



December 2021

It's Time



My dear friends, Following these few words from me, you'll read a message from Catherine letting you know that she is retiring from Human Kindness Foundation. Dear ones, every now and then we get a letter addressed to Catherine Lozoff. That doesn't even seem strange to me (even though that's not her name), because for the last two decades Catherine has been as much a part of our HKF family as me and Bo. I'll let Catherine tell you the rest.

To my very dear friend Catherine, blessings to you. I hope that wherever your great adventure takes you next, you are as loved and appreciated as you are here. "Thank you" falls short of

what my heart truly wants to say to you, but it'll have to do, so thanks from each individual you've touched with your generous heart, but mostly mine. I love you, Sita



Sita, Bo and Catherine, 21 years ago

"It's time." This phrase seemed to be shouting at me.

"But this is not just a job, it's family! I can't imagine my life without it!" These doubts were also shouting at me. Even in so-called *silent* meditation, my thoughts were a noisy mess.

"Faith, No Fear" is not an empty slogan around Human Kindness Foundation. So I gathered up my courage and told Sita and HKF's Board of Directors that it's time for me to step down from my role as Executive Director.

"Faith, No Fear" doesn't mean you never feel some fear. It means you don't let fear control your actions. After 21 years of HKF being at the center of my life, I feel some fear about this transition. I will miss hearing from you, our dear friends all over the



country (and some in other countries). You are a beautiful, loving, striving, inspiring network of souls and I have loved working with you.

Bo Lozoff was always excited by big changes. I can almost hear him saying:

"You don't know what it will be like? How wonderful!" Nine years after his death, I feel that I have Bo's blessing for this change. In the 25 years I knew him, he encouraged me to expand my comfort zone and challenge my fears in many ways. It wasn't always easy, but working with Bo was a grand adventure. I feel certain he would say "take the leap!"

It has been my honor and my privilege to work with Human Kindness Foundation. I won't be leaving the family. Sita and I have been friends since well before I began working with HKF, and we will be friends to the end. I hope to continue with one meditation group in a nearby prison when the Covid situation makes that possible again. You, my friends on the spiritual journey, my HKF family, will always be in my heart.

I will be stepping back fully from the operations of HKF by the end of 2021. Please give your full support to the new Executive Director, Erin Parish, who you will hear from in the next newsletter. She will do some things differently—isn't that the point of change? You can trust that any changes will be in service of the unchanging mission of HKF.

HKF is strong. Sita is here with her whole heart. Our Board of Directors is seven wise, deep, compassionate people. You can read more about several members of the HKF family throughout this newsletter. Stay tuned for wonderful years to come!

With so much gratitude and love, Catherine

New Board Member Joins HKF

Jaki Shelton Green is the first African American and third woman to be appointed as the North Carolina Poet Laureate, beginning in 2018. A North Carolina native, she has written eight books of poetry and a play, co-edited two anthologies of poetry, and has been published in over 80 national and international anthologies. She was inducted into the state's Literary Hall of Fame in 2014. The following introduction was written by another HKF Board Member, Gina DeVine.

HKF is so fortunate to welcome Jaki Shelton Green as our most recent addition to the Board of Directors! Jaki brings to HKF her magnificent marriage of experience and talent.

Our first visit was sheer delight. We sat and sipped coffee and chatted about so many things in her life and in mine. I came away feeling like I had a new treasured friend.

Then it came time to write this introduction for you, Dear Reader, and I realized that for as much as we'd had a lovely visit, and as easy as it is to find lots of articles about Jaki on the internet – how many of us can say we're included in Wikipedia!?!? – that information was not going to be enough.

You—and Jaki!—are much too unique for a few paragraphs of mundane facts.

When Governor Cooper appointed her as Poet Laureate in 2018 he stated that “Jaki Shelton Green brings a deep appreciation of our state's diverse communities to her role as an ambassador of North Carolina literature. Jaki's appointment is a wonderful new chapter in North Carolina's rich literary history.”

What an appropriate commentary by the Governor about his excellent choice of Poet Laureate! But anyone who has been following Jaki's poetry might wonder if the Governor appreciated the true extent of the gift that he had made to the folks of our state in selecting Jaki for this honored appointment.

Yes, it's easy to think of Poetry as literature, and writing and presenting the Poet Laureate's work to be the main purpose of the position. People typically assume that literary art is a nice pastime for those who have the luxury and time to spend on it. But Jaki brings so much more to poetry than melodic literature.

Here's the thing: Jaki Shelton



Photo by
Sandra Davidson

**This is one of those times where I feel like
I need to give myself permission
to stand still,
looking from one side to the other,
up and down,
looking at my neighbors,
And I mean that in a very global sense,
experiencing what people are going
through,
asking myself,
is there a place for me
to be a kindred support to them right now?
I'm asking myself,
what does it mean to be human
inside of this season
where we are all facing
tremendous trepidations?**

Jaki Shelton Green

Green is not just a literary artist, she *is* an advocate and activist. Jaki uses her medium to teach, and to learn, and as a way of holding conversation about critical issues of the day. Jaki shows us that writing poetry is an opportunity to serve *truth*, to express grief, protest injustice, share gratitude, feel compassion and experience the power of vulnerability. Every piece of Jaki's poetry is a richly crafted message from the very depth of her soul

to the heart of the reader. Jaki's experience includes leadership roles in other non-profit organizations and offering writing workshops in prisons and jails. One of her writing exercises featured this basic statement: ***What we keep, keeps us.*** The assignment, then, was to write a letter to yourself about what's keeping you? Regret? Lost love? Unfinished business? An actual physical 'thing' that we're holding on to? It's easy to imagine that such an exercise could unlock truth and freedom in the soul of the writer, as well as the reader.

Listening to Jaki describe her workshops inspired me to look inside my own heart for 'what keeps me.' Perhaps you, Dear Reader, might take a moment to do the same thing.

At the end of our delightful sharing over coffee, I came away with even more enthusiasm for the wonderful addition we have in our new Board member, Jaki Shelton Green. There's no doubt that her presence on our Board, her leadership experience, her brilliant success as Poet, and her all-around-inspired life will add immensely to the spirit of HKF and the work we do.



Long-Time Board Member Takes a Break

Chris Canfield courageously stepped up after Bo Lozoff's retirement and accepted the position of HKF's first board Chairperson. Navigating complex legalities and financial issues that all nonprofits have to manage, Chris never lost sight of HKF's unique mission. When his professional work with another nonprofit demanded nearly all of his time, his volunteer work with HKF somehow got done anyway.

We first met Chris when he was leading a weekly meditation group at a prison near the HKF office. He credits that group with helping him deepen his own decades-long meditation practice.

Chris wrote HKF's newest book, *9 Paths to Forgiveness*, about the Enneagram (you can request

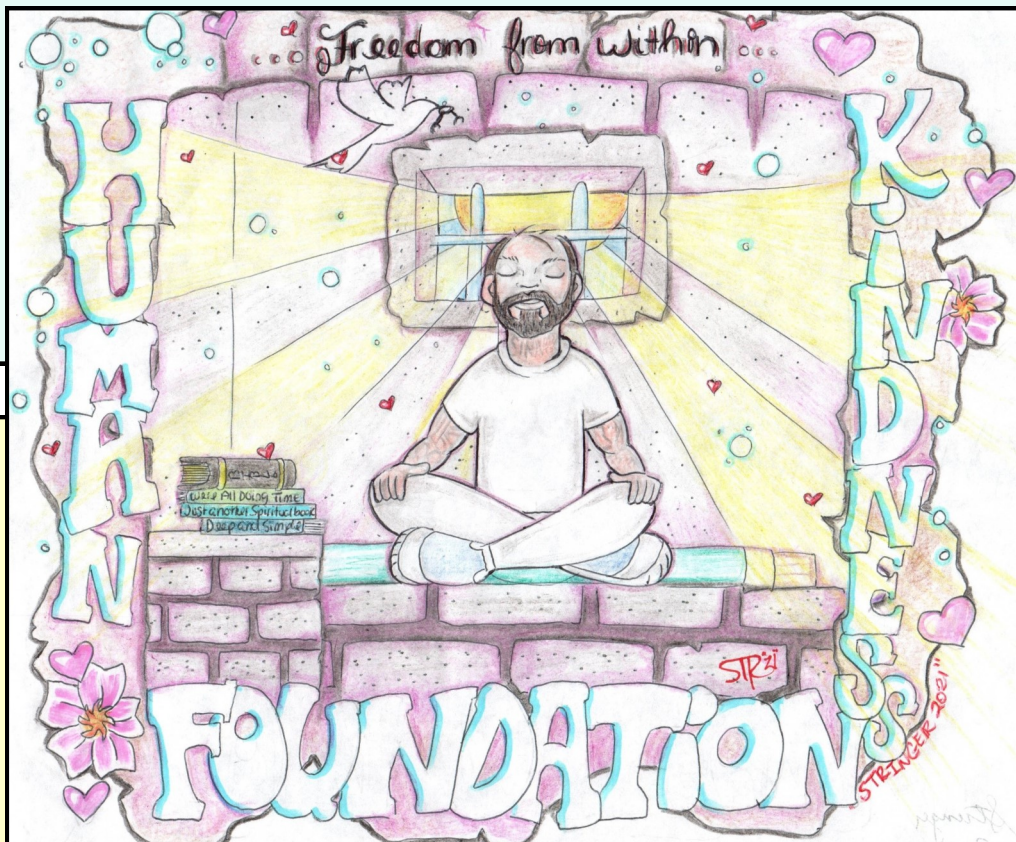
a copy by writing to HKF, PO Box 61619, Durham NC 27715).

Thank you, Chris, for countless volunteer hours in meetings, on phone calls, and doing paperwork. Thank you for doing all of that with full commitment to the values of Human Kindness Foundation. Your calm, compassionate strength is a powerful example of the potential benefits of meditation.



You will be missed, and we hope you come back soon!

[Board members are required to take breaks when their terms expire. We are grateful to welcome the Rev. Joe Hensley as our new Chairperson. Joe has written for this newsletter in the past and has served on our Board since 2014.]



Books—And Wisdom—Shared By A Former Board Member

K Paredes served on our Board of Directors from 2006 to 2011. She continues to be a cherished part of the HKF family. A new friend in Texas told us about getting a copy of We're All Doing Time from K, and added

this story of wisdom shared along with the book:

Five years ago I was living in a tent in someone's back yard while on the waiting list for a Veterans Assisted Housing voucher. This situation was less than ideal. I would get cranky and whiney and put it all in a box and hand it to K regrettably often.

You could justifiably expect anyone else to eventually get fed up with this and yell "SNAP OUT OF IT!!!" before slamming the phone down. Not so, with my dear friend.

One evening when I had finally run down the usual list of misery and angst there was a long pause, and then in the kindest way K asked, "Isn't there something you can do for someone else this week, dear?"

Hahahahahahaha!!!

What can you say after that except "Yes. Yes there is." There ALWAYS is. This question and the answer are what kept, and continues to keep, me from despair. —Juliet P.

Reflections from Sita

My dear friends,

In the Fall of 2008, when our Bo was going through a difficult time himself, he wrote a beautiful newsletter titled, "Maybe it's okay to feel blue." I'd like to share some of that with you now:

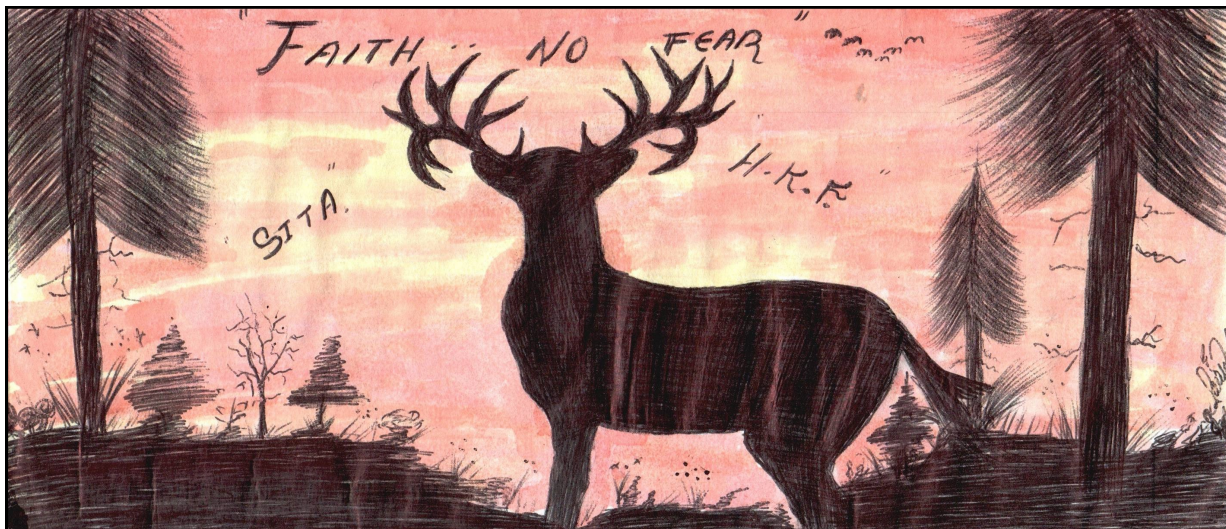
"We can move through prison life, corporate life, family life, community life, tough as nails to deal with reality but with hearts of butter underneath that toughness. We can move through happy days and blue days with soft hearts and a feeling of connection to the ups and downs of others across the world. On our happiest days we can humbly remember that not everyone is happy, and on our most depressed days we can softly remind ourselves that not everyone is blue.... We don't need to be afraid of our low times. The Psalms say "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens." Do we believe it? Do we believe that happy times and sad times all have their purpose, their season? Can we snap ourselves out of the consumer mentality that leads us to believe the highest goal in life is to look and feel great right now, and to be better off than our neighbor?

There are countless fad diets, but the safest way to lose weight is: Eat less, exercise more, and do it forever. Same thing with living deeply. If we want to discover the Heaven that Jesus tells us is within us, we have to be unselfish and compassionate, and do it forever. Just **be a little less selfish and a little more loving every day**, working with every reality Life brings us, including hard times and blues. St. Paul tells us, "For the believer, all things work toward the good."

Sweet friends, I'm so touched now while remembering that this message of Bo's was something he took very deeply himself.

My deepest love and respect to all of you. "See" you on Wednesdays, Sita

*P.S. Once again, I invite you to join us on **Wednesday evenings 7:00pm to 8:00pm** for our "together-apart" practice. Use any spiritual practice that is meaningful for you as you join HKF family all over the world by holding compassion for all suffering beings.*



Putting Faith Into Practice

Anger is contagious...but so is gentleness

By George Wilkerson

Prison culture values toughness, hardness. Both officers and prisoners cultivate a take-no-crap attitude, because we're told that anything less will be read as weakness—and the weak become victims.

One day, on my way to the mess hall, I stopped by the sergeant's office to drop off a book package I needed to mail home. The shift sergeant laid it on his cluttered desk, acting frazzled and growled, "Stop by on the way back from lunch so you can sign the release form, and then I can get this to the mailroom before it closes."

Well... on the way back I was so caught up in a conversation that I forgot to stop by the office. Six or seven hours later, the sergeant called me to the office. As soon as I walked in, he started screaming and cussing berating me, "I f-ing told you to stop by earlier! Now this won't go out until tomorrow!" Instantly I felt my anger rise up to butt heads with his—but before I could yell back, I sensed God's presence and I had a

small epiphany: I sensed God telling me that the sergeant was scared that I would blame him for the delay in my mail, and was striking preemptively. I also remembered a couple of Bible verses: (Proverbs 15:1) "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh

word stirs up anger." And (Prov. 16:7) "When the Lord takes pleasure in anyone's way, He causes even their enemies to make peace with him." So, for one of the first times in my life, not only did I know what God wanted me to do, but I then actually did it.

Calmly, I said, "You're 100% right, Sarge. You did tell me. It's my fault, and I accept full responsibility. I apologize for holding up progress."

He recoiled as if struck and his tone softened to just above a whisper, "That...that's alright. No problem. Look, I'll take your mail with me after shift-change, and drop it in the mailroom's drop box. First thing in the morning, when they come in, they'll get this mailed." I thanked him and went back to my pod.

That sergeant is notorious for his verbal abuse, but from that day forward he never raised his voice at me again. Though on opposite sides of "the line" we treated each other with gentleness and respect anytime we interacted.

God is true to His Word: I obeyed, sincerely stepping out in faith, and God did His part—He caused my enemy to make peace with me.

Amen.



Many thanks to the artists: pg 1: Reynaldo Sanabria, Raiford, FL; pg 2: Vaughn Pierce, Frackville, PA; pg 3: Michael Stringer, Grady, AK; pg 4: Peter Rivers, Taylorsville, NC (HKF rose), Javier Hernandez, Dobson, NC (deer envelope); pg 5: Martin Russell, New London, NC (praying hands), artist unknown (drawing titled "Be Still And Know"); pg 6: Michael McCullough, Seward, AK; pg 7: Stephen Stoeltje, Beaumont, TX; pg 8: Daniel Gwynn, Waynesburg, PA.

Letters

Hello Catherine,

I was happy as a kid sitting in front of a coconut cake when I saw your letter waiting for me. I hope my letter finds you and the HKF family in the best of health and spirits.

In your last letter you acknowledge racial injustices in this country, and that allows me to keep it all the way real with you. I'm not the monster they've painted of me. No angel, but no monster either. In the 70s I was falsely accused and convicted of raping a white woman. I thought I could live it down after paroling 11 years later. But with the racism in my home state and nobody to talk to about all of it, things got out of hand. I ended up in another state living on the streets, and eventually got locked up for a robbery.

I don't like talking about it because to do so sounds unbelievable even to me. It sounds like I'm minimizing. The way I figure it, I've had multiple charges of fights and racial riots, more than I can count in all these years locked up. I've always gotten respect, even when I was on the chain gang at age 16. I don't need to lie to you. For what? I've spent most of my life incarcerated. But the truth is, I didn't rape that white woman. I never hit a woman in my life. Please don't judge me on half the truth. Half the truth is always a lie.

Thanks to courageous individuals writing books sharing their stories has helped me understand myself.

And talking with people has been a big help in understanding all the decisions I made in my own life. I

It's ok if people want to tell us, but we never ask for that information. We ask things like "How are you

living your life now?" or "How do you want to be of service to the people around you?" or "How can we support you to find more peace?" The answers to those questions tell us a lot more about a person than what conviction they got.

As you said, you are definitely not a monster, no matter what. When I read your letters I hear a thoughtful person who is making an effort to live with respect for himself and others. I hear a person who has been through an enormous amount of adversity and continues to make the effort to live with respect. I admire you for that.

Peace and blessings,
Catherine



Dear People,

I am a formerly condemned man whose conviction was overturned, yet I sit in a county jail waiting to see how this particular part of my journey will unfold. Would "surreal" be the right word here?

But anyway, can you imagine the pressures threatening to overwhelm my equilibrium? A future without incarceration and all the inherent worries, which come from considering the many doubts I have after 20 years on death row, and the fact that I've never been successful living in society. What did Hyemeyohsts Storm say: "One has to face fear or forever run from it." For me it has been more about understanding fear

think things would have been different for me if my mother had been in my life.

Thank you for listening and writing.

M

Dear M,

I'm glad my letter was a welcome lift to your day. I hope this one is, too.

I do respect you, M, and I'm glad to hear that you have always gotten respect. I agree, no need to lie—what would be the point? After 21 years with HKF, knowing so many people who have been convicted of different things, I absolutely understand how often charges are completely wrong, and/or complicated, and/or layered in racism. It's one of the reasons we don't ask people about their charges and convictions.



as opposed to confronting it; whereby I work through and learn from it, rather than move past and possibly forget what it has taught me.

This perspective has helped me to become more than the circumstances I've endured, and the many falls I've gotten up from. Part of this perception has been greatly informed by the principles taught in *We're All Doing Time*. Meditation practice, yoga, prayer, and the inclusiveness of Bo's message, have this universality which transcends the many divisions society tends to impose on us. They are about balance and harmony, about creating a space within us so that we may see and be in the reality of the moment.

Such a state requires much undoing of the noise which distracts our focus. Therefore, if you wouldn't mind, could you send me a copy of *We're All Doing Time* and if possible *Deep & Simple*? The inspiration and guidance in those books help me keep placing one foot in front of the other. Each step is just as important as the destination. So whatever you do to enrich my experience along the way would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you, and may you all recognize your inherent awesomeness; that all beings are created to be enough for the roads they travel.

Sincerely, P

Dear P,

It was lovely to hear from you. It sounds like you are on a very deep journey and that you have been moved inwardly along the way. You have had to face the biggest fear in the human condition—not just for an instant, but for years—and it seems that has molded you in important ways. Adversity can be a double-edged sword, and for you it seems the cuts have deepened you.

You will of course still deal with

fear. Sometimes the fear of living can seem as intense as the fear of death. If you can find, within your depth, to count on a power greater than yourself, you will be moved and led in miraculous ways. We are here to help you dear one! Feel free to write us again.

Love, Donna



Hello. My name is J and I am currently incarcerated. I want to make a positive impact in this world by trying to change this horrific tragedy I caused. I want to make it into a vehicle to help save lives.

I am 54 years old and the last time I was in any kind of trouble was almost 30 years ago. I am a recovering addict for 18 years.

I was living with my wife and 2 beautiful daughters. I was successful, athletic, and had everything people dream of (house, family, friends, cars, money, etc). But for the second

divorced me.

The next week, after a day or two of using and drinking, I fell asleep at the wheel and killed a 17-year-old girl.

I plead guilty even though my blood alcohol was below the legal limit. I plead guilty because I was guilty, in hope it would help minimize my sentence and the pain for the girl's family and my family.

I started telling my story long before the sentencing date at AA meetings, hoping to help others. My only salvation is in my faith, desire to help others and deep sorrow for what I have done. Of course Jesus Christ is my understood #1 for everything.

Please help in any way you can.

God bless, J

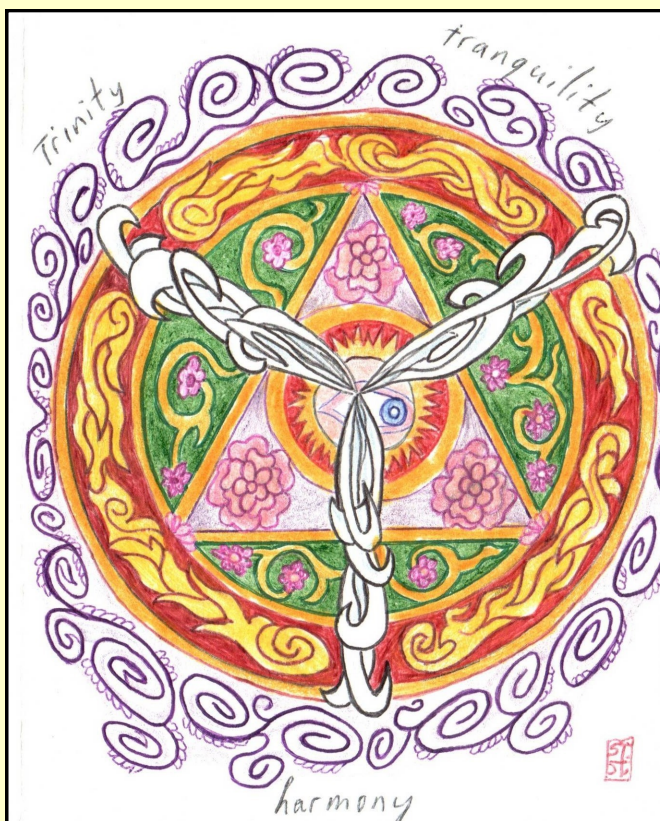
Dear J,

Thank you for your letter. We are very saddened to hear about what happened. We hope and pray that you and your victim's family find peace with your journey. Recovery is a road all to itself—it is not for the person who wants an easy way out. It takes great faith in a power so much greater than ourselves and that power is what sustains us and guides us daily.

I guess you are at a new crossroads, and more will be revealed as you go deeper and deeper into your recovery process. We have put you and your young victim on our prayer list this week, and we will hold you in our hearts as you go deeper into this journey.

No one can take away the pain and regret—but Spirit can use every part of our human experience to deepen us. We will hold that prayer in our hearts.

Love, Donna



time I was on a collision course with disaster. I began a 2-3 year binge of drugs and alcohol. My precious wife



humankindness.org

PO Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715



"Rivers do not drink their own water; trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves. Living for others is a rule of nature. We are all born to help each other. No matter how difficult it is... Life is good when you are happy; but much better when others are happy because of you."

Many internet sources attribute this quote to Pope Francis. Other sources say it is a Sanskrit proverb, part of the Vedas (the most ancient Hindu scriptures). We think words that could believably be Christian or Hindu probably have some real wisdom in them.

Art by Daniel Gwynn, 2015