you may remember from our books and newsletters that Ram Dass, Bo, and I began this project in 1973 when Ram Dass began sending his famous book, *Be Here Now*, into prison libraries across the country. We invited him to speak at Duke University in Durham, NC, and during that visit we offered to happily and lovingly answer the mail that he was starting to receive from people in prison. Bo and I had a brother-in-law who was in federal prison for smuggling marijuana, and we visited him the summer before we met Ram Dass. That was our first experience being inside a prison, and we felt a

pull at that time to do something further, so we were "ripe" for that auspicious meeting with Ram Dass.

Through these many years, Ram Dass has been so supportive and loving to this project. In my deepest heart, I know how much he truly loves all of you.

Ram Dass had a massive stroke twenty years ago, and even though he recovered in so many ways, as the years go by, he has become weaker and less able to speak.

This last week (July 2019), I had the immense good fortune to be in his sweet and loving presence again.

Although he uses very few words at this point, when I was with him gazing into his luminous eyes, he said to me: "Thank you for your work in prisons."

It's hard for me to get across how much those few words meant to me. I felt that I was receiving a transmission of his deep presence and love for us all, especially for those of us who are incarcerated. It made me cry and still touches me so deeply several days later as I write this to you. I know that our beloved Ram Dass sent his blessings to you in those words he shared with me.

I hope that you will take in his message of being love, being compassion, being kindness—the message that Ram Dass embodies and that is the very core of the Human Kindness Foundation.

—I love you, Sita



**The universe is an example of love. Like a tree.
Like the ocean. Like my body. Like my wheelchair.
I see the love. —Ram Dass**

Letters

[In May of 2019, *We're All Doing Time* was mentioned in the first episode of Van Jones's CNN show, *The Redemption Project*. Z heard that show and wrote the following letter.]

Hi Sita!

You guys recently sent me another copy of *We're All Doing Time*, but I was in a funk when I got it, and just set it on the table beside my bed. Things just seemed to keep getting worse that week. Solitary and 24/7 lockdown take its toll no matter who you are. I've never been as low as I was that night. I was through contemplating and 100% decided it was time to move on. I was deep in thought and working up the courage to take that final step. Sitting on the edge of my bed and staring at my table, I was looking at Bo's book without really seeing it—just kind of staring blankly off in my mind when suddenly the title words registered, because I had just heard them spoken. Some guy on CNN's show *The Redemption Project* had just said the title and author's name and the hope it gave him. Curiously, I picked it up, and when I opened the cover page a little paper fell out, and on it was printed, "Faith...No fear," and on the back were a few hand written words from you, Sita.

I'm not sure what the moral is, but personally I think everything happens just when it's supposed to. Just when you need it the most, something you had all along makes itself known and reinstates that flicker of hope that doesn't really fix anything, doesn't turn the world right side up, but instead allows us to make peace with everything that's broken because we know that we are loved. Sincerely, Z



in. So far every book you have sent is amazing. It always has me thinking in ways I never have before. I've been meditating every day and doing yoga. What a difference in my body and mind.

2) My second reason for writing is that since coming to prison three years ago it has been hard to just be away from my family. My ex-wife filed for divorce two months into my coming here and got a lawyer and basically got everything. I can't even make any decisions on my kids. The phone calls, visits, and mail have almost stopped. Also, my kids don't see any of my family. My ex-wife is very bitter about me going to prison.

Over the last 15 months, I've changed my way of life physically, mentally, and spiritually. In doing so I decided to tell the truth about stuff I've lied about. One being, I have two other children with another woman while I was married, and I want to tell my two kids with my ex-wife about them so they can grow up together as a family. My ex-wife says to wait till I get out in 10 years, but I think the kids will be mad about missing out knowing each other. She has said that if I do tell them, that I will have no contact with them till I'm released.

If you have any advice to give me, it would be wonderful. I've learned one thing for sure—it's a lot harder to tell the truth and do good then to tell a lie and do bad. Thank you, D

difference it makes in your body and mind. Congratulations! When you are taking care of yourself in those important ways, you are much better able to make important decisions skillfully, so I hope you will keep up your spiritual practices.

I don't have an opinion or any advice about what you should decide. I'm going to have to trust you to believe that and not convince yourself that I'm hinting one way or the other. I fully believe that this is your decision to make, D. You are their father. Be your best self and you'll be their best father.

Some points to consider:

1) You are important to your children, all of them, whether you have contact or not. Don't let yourself slip into believing that you don't matter to them.

2) Don't rush yourself. Give yourself time to reflect on your decision, and like I mentioned above, make the decision when you're at your best.

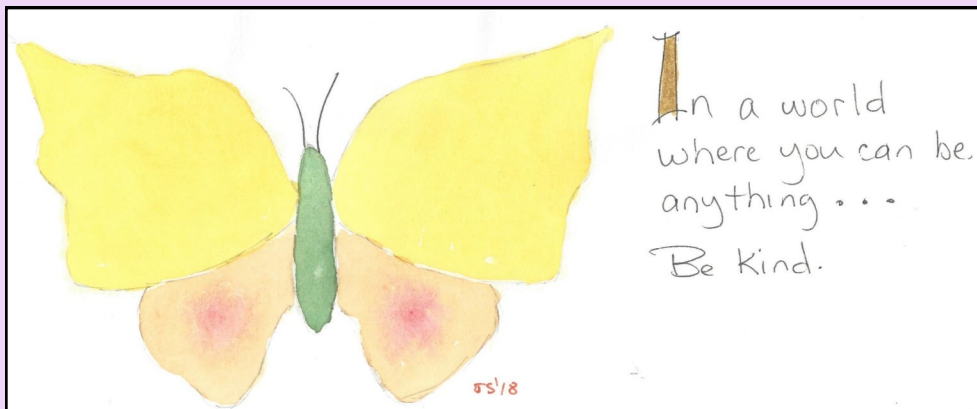
3) Imagine yourself someday in the future explaining your decision to your children. Will you be able to say truthfully that you made your decision because you felt it would be the best for them? Even if the consequences don't work out the way you hoped, will you know that you made your best decision for their benefit and not for any selfish purpose of your own?

Sita and I know that you're in a very difficult situation, D, and we care. If we had some way to see which choice is best for you and your children, we

would certainly share it with you. You are in our hearts and prayers as you do this hard work.

Your last sentence in your letter is "... it's a lot harder to tell the truth and do good than to tell a lie and do

bad." I wonder if what you've really been experiencing is that it's a lot harder to heal the consequences of a selfish act than you realized when you were younger. Now that you're focusing on



Dear HKF,
Hope all is well with everyone there. I just got the newsletter, and it is always a great read. I'm writing for two reasons. 1) I'm hoping you can send me *Deep & Simple* and *Finding God With-*

Dear D,
We're sending the books you requested. I'm so glad to hear that you've been meditating and doing yoga every day, and that you are noticing what a big

what's best for your children, you're stuck with some things you did in the past, and that certainly is hard. But you can start right where you are and choose to be the kind of man you want your children to have for a father. We're with you all the way on that journey. Peace and blessings, Catherine



Dear HKF, One of the things you guys constantly remind us to practice is radical acceptance and loving kindness. I'm writing to describe my current struggle with putting that into practice. I'm guilty of the crime that landed me in prison, and, sad to say, it was a terrible crime, one that created victims, and so, therefore, I'm being called upon to take responsibility—serving my time is one of the ways I am making amends. So, basically, I get why I'm here, and I accept it.

Many other inmates understand it too. They survey their lives, and they see a long list of betrayals, deceits, lying, cheating, stealing, violence and all the rest. They are sorting out their lives and are committed to change. Guys like this, I can get along with easily enough. We're on the same wavelength. As a result, they're likable to me.

But what about the guys who remain in deep denial over who they've become? The ones who still boast about their crime and will tell anyone who will listen that it's everybody else's fault but their own? These types of people—the ones who remain defiant, unrepentant and in denial...well, I just don't like them. I see them as whiners, unwilling to grow up, or worse, train wrecks waiting to happen.

I don't like these people, and I don't like what they say, how they act, what they believe, and yet, I know they too are human beings. They too are still hurting, afraid, in pain and suffering. Bo's letters to people like that are sometimes very direct, very clear: stop lying to yourself, cut out the bullshit, and get real. So I know Bo's approach to radical acceptance and loving kindness didn't mean telling people what they wanted to hear. The difference, though, is that even when he called someone on their



shit, he was doing so from a place of love and a desire to help someone be happy.

I'm not like that. First of all, I normally just keep my mouth shut and do my own time. But even when I do find myself drawn into a conversation, I say what I think, and usually my agenda is to shame the other person. I'm not speaking from a place of love. It's more just frustration that someone can so tenaciously cling to habits and mindsets that are clearly hurtful to self and others.

Anyway, I wanted to reach out to you and see what you think. How can I be more kind, more loving, not only towards those I deem worthy of it because they're making a good-faith effort to fix themselves as I feel I'm doing, but towards those who haven't yet quit rolling around in the pigsty. I wish I could be more like you and the other volunteers at HKF. I know that if I can have this breakthrough, I will enjoy more peace, and I will be a genuinely better person. I just don't know how to get from here to there.

With best regards, N

Dear N,
Thank you for your letter. Your question is a good one, and it's great that you realize the hypocrisy of trying to spread loving kindness while at the same time being in judgment about others who aren't there yet. It's quite common for us to hold other people accountable for our highest ideals—we expect that they should act and behave in the way that we expect them to based upon our high ideals for ourselves. But

if we look deeper at our own thinking, we can often see that we ourselves have been in that same "defiant" place, even if we no longer are.

When I first came into my spiritual search, I remember trying to convince everyone that I'd found "the way," but what I ended up doing was finding fault with my brothers and sisters and not really seeing them for who they were. So I then began using everyone as my personal spiritual practice. Whenever I fell into judgment—which was pretty much all the time!!—I asked myself

if I had ever done that, felt that, said that, thought that way? Have I ever bragged about something bad I've done? Then, I'd think back to my state of mind at the time—did I really know better? Was I really capable, in that moment, to do better? If we are being honest, the answer is surely no. We DO better when we ARE better, and that takes a serious minded spiritual inward journey.

If you are really on that path, and I suspect that you are because you say that you want to be a "genuinely better person," than this practice will really propel you further and faster into your own journey, to continually clean your own house first. Once you find your own inner reflection clear, then you will be able to see others in their true inner truth, even when they can't. And when you are clear of the shackles that bind you, you can truly be of service to others, in the same way Bo was. As you pointed out, Bo could be real and point out BS without ever judging the people for whom he felt called to help. We can't put the cart before the horse. For now, spend time with those who are trying to change, and make it part of your collective spiritual practices to learn to see past the superficial man-made mental shackles; have compassion for the seeming lack of enlightenment, just as you have for your own, and work on setting your own self free first. Then questions of "how to" will fall away, and only love remains. Love, Donna (HKF volunteer)



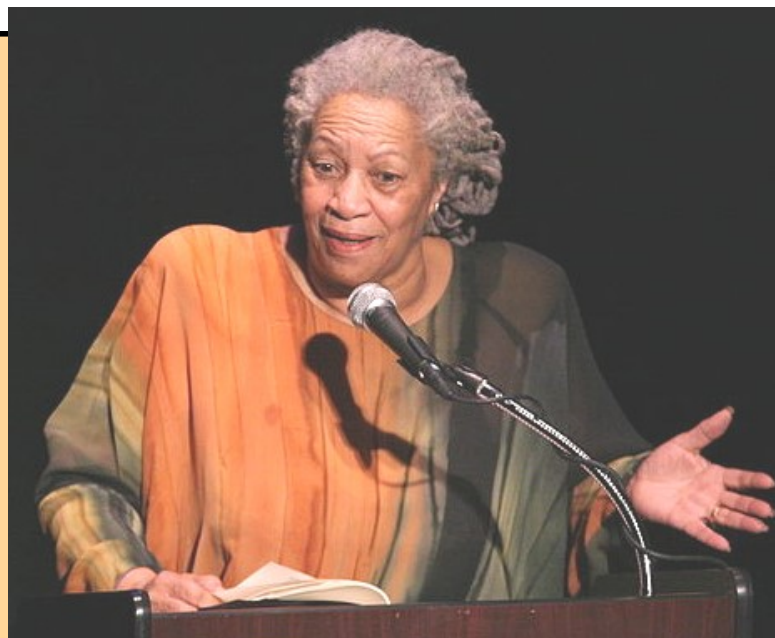


humankindness.org

PO Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715

Rest In Peace

Toni Morrison, the first African American woman author to be awarded the Nobel Prize, died on August 5, 2019, at the age of 88. *The Root* referred to Morrison as "one of America's greatest writers." Her novel, *Beloved*, became a movie starring Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover in 1998. She won a Pulitzer Prize, the American Book Award, and many other honors. President Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and The National Memorial for Peace and Justice prominently displays her words. Her first novel was published when she was 39 years old. Her given name was Chloe Ardelia Wofford.



"I know the world is bruised and bleeding, and though it is important not to ignore its pain, it is also critical to refuse to succumb to its malevolence." —Toni Morrison

