

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Summer 1995

"BUT ENOUGH ABOUT ME...!"

*"Why are you unhappy? Because 99% of the things you do, think, and feel are about your self. And there **isn't** one!"*

— Wei Wu Wei

Dear Family,
Recently I gave a talk at Duke University, and as I walked across campus my eye was pulled toward a sign that was posted on nearly every telephone pole and bulletin board. It looked something like this:

FEEL GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF

Give Blood.

See the American Red Cross today.

Now, that's the final straw! Enough already. This is getting embarrassing. The current self-esteem fad is going to be something our grandchildren laugh about like we laugh about zoot suits, pet rocks and hula hoops. The purpose of doing a good deed is not to feel good about yourself. That may be a *by-product*, but if we make it the goal instead, we miss the whole point.

True self-esteem is like a smile: It arises naturally in a life lived well. We don't stand in front of the mirror all day *working* on our smile, do we? We don't wake up in the morning thinking "Now, let's see; I've got to smile today; I've got to smile; I've got to smile..." Countless things effortlessly bring a smile to our faces — nice people, a beautiful sky, a sweet cat or dog, a little baby, children playing, our old jalopy starting right up instead of having to drag out the jumper cables — smiling is a natural part of life.

So are self-esteem and personal happiness. They are impossible goals if pursued selfishly, yet they are free gifts when we give up self-absorption. *Mother Theresa didn't undertake her mission in order to boost her self-esteem.* She followed her heart, she did what she felt was right. Without focusing on self-centered happiness, she dedicated her life to helping others. The result? A profoundly happy person esteemed by the world.

Ripping Off The Poor

Back to the Red Cross signs — you may say, "Hey, what's wrong with appealing to a little self-interest in order to get people to do the right thing?" Plenty. The Red Cross is one of the most respected humanitarian organizations in the world. Those signs tell a whole generation of young adults that everybody should just be out for themselves. What used to be a charitable act becomes merely one more strategy for selfish happiness. Instead of *giving* to the needy, we're just ripping them off to get a little buzz. They may get the blood, but they used to get a whole heap of kindness with it, which may be lacking until we and the Red Cross come to our senses.

It's one thing to hear someone say "I feel so good when I'm volunteering at the soup kitchen." But it's quite another to build advertising campaigns around it as the main reason to volunteer. Altruism — the act of doing something for the benefit of others — must *actually* be altruistic. "Will it benefit me?" I don't know! That's not what we should be thinking about. Of course, we all know in the back of our minds that altruistic people are often the happiest, most dynamic people in the world. We've all heard that caring for the needs of others is important to our own well-being. I'm not saying we should pretend not to know that human service is a time-honored path associated with deep peace and happiness. But we need to remember that it is not a path *about* our happiness; rather, it's a happy *path*.

When we begin to care more about others than ourselves — what early Christians called "Self-forgetfulness" and what Buddhists call "Bodhicitta" — the happiness we feel is mainly a sense of *relief* more than anything else. It's a happy *relief* to step aside from the spotlight of ego's endless desires and fears. It's a happy *relief* to open ourselves to what we are really and truly about: Love, compassion, courage, kindness, mercy, dedication.... instead of being constantly wrapped up in the newest scratch on the door of the mini-van. Happiness is our natural state when we live a soul-centered lifestyle.

The Self-esteem Trap

Self-esteem seems to have become nothing short of a new American religion. The problem is, low self-esteem and high self-esteem are *both* egomania. If a river is in flood, raging toward your house, do you care whether the water is hot or cold? It's the *volume* of water which is the problem, not the temperature! Cold or hot, you drown!

Same with self-centeredness. If I'm wrapped up in myself with worthlessness, guilt, doubt, etc., that's just as much of an ego problem as if I thought I was the greatest thing ever to hit the Earth. *The solution to a negative ego problem is not to replace it with a positive ego problem.* We have come to worship individuality as though we each exist in our own separate universe — which of course is untrue. And because it is untrue, what may once have been *individuality* has now mutated into *alienation*. *Community* esteem has been sacrificed to *self-esteem*.

Classic Vices Are Now Called Virtues

Modern-day America is probably the first society since the fall of Rome which has made personal pride a prized virtue instead of a dangerous vice. Pride is in, modesty is out. Assertiveness is in, easygoingness is out. Boastfulness is in, humility is out. Competitiveness is in, self-sacrifice is out. These are not good signs.

We mean well, but we're not thinking clearly. We hear one "expert" say that we should praise our kids, and the next day somebody has begun cranking out millions of bumper stickers saying "My child is an honor student at Smith Junior High." That's not praise, it's tacky boastfulness. And it doesn't take the place of spending more time with our kids. Frankly, kids need to be *appreciated* a lot more than they need to be praised. Appreciation takes more time and commitment. It's a lot more work than merely uttering some popular slogans or slapping one more bumper sticker on our car.

Appreciation joins and unites, while praise tends to separate and elevate. When we say, "Oh, sweetheart, I am so glad to be spending this time with you, and I treasure you so much in my life," that's appreciation. And it means a tremendous amount to our children *without* making them feel superior to the kid next door. But when we merely throw praise around, or slap the bumper sticker on the car, it's no longer the whole child we are valuing, but rather one or two things that the child is doing — and usually doing *better* than other children. That sort of praise is a strengthening of ego instead of a strengthening of essence.

A Mixed-up Model of Success

To see the ultimate consequences of praise versus appreciation, and our fixation on the "small self," we need look no further than the celebrities whom we elevate practically to the status of gods. Are they happy? Do they enjoy the love which millions of fans pour out to them?

Let's face it: Michael Jackson and Madonna are both pretty demented; poor Elvis died a bloated joke of whom he once was, and O.J. Simpson is charged with murder.

Our model of success separates people from their community and elevates them above the rest of us. Whether O.J. is found guilty or not, we already know that he was not a happy man — tall, dark and handsome, intelligent, talented, disciplined, loved by millions of people, rich beyond imagination — but not a happy human being. Is it just his fault? Or is he perhaps one of countless indications that it's basically no fun to be richer and "better" than everyone else. We *think* it's going to be fun, but those of us who succeed at it seem to go nuts with alarming consistency.

It's amazing that we keep presenting that same model of success to our kids, year after year, when there is so much evidence that the more we get of it, the weirder or sadder or more dysfunctional we become.

The Great News

But there is good news in all of this — in fact, it's *great* news. There's a wonderful reason that personal pride, high self-esteem, boastfulness, and selfish success don't lead to real happiness. The reason is this: **We are all deeply connected.** We are in this thing together from start to finish. We are One Big Family, like it or not. I've come to like it. I hope you do too. We *need* each other.

The ancient quote from Wei Wu Wei at the beginning of this article goes one step further: We don't even *exist* as a separate little self; we just think we do. We are one big EVENT, all of us together, and we must either start acting like it, or else descend further and further into despair, madness, or mass annihilation.

If we *were* able to find true happiness through selfish pursuits, *that* would be the tragedy, because it would mean our essential nature is not deep or compassionate. Our society is terribly unhappy precisely *because* our true nature is divine and generous and merciful, and we're not acting like it. That really is great news.

It means we can save ourselves. We can wake up from this horrible national hangover we're experiencing. Enough of the arrogance and pride and "asserting our gifts" and all that other popular silliness which boils down to childish attempts to cover fear and confusion. Enough of lavishing empty praise on our kids and friends and ourselves. Enough of the "I deserve prosperity" seminars and "Free yourself from guilt" workshops. Enough about "me" already! We need to look around and realize that we only exist in relation to each other. And then we need to act like it.

With Love From Your Brother,

Bo

ME (☺)

Myself?



I sat there in awe as the old monk answered our questions. Though I'm usually shy, I felt so comfortable in his presence that I found myself raising my hand. "Father, could you tell us something about yourself?"

He leaned back. "Myself?" he mused. There was a long pause.

"My name...
used to be...
Me.

But now...
it's you."

— from *Tales Of A Magic Monastery*,
by Theophane the Monk

Love Letter

Where are you now, my good friend? Are you out in the field, in the forest, on the mountain, in a military camp, in a factory, at your desk, in a hospital, in a prison? Regardless of where you are, let us breathe in and out together, and let the Sun of awareness enter. Let us begin with this breath and this awareness. Whether life is an illusion, a dream, or a wondrous reality depends on our insight and our mindfulness. Awakening is a miracle. The darkness in a totally dark room will disappear the moment the light is switched on. In the same way, life will reveal itself as a miraculous reality the second the Sun of Awareness begins to shine.

I have a poet friend who was put into a "re-education" camp in Vietnam, in a remote jungle area. During his four years there, he practiced meditation and was able to live in peace. Upon release, he was lucid, like a sharp sword. He knew that he had not lost anything during those four years. On the contrary, he knew he had "re-educated" himself in meditation.

As I write these lines, I am writing a love letter. I hope these words will be read by you, my known and unknown brothers and sisters, who are living in circumstances regarded as hopeless and tragic, that you may renew your energies and courage.

— from "The Sun My Heart," by Thich Nhat Hanh (Vietnamese Buddhist monk)

LETTERS

Have You Loved Anyone Today?

Have you tried to give your love to anyone today?

Have you spoke a kind word as someone passed your way?

Did you send a loving thought to help someone somehow?

*Better late than never:
Why don't you do it now?*

David Scoggam, CA



Dear Bo & Sita,

Thank you for coming to our prison and giving such an excellent talk. Some of the questions I had were asked by others — about anger, guilt, forgiveness. Still, I have some questions I didn't get to ask.

You said you love God more than you love your wife and son. How? I don't even want to do this. Maybe my understanding is limited, but I can't view life in this way. Is it maybe that God lives in them, and so I can love Him by loving them? Does this make sense?

It's just that in my life, the most fulfillment I've gotten has been from love and work. Of course there must have been something missing because I resorted to drugs and crime. But I never had all those things at the same time: Wife, child, work, sobriety, freedom (from prison). It would be nice to try.

I don't want to get bogged down in this letter. I just wanted to thank you and Sita for coming and for your insights.

Love, A

Dear A,

We had a great time meeting you, too. You ask how can you love God more than you love your wife & son, and why would you even want to?

The thing is, unenlightenment is basically one enormous misunderstanding. We must grasp this first before it will do us any good to toss ideas back & forth.

Your body, your wife, your son, your prison time, your life itself are

misunderstandings. Anything you call "mine" is a misunderstanding.

You and I have a clear choice to make: We can either keep trying to fashion the best life we can around the Big Misunderstanding, or we can say "I'm going to have faith that there is something deeper going on, even though I don't presently understand it."

And then we turn to the spiritual traditions, the elders, saints & sages, and practice the methods and principles they have handed down to us. (If we were already good at it, it wouldn't be called "practice.")

When you feel guilt, anger, confusion, doubt, agitation, you can either be thrown by it, or say "Hey, nobody said it would be a snap," and continue in your practices. Practices, study, and fellowship have always been the key. That's a lot of what I tried to get across at the prison: Use your time wisely; learn to support and rely on each other. Be serious spiritual seekers.

If you can admit to yourself that you're running purely on faith for now — faith in the teachings, the saints & sages, me & Sita, whatever — then you don't need to feel so frustrated over anger, guilt, confusion, etc. Just watch those feelings, let them go, and keep on practicing the best you can. Don't require it to be different than it is.

You just need to see *everything* as your journey; nothing is a detour or an interruption, everything is part of it — including your wife and son. They have no reality or meaning other than a spiritual one.

That's how I can say I love the "Dharma" — the whole spiritual path — even more than I love Sita and Josh. And they feel the same way. *Without* the path, we all exist only as a serious misunderstanding which leads to worry, jealousy, grief, pride, greed... *On* the path, we are the most wonderful, enjoyable elements of each other's lives!

Someone who says, "Baby, I love you more than anything; I would do wrong for you; I would kill for you" — that's

somebody heading for serious trouble. Look around the prison and I'm sure you'll find many examples. It sounds romantic, but it is not **REAL**; it destroys lives because it is not founded upon truth. We are nothing without truth, or the path, or God or whatever you want to call it. In the East, people simply call it *Dharma*.

Dharma is the only context in which all the power of our emotions contributes toward a total good. I love the "Sacred Path" more than anything! It's the basis of kindness, patience, courage, faith, and the very *best* sort of affection toward wife and son. *Everything* is precious in that context, and *nothing* is precious without it — just worrisome and demanding.

I hope this clears up some of what I said that night, and I hope you stick to your work. You're doing great; just appreciate these tough times as opportunities to increase your compassion for *everyone* who feels discouraged. Even *this* is part of your training. Resolve to remember these hard times for the benefit of others, and then move on. You're doing fine.

Your brother, Bo



BIZARRO Piraro

... AND AT THE END OF YOUR JOURNEY WHEN YOU HAVE ATTAINED TOTAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND DIVINE INNER KNOWLEDGE YOU CAN, ONCE AGAIN, WEAR YOUR HAIR HOWEVER YOU LIKE.



Dear Bo & Sita,

Thanks for the books. Since I've been practicing my meditation and cleaning all the garbage out of my mind a lot of things have started becoming better. I feel more patient instead of just "tolerant" to the ones who have ZERO understanding. And I have learned that everyone around me, black white, red and yellow are me. Kind of like my personalities running around outside instead of in. Seeing this helps me to be kinder towards them because I am actually being kinder to myself.

Love, E



Dear Bo & Sita,

Hey hey, what can I say? My name is K and I'm 20 years old. I've been in the joint here for 2 years on a nickel.

Bo, I got a lot out of your book and especially the awesome letters you write, man. You really stick with a dude. But I haven't ever seen my problem in your books.

I have done about 8 or 9 years of my life in institutions man, and dig this: Sometimes I feel like just stayin' inside these walls. What would you do if half of the population in here was like family to you, man? I met most of these people years ago, and they are dear friends, man.

I have no one on the outside. My dearest bro has a life sentence without parole, and another of my bro's is doing 125 years, another 50 years and yet another, another life sentence. What do I do man? All my life it has been lockup after lockup man, and my family that is the most dearest to me is in here and don't get me wrong, I don't like prison.

I shit you not of what I've just told you, this is a for real crisis I need advice on, please help if you can.

Luv you all, K

Dear K,

It's nice to meet you, little brother. I hear you loud and clear about not knowing whether you want to be outside without your friends, or inside with

them. The thing is, you need to get up a little higher than your normal view, like the eagle who can see more than the mouse.

The eagle sees that your life is a wide-ranging Holy Adventure, not just a series of problems, like it seems to the mouse. In other words, if the point of life were mainly about hanging out with your friends, then it's real tempting to stay in the joint. But if that were the point, Sita & I would never have let our son, Josh, move 3,000 miles away from us. He loves us and we love him as much as you and your friends love each other. And he was lonely, he didn't have any friends in L.A. when he first went out there. So why go? Why didn't he just stay here with us and have a great time?

We all miss each other, but Josh had to leave home because he needs to follow his own adventure. As wonderful as being together feels, that's not all his life is about, and it's not all *our* lives are about, either. We talk on the phone, write, visit a couple times a year, and we can always feel, somewhere in the background, the painful love / loving pain of not living together anymore — but all three of us know that even this pain is a natural part of life, a natural part of *all* of us growing up.

Funny thing is, our love and friendship deepen all the time; yet we sometimes go as long as six months now without seeing each other. But we hold each other in our hearts every day and we are very much part of each other's lives — the sense of humor, seeing things through each other's eyes, feeling each other's hopes and fears — we belong to each other *without* trying to possess each other.

So what does all of this have to do with you? Well, you have a life to find — hopefully an honorable life that will help the world in some way. The love and support and loyalty you've developed with your friends may always be a big part of you.

Leaving prison, you don't have to leave behind the love; take it with you. Your friends may always be with you in your heart as you move through tough situations in your life. Corresponding with them may help you through those times; their prison perspective may help you remain level-headed instead of getting all caught up in the sideshow of the streets. In other words, you may still be friends.

Staying in prison would be weakness on your part, not strength — which means it wouldn't *really* be satisfying. Your friends are *required* to stay inside the walls, but you are not in that same position. You have to follow your journey, not theirs.

Trust your life. Even when it hurts or is scary. Start living for something bigger than yourself. That's what my books are about. You have no idea how free and happy you'll feel when you give up the mouse's worries and start soaring with the eagles. But it takes courage and clear-seeing; that's why we call it "spiritual work." Try it on for size.

In The Great Adventure, Bo



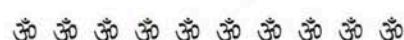
**Our relationships with one another
are like the chance meeting
of two strangers in a parking lot.
They look at each other and smile.
That is all there is between them.
They leave and never
see each other again.**

**That is what life is —
just a moment, a meeting, a
passing, and then it is gone.**

**If you understand this,
then there is no time to fight.
There is no time to argue.
There is no time
to hurt one another.**

**Whether you think about it
in terms of humanity, nations,
communities, or individuals —
there is no time for anything less
than truly appreciating the brief
interaction we have with one
another.**

— Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche



PRACTICE: THE DALAI LAMA'S DAILY PLEDGE

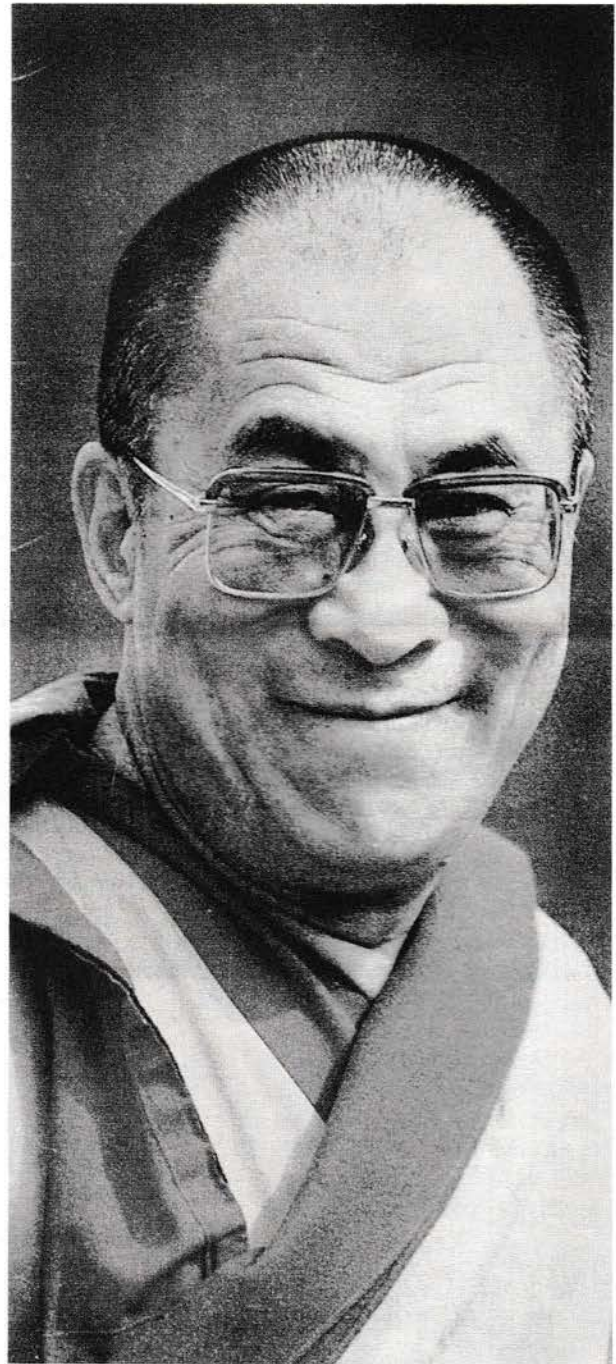
Reprinted from Kadampa Center Prayer Flag, who reprinted it from The World of Tibetan Buddhism (Wisdom Publications, 1994)

Question: Would Your Holiness please explain what daily practices should be performed, what motivations are appropriate, and what benefits result from them?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: As soon as you wake up in the morning, if you have any interest in spiritual development, you should examine your own mind and try to develop some kind of proper motivation. Then, make a strong pledge, or determination, that in the future, and especially on this day, you will practice proper behavior and proper ways of thinking. Think that you will help others in the proper ways, and if that is not possible, at least you will refrain from harming them. Then, from time to time during the day, constantly remind yourself of that determination, that motivation.

In the late evening, look back on the day to see if you really spent your day as you pledged in the morning. If you find something positive (beneficial, helpful), then good — feel happy! Reinforce that determination by rejoicing in your own good actions and by resolving to continue such activities in the future. If you find you have done something negative (harmful, destructive) during the day, you should feel remorse for those wrong actions committed... reflecting on how these same negative actions, committed in the past, are the reason why you are still experiencing undesirable consequences. Think that if you continue to indulge in such activities in the future, this will lead you into similar undesirable consequences again.

This is the way: Try, try, try! Then, over time, there is hope. There is the possibility to improve oneself. Blessings from others are not sufficient. ...There are thousands, millions and billions of buddhas and bodhisattvas (saints) out there [blessing us]; yet we are here, still passing through many difficulties every time something goes wrong. So blessings are not enough. Is that clear? Blessings must come from within. Without your own effort, it is impossible for blessings to come. Do you agree?



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NEWS, NOTES, OFFERINGS & GOOD WORKS

PRISON LIFE MAGAZINE...

a national, glossy publication by convicts for convicts, seeks prisoner authors and artists. Feature articles (up to 4,000 words), shorter pieces on life in the joint (up to 500 words), essays, fiction, poetry, art (envelope, etc.) needed. Payment minimal but byline and exposure guaranteed.

Entries for *Prison Life's* Second Annual *Art Behind Bars Contest* are due September 15, 1995. Categories: Fiction, Nonfiction, Drama, Poetry, Art (paintings, drawings, envelope, any medium). **Cash Prizes.** Write to:

PRISON LIFE
505 8th Ave., 8th Floor
NY, NY 10018

[for subscription info only, call (800) 207-2659]

PROJECT FOR OLDER PRISONERS (POPS)

Currently, POPS helps inmates in MD, MI, DC, NC, NY, and IL to obtain parole or medical release. To be eligible, an inmate must be 55 or older, have a medical problem and a good prison record. If you meet these criteria, send a brief letter describing your general situation to:

POPS / The Nat'l Law Center
GWU, 2000 H St., NW
Washington DC 20052

PROSE AND CONS...

is a literary magazine exposing the writing and drawings of prisoners — literal and metaphorical; both inside and out. The subject matter varies and is not limited by topic. As creative expression is the purest form of exercising freedom, *PROSE AND CONS* challenges and inspires artistic break-outs. Pen-and-ink drawings and prose of any length accepted. **No poetry.** Send submissions to:

PROSE AND CONS
4200 Park Blvd., Suite 118
Oakland CA 94602

BO'S ONLY SUMMER SPEAKING DATE...

Bo Lozoff will be giving a keynote speech and a workshop at *OPEN HEART, OPEN MIND — The Transformative Spirit of Service*, the annual conference of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, in San Diego CA, Saturday, July 15th. The conference features a host of prominent speakers over a period of four days. For information on attending, contact:

INSTITUTE OF NOETIC SCIENCES
475 Gate Five Road, Suite 300
Sausalito CA 94965

UPDATING OUR *PRISONER* MAILING LIST !!!

Our postage costs have risen so much recently (over \$2,000/month), we need to cut down on as much waste as possible. Of the nearly 20,000 prisoners who receive these newsletters, there may be thousands who no longer care to read them. So, this is a **BIG** clean-up. **If you want to keep receiving these newsletters, you MUST tear off this half of the page at the perforation, and return it to us before September 1st, 1995. Your mailing label (other side) must be included!**

Prison mail regulations have gotten much tighter lately, so be sure to note any changes we should make on your label (on the other side of this page) in order for you to receive your mail more reliably. Whenever you move, it would help us a lot if you would be so kind as to drop us a line and let us know. Uncle Sam is making a killing off of our return postage, and there are a lot better ways to spend our limited funds.

If you want to say hi or make any other comments, please do so on the other side. But remember that we'll be receiving maybe 15,000 of these, so please don't ask anything that would require us to respond right now. It'll take us a few months to process all these replies. Just know that we love you and are always sending you our deepest blessings and prayers.

a little good news

is a publication of the Human Kindness Foundation, which is non-profit and tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code. Donations and bequests are always welcomed and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. All money goes directly to support HKF's work, helping us to continue producing and distributing free materials to prisoners and others, and sponsoring Bo Lozoff's free lectures & workshops as well as supporting Kindness House and the other projects of the Foundation.

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The Golden Rule

(as expressed over 5,000 years around the world. Have we really listened?)

Hurt not others with that which pains thyself.

— Buddhist

Do not unto others what thou wouldst not they should do unto thee.

— Jewish

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

— Christian

Do not condemn your brother until you have walked a mile in his moccasins.

— Native American

Do naught to others which if done to thee would cause thee pain.

— Hindu

Treat others as thou wouldst be treated thyself.

— Sikh

No one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.

— Islamic

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

— Taoist

In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self...

— Jain

Do not unto others all that which is not well for oneself.

— Zoroastrian