

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Spring/Summer 2001

MUCH ADO ABOUT SILENCE

From silence came the ego, from the ego came thought, and from thought came speech. So if speech is effective, how much more effective must be its source!

—Ramana Maharshi

Dear Family,

In our last newsletter, I mentioned my plan to go into one year of silence beginning in the fall of this year. I wrote about it mainly to use as an example of the theme of the newsletter, "Following God." We had no idea that so many of our readers would feel fascinated, upset, supportive, concerned, abandoned, betrayed, or just plain dumbfounded as to why I would spend a year without speaking.

There were enough letters and comments to warrant a little further discussion about the whole thing.

First, some clarifications: Yes, my year of silence means no speaking, whispering, singing, or chanting to anyone at all, even my wife. It does not mean I will be in total solitude the whole time. On September 2nd, I will go into solitude for forty days in a small hermitage (twelve feet by twelve feet) in the forest near our home. When I return around October 11th, I will be participating in our community life and our work schedule, but silently. Because my "year" is actually from full moon to full moon, it will not be until September 21st, 2002, that I resume speaking. I will probably do another forty-day retreat leading up to that date. So about one-quarter of the year will be in solitude, and three-quarters going about my normal activities.

This is not a vow of non-communication, so I will occasionally write notes for practical purposes. The people in our community know how to support a vow of silence, so they will be doing what they can to minimize the number of notes I may need to write. I am not sure whether I will write individual letters, or articles for our newsletters. I imagine my first forty-day retreat will fill in a lot of those details.

A year of silence is not "time off" in any way. Believe me, I am not abandoning any of you, I am not breaking the ties of our friendship. All I have ever done is to share the realities of the spiritual life, including my own practices

and experiences. I sincerely feel that this year of silence is as much for your benefit as mine, or else I would not do it. I feel God has called me to do this, and since there is only one God, then God knows what you need from this as well.

One reader sent all sorts of practical advice about not eating meat, not watching television or listening to the radio, not reading books other than sacred books, and so forth. Thanks for the tips; most of what you wrote is my normal lifestyle already!

Another reader expressed her concern for the strain on my marriage. Again, thanks, but Sita and I deeply believe in spiritual practice and in going "outside the envelope," and so we are both more curious than afraid. We will celebrate our thirty-fifth wedding anniversary early this year, in July or August instead of September, and I'm sure we'll do something very special.

A few people encouraged me to learn sign language, but I do not intend to be communicating enough to merit that. One aim of my year of silence is to quiet down, not just to figure out other ways to say things.

Things that are REAL are given and received in Silence.

—Meher Baba

Two groups of prisoners felt that I am abandoning them, as fathers or other male elders have done all through

their lives. Nothing could be further from the Truth. I am stepping up my own spiritual work to be a better friend to you all. I have said repeatedly through the years that it takes time and effort to be deep. It does. I am taking the time and effort of a year in silence in order to be of more value to each and every one of you. My love and commitment to you is a primary motivation for my year of silence.

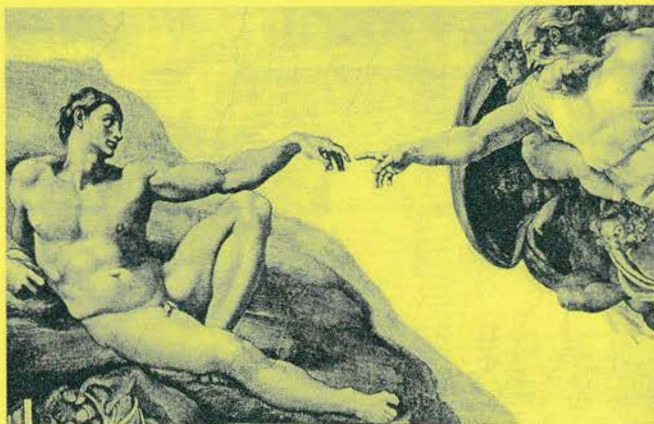
One reader asked, "Have you ever heard of any self-realized mutes?," suggesting that a year of silence is not what I should be doing. But actually, yes, the spiritual history of the world is filled with saints and sages who took vows of silence for periods of time or for their entire lives. Silence is one of the most universal and classic

spiritual practices of every race and culture. Spending one year in silence is not really a very big deal in the spiritual literature. I'm still minor league, really. There's nothing extreme or fanatic about this.

In Michelangelo's world-famous painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Italy, man reaches his finger towards God, and God reaches his finger towards man. Every spiritual practice, including a year or even a lifetime of silence, is no more than reaching a finger toward God, saying "Lord, here is a humble token of my effort to reach you. I pray that Your finger reaches down toward mine at the same time."

To those who feel I am being foolish or unkind, I urge you to remember that it is always risky to judge someone else's spiritual practices

from the outside. The path to God has never been a crowd-pleaser or easy to understand. Many sages have been regarded as fools, and many have been scorned by their own friends and family for doing what they felt God was calling them to do. Even Jesus got a terrible reception in His home town of Nazareth and said, "A prophet is not without honor save in his own home."



I hope I can count on your prayers and blessings from the full moon of September 2001 until the full moon of September 2002. There may be periods of great difficulty in store for me, and I would like to know I have your love and support to see me through. I promise, you will always share in the benefits of whatever I find.

All my love,
Bo Logg

PRACTICE: A DAY OF SILENCE

Occasional periods of silence are recommended by every wisdom tradition. Modern life (and prison life) can be extremely noisy, and this constant noise can keep us from experiencing life as honestly or clearly as we may like. Sita and I have found great value in many periods of silence. For several years, each of us spent one day a week in silence. There are two main types of the practice of silence, and they are both very valuable in different ways.

- 1) *Silence in an otherwise normal day:* Practicing silence in an otherwise normal day can be extremely insightful into the nature of our speech patterns. It also shows us that the world gets along quite well without our two cents' worth, and usually inspires us to try to speak a little bit less when we do resume speaking.
 - Let your close associates, especially family, bosses, cellmates or staff, know in advance. Then print a little card saying, "I'm practicing a day of silence." You can choose to explain more, or to add, "Thanks for your understanding," but keep it brief. It's great if people understand, but some will not, and may make a joke of it or even resent you for it. Don't get all huffy or hurt about it. Leave their own spiritual work to them.
 - Carry a notepad and pencil, but do not join in on social or personal discussions. You are taking a break from that. Work-related matters (or, in prison, dealing with officers) are different. Even there, be as brief as possible and true to your intent of disengaging yourself from all but the most necessary matters of communication. You may want a second prepared card that reads, "Can I discuss this with you tomorrow?"
 - At mealtimes, you may be surprised at how much effect one silent person can have on a table full of conversation – especially when conversation turns to gossip or backbiting. In a way, your silent "witness" may help others to better hear what they sound like.
- 2) *Silent retreat day:* The other way of practicing silence is to retreat from all your normal activities and from the presence of others to the greatest degree possible. If you can't go to a cabin in the woods or some other isolated place, you may want to simply spend the day in your cell or your bedroom. However you arrange it, here are a few tips to get the most out of a day of silent retreat:
 - Plan your meals in advance, and plan for only about half of what you may normally eat. This helps you to be quieter. Simple foods are best. I take a heel of bread and some fruit with me. Sometimes I fast entirely.

- Do not spend a lot of the day reading. If you choose to read at all, plan it in advance and limit it to brief spiritual writings which may help you to work with silence. Do not listen to music or watch television.
- Try to spend time in nature, listening and observing. If you have no access to the outdoors, try watching the sky and all its changes through a window. If you have no window, then focus a lot on everything in your cell, even the movement of shadows on the walls, distant sounds, or ants walking across the floor.
- Try not to let thoughts dominate the day. Keep your focus in the here and now. The best way to do this is to focus on perceptions of the senses – seeing, listening, touching, smelling, tasting, walking.
- Slow breaths, deeper breaths, help quiet the mind and body. Your breath is the source of your life. Each breath arises from and returns to silence. When you tap into the Big Breath and the Great Silence, you'll know it!

ESSENTIAL SPEECH PRACTICE

Total silence may be impossible for your situation. If that is the case, you can do essential speech, which means speaking only when required (by boss, staff, etc.). No chatting, singing, TV, radios, etc. You may still want to carry a card explaining why you're not speaking, so people will not think you're being unfriendly. People in our community have sometimes taken essential speech vows for a month or more. It can be as productive as a vow of silence. The idea behind both is to become more deliberate about how much we really need to say, and giving ourselves time to listen instead.

GOOD WORKS

Ex-Con Helps Fellow Ex-Cons

Fredrick "Mr. Bull" Chaney, Jr., was first busted at fourteen for selling marijuana and did a turn in Juvenile Hall. He stepped up to the big time when at nineteen he got his first prison sentence. For the next twenty years, he continued a senseless, vicious cycle of prison-parole-crime to support his habit. At age thirty-three, Mr. Bull tested HIV-positive due to his long history of intravenous drug use.

Finally, at thirty-nine he tired of his self-destructive "out again, in again" dance and realized he was killing himself and that he wanted to live. He also realized that one way to help himself was to help others with the same problems and addictions. While still locked up, he became an HIV counselor, and upon his release, entered a recovery program specific to HIV-positive addicts. In ninety intensive days he claims he learned what all the years in prison hadn't taught him – how to love and care for himself and others.

Mr. Bull has now been clean and out of prison for five years. He is an HIV counselor for the Public Health Department in San Luis Obispo County, California, and is also president of the Gryphon Society, a non-profit corporation that helps ex-cons learn new ways to live and stay out of prison. Through counseling, peer support, referrals to support groups, and help in finding employment and housing, the Gryphon Society is helping former prisoners make it in the free world. The Society also works to educate the community about the realities of prison life. Several Gryphon ex-cons also contribute many hours of volunteer time to serve the local community.

Mr. Bull is also striving to establish a "Sober Living House" to provide housing for male, non-violent ex-offenders with substance abuse problems. When asked how the project was coming he said, "Tough. Hard to overcome the inmate stigma, but we'll get there eventually." For more information, contact:

The Gryphon Society
PO Box 13921
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406
(805) 550-8140 or (805) 596-6272



LETTERS

Dear Bo:

Hello, my friend. I am in need of advice. I know you've dealt with convicts for many years and I know you give good advice. This prison I'm in has me classified as one of the dangerous convicts and got me living on lifer/death row. Every guy is a lifer, except 6 guys who are death row inmates. My trouble is there are two death row inmates who want to kill me. These guys are blood-thirsty killers. Both have killed right here in prison.

Both guys have officers who will let doors open "by accident." The killer in the cell next to mine says when I get dayroom time (exercise), he will arrange for us to have dayroom together so he can kill me. Death row inmates and max custody are not allowed to yard or dayroom together, but cops do bend rules a lot, and I'm not too well-liked by a lot of officers who can open our door together and declare it as an accident, and want to see me get killed!

All the guards and inmates know I've become a Buddhist and taken vows to not indulge in any more violence and not to kill! And now I'm confused because when I get dayroom privileges in a few months, I'll have to do something. I do not want to hurt or kill this guy. All I want is peace. But I have a history as a good fighter in both boxing and martial arts, and as a guy who won't back down. But I swore to not fight again, 'cause the last time I fought, it was a death fight with another martial artist.

I've killed three people in this lifetime; one in a drunk-driving accident, one out of anger, and one in a death fight, it was me or him, and he lost. After the last one, I swore to never use martial arts fighting again and burned my belt and silk robe. But I can't really fight without using the arts. I do not want to hurt or kill this guy! But what do I do, Bo? The guy has told me if I don't kill him, he will kill me. I'm not ready to die, and I don't want to kill him!

In here, even if a guy alerts the administration that their life and well-being are on the line, they say, "Prove to us your life is in danger." Their motto is, "If you ain't losing blood or dead, your life is not in danger!" So alerting

administration or asking for a transfer is a waste of time! Do I face one of these two killers and kill him and get the death sentence, or do I let one of them kill me? What do I do, Bo? I need your wise advice. Please write me back as soon as possible, please? I'll close for now! Peace to you, my friend!

Peace, T

Dear T,

Sorry to hear you're in such a bind. I can't wave a magic wand and make it easy, but maybe I can help you see the whole situation as clearly as possible. When we are able to see clearly, the solution is often right there in front of us, even if it is a bitter pill to swallow.

My first advice is to accept this conflict as an important challenge on your spiritual journey. It is not random or meaningless. There's something in this that you need to learn from.

There are two guys who want to kill you, an administration that doesn't care, guards who will turn the other way, etc. At the same time, as part of your spiritual journey, every problem carries a teaching for your own good, and you never have to go through these things alone.

Your chief problem – and I think the center of this teaching God is sending you – is that you have vowed not to harm others anymore, and yet you don't yet feel ready to die for your beliefs.

One of those positions has to give. If nonviolence is the most important principle, then have faith that God will decide whether you live or die. Mahatma Gandhi walked right up to the guy who was hired to kill him and said, "Here I am. Do what you need to do." He would easily choose dying over fighting. The guy fell at his feet crying, by the way.

If I were attacked nowadays, I would probably defend myself, because I am not where Gandhi was. But I would do it – as you can do also – making every possible effort not to lose myself in

anger, and not to kill my opponent. If you are a skilled martial artist, then it is not very difficult for you to incapacitate your opponent rather than kill him. Break his leg, knock him out, break his jaw. Why would you need to kill him?

My son, Josh, is a black belt in Aikido. When a disturbed homeless man tried to steal the winter coat of a poor child Josh was taking care of, Josh apologized to the homeless guy for not being able to allow him to take the coat. He said several times, "I'm sorry, and I don't want to hurt you, but please understand that I can't allow you to take this child's only coat. So it's your choice – you can give it back, or I will be forced to take it from you, and I really don't want to do that." That encounter did not result in a fight, and the kid got his coat back.

So does your problem stem from those guys on death row, or the guards, or the prison, or from your own confusion and spiritual pride? The cons and guards and prison are just doing their normal prison stuff, aren't they? You can never fully control all of that. You can only choose your own response to it.

Wow! I'm half-assed glad I have a little over seven years to go on my ten year sentence, otherwise I might not have time to absorb *We're All Doing Time*.

Still practicing sitting still... A

Either decide that not fighting is worth dying for, and rely on God to be with you "in the valley of the shadow of death;" or else consider that maybe your vow not to fight

was a little prideful. You do not have Gandhi's fearlessness about dying. Gandhi's life did not matter at all to Gandhi; he had long ago given it over to God. If your life matters very much to you, then acknowledge the truth of where you are in your journey, and act in accordance with that truth.

God may be giving you this lesson now so you can set yourself on a truer path with more humility and self-honesty. All of us should avoid violence as much as possible. But especially in prison, you cannot always guarantee you can live without ever raising your fist. What would happen if you needed to defend someone else? Would you allow someone to be raped or beaten to death just so you can keep your promise not to fight?

You mentioned that you are a Buddhist. The Buddha himself committed murder in a previous life. He was told that a certain evil man was going to sink a ferry carrying five hundred people. The Buddha prayed and reflected over what to do. Should he kill the man to save five hundred lives? Or should he remain nonviolent, letting life proceed as it must? Finally, he chose to kill the man, but not just to save all those lives. The Buddha killed the man for the man's own sake, to save him from the karma of committing five hundred murders.

You should try to spare those death row guys from the karma of killing you. That is the whole basis of Aikido – it is an act of mercy to defend yourself, so that your attacker is prevented from bringing more harm into the world and to himself. It's not you *versus* anyone. You've been seeing only from your personal point of view. That's understandable, but it won't get you to where you want to go.

The other thing you seem to be giving up on without trying is to transfer into SMU or another prison. You said the administration doesn't care, but that is *their* part. You need to do what is right for you to do, and let others wrestle with their own decisions. Tell the chaplain or a caseworker the situation, ask for their help to avoid bloodshed, and see what happens.

And obviously, trying to communicate as clearly as possible with the guys who threaten to kill you is something else you need to do. Make it clear you do not wish to see them as enemies, and that they have serious choices to make in their own lives about all of this. Appeal to the highest in them, not because you know it "will work," but simply because it is the right thing to do. If you do wind up having to go toe-to-toe with these guys, you need to know you did everything within your power to resolve it nonviolently. Your letter shows a lot of "why bother, nothing will work," which is not productive.

Back to the beginning – accept this important teaching. Use it. Walk with it in an honorable

way. Don't keep treating it as an annoyance which should not be happening. That would be missing the point big time. And please keep me posted, okay? I care, and we'll be praying for you. Miracles do happen, you know. But we have to do a lot of work sometimes to receive them.

Your loving brother, Bo



Hi folks,

Bo, I am having a very hard time being on the outside. The drugs are calling me very strongly. I have always loved to drink, so that's doing a number on me too. I just want a simple life with my old lady and my kids. Things are pretty confusing at this point in time. I got another D.W.I. This is the 3rd and they want to give me the max. of 5 years. I don't see it. I may be totally selfish and self-centered, but... I am almost to the point of giving up, of just ending it all. It's got to be better than this, for sure. Can't find my center space anymore. The peace is gone. I would love to have another copy of your book, mine was kept in jail. I really enjoyed the story about the big tough con and the kitty-cat. The story of the artist (forgot his name) touched me; I am very sad he is gone. Especially the way he went. I want to thank you for listening to me again. Truly hope yourself and Sita are fine.

Love to you both, L

Dear L,

I'm sorry to hear that times are so rough that you are considering taking the

wrong way out. There is a way out that will not traumatize and scar your wife and kids for the rest of their lives: It's called clean and sober. And you can do it. Millions of people are doing it. It may be hard, but you can do it rather than die.

See if your lawyer can make a deal for a mandated

Thanks for being there. Words cannot express my gratitude. My mental health and spiritual well being have never been this good. I took myself off all the medication they had been giving me (psychotropics) and its been 6 months now and I feel really good, all things considered.

I'll be seeing the parole board the first part of August, and maybe possibly I might get a parole. Regardless of what may happen at that time, I feel I can handle the decision either way it goes. Again thanks. I don't believe the positives that have happened recently would have been possible without the awareness I've been shown through your help.

Peace, M



Scott McTaggart, Georgia

serious recovery program, like a one- or two-year residential program. Not 28-day or anything short; you've probably done those before. If you don't know of any in Louisiana, there are several right here in NC that we are friends with. Two years away from your family is not as bad as five years in prison or being dead, and away from them forever. And the two-year programs work. It's a long enough time to shed old habits and form new ones.

Suicide is a coward's way out. You need to think of your family, not just yourself. They need to see that you can deal with your problems in an honorable way. How else will your kids believe that they will be able to deal with their problems? Don't you want to break this cycle, so your kids aren't being sentenced for D.W.I.'s in twenty years?

Come on, L. It's hero time and you're it. Please do the right thing. We are sending you copies of my books again, and I hope they help you get back to a bigger view than selfishness. But in the meantime, this one is right now and it requires your immediate attention. You need to do this, and you need to do it now. Make this Christmas a real birth of the very highest spirit in you. That's what it is about.

Love, Bo

FAMILY NEWS — FROM INDIA

Dear Family,

At the time of this writing we (Sita, Joanne and Madri) have been back from India for almost a month. We traveled to many ashrams and holy places from North to South. India was humbling, sobering, and joyful; it deepened and challenged our faith in many ways. Some of the highlights of our trip were:

- In Rishikesh at the sacred Ganges River, we immersed the ashes of a beloved nineteen-year-old friend who died in a car crash last August. The ceremony was to release her soul from the physical plane, and was very moving for all of us.
- Also in Rishikesh, we met Vandana Mataji, a Catholic nun (with an Indian guru) who told us the necessity for "absolute faith in God." Looking into her luminous eyes, we knew that she lived this, and that it is possible for all of us, too.
- The mountain village of Dharamsala is home to thousands of Tibetan refugees, and there we met a twenty-six year old monk who escaped persecution from the Chinese government. Like most Tibetan refugees in India, he arrived by making a treacherous journey across the snowy Himalayas. Although he could safely stay in India, he told us he missed his family and wanted to help his people, so he was planning on turning himself in at the border to Chinese authorities and expects to be put in prison for up to two years. Sita cried when he told her this and he said, "it's okay, you can cry." Please keep the Tibetan people in your prayers.
- Chris, an American ex-con in the south Indian city of Tiruvannamali, was very excited to meet us. Chris read Bo's books while in prison. While inside, he dreamed of one day living near Arunachala, the hill where the sage Ramana Maharshi stayed his entire life. Chris is living there now and wanted us to tell all of you not to give up on your dreams.

Of course, dear friends, most of what we experienced is hard to put into words. We hope we are deeper and humbler and stronger in our faith as a result of our pilgrimage. We send our love and gratitude to you for keeping us in your prayers. There were some tough times in India when we could certainly feel them. God bless you all.

Love,

*Sita
Madri
Joanne*



Sita, Madri & Joanne after the ceremony at the Ganges



Tibetan monk friend



Arunachala



Joanne, Sita & Madri at an Ashram



Vandana

NEWS, NOTES AND OFFERINGS

MIRACLES PRISONER MINISTRY

This Christian ministry is founded on the teachings of Jesus, the 12 Step Program (based on AA) and A Course in Miracles. MPM provides inmates with written literature, audio/visual tapes and CD's, as well as on-site individualized self-help training programs. Their purpose is to aid in the change of an inmate's mind from one full of hate and fear to one fostering forgiveness, peace, self-determination and cooperation. To receive materials, send your name and complete and accurate mailing address to: (Be sure to tell them about any special requirements, and include your ID#)

Miracles Prisoner Ministry
501 E Adams
Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965

KARMA BOOK STILL AVAILABLE TO PRISONERS

The response from our last newsletter for this Karma book has been wonderful, and Larson Publications would like to offer this once again. The book *What Is Karma?* by Paul Brunton, is being offered free to prisoners in the US and Canada. The book is a positive view of karma: What karma is, how it works, its relation to forgiveness and freedom, and how to get it working for you. (Please check your regulations to make sure you can receive the book. Also, be sure to tell them about any special requirements, and include your ID#) Write:

Larson Publications, Dept K
4936 Route 414
Burdett, NY 14818

ARTWORK PROGRAM FOR INMATES

Create Me Free is a free program for all imprisoned artists & writers to express themselves, explore ideas and artistic techniques and gain an audience for their work (there is no compensation). Create Me Free considers art to be a tool for growth and a way of raising public awareness of the issues which are relevant to prison life. Create Me Free produces a quarterly magazine of art and ideas. For more information or to contribute artwork (you will not receive the artwork back), write to:

Create Me Free
2009 N Rosemary
Tucson AZ 85716

BO'S RECENT TRAVELS

In February, Bo gave workshops at Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary (PA) and Macomb Correctional Facility (MI), and a talk at the Church of Today in Warren, Michigan. He was allowed to go from cell-to-cell in the lock-up wings at Lewisburg to meet prisoners who had requested his visit. Bo was deeply moved by the men he met there, and when one of them said that he was hoping to be strong enough to resist drugs when he was released, Bo reminded him, "Ron, look at where you are! If you have stayed sane and human in this cage for three years, you are strong enough to do anything you ever need to do! Remember that!"



Steve Harper & Bo

At Macomb in Michigan, Bo was delighted to jam with the prison band, leading "Knocking on Heaven's Door" for everyone to sing along with. He sends special thanks to the band and to Steve Harper (see photo), whose efforts led to prison officials inviting Bo to come.

NEW PRISON WORKSHOP VIDEO

One of Bo's most recent prison workshops, this tape was recorded by a prisoner video crew at Ionia, Michigan, last July. Uncharacteristically, the camera did pan around the room of about 200 prisoners and focused on prisoners' faces as they asked questions, so the viewer can get a good feel of what the evening was like. If you would like a copy, the price is \$20, or we will be happy to send it free to prison staff for use in a facility. Please refer to our code of "VIP" when ordering this video.



[Envelope art by Beth O'Dell, Virginia]

a little good news

is a publication of Human Kindness Foundation, which is non-profit and tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code. Donations and bequests are 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 and workshops and the other projects of the Foundation.

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Human Kindness Foundation

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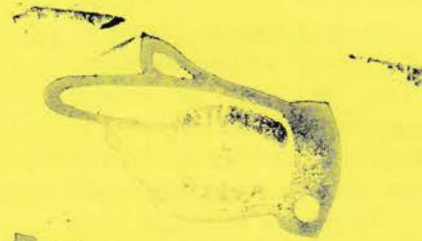
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www.humankindness.org

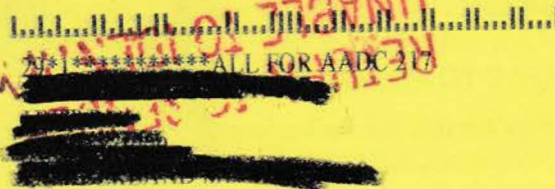
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The Crystal Globe

I told the guestmaster I'd like to become a monk

"What kind of monk?" he asked. "A real monk?"

"Yes," I said.

He poured me a cup of wine. "Here, take this." No sooner had I drunk it than I became aware of a crystal globe forming around me. It began to expand until finally it surrounded him too. This monk, who a minute before had seemed so commonplace, now took on an astonishing beauty. I was struck dumb. After a bit the thought came to me, "Maybe I should tell him how beautiful he is—perhaps he doesn't even know."

But I really *was* dumb—that wine had burned out my tongue! But so great was my happiness at the sight of such beauty that I thought it was well worth the price of my tongue. When he made me a sign to leave, I turned away, confident that the memory of that beauty would be a joy forever.

But what was my surprise when I found that with each person I met it was the same—as soon as he would pass unwittingly into my crystal globe, I could see his beauty too. And I knew it was real.

Is this what it means to be a REAL monk—to see the beauty in others and to be silent?

from *Tales of a Magic Monastery* by Theophane the Monk