

WHO AM I?



# WHO AM I?

ATHANASIUS YOHAN I METROPOLITAN

Who Am I?

(English)

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# DEDICATION

To you my friend  
for words of stimulus  
that inspired me to sketch  
images with words  
to re-kindle kindness  
for a broken world.



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Fr Dr Daniel Johnson, Jeena Kochamma and Felix,  
you made this little book a reality.  
I remain grateful. Thank you.



# INTRODUCTION

**K**indness. There are no words that can give justice to the importance of kindness. *Kindness* overshadows truth, lies, wars, all forms of evil and values. Think about it: our very survival depends on the kindness of people around us, even the months we spent in our mother's womb. We yearn for warmth, not an icy cold life as might be lived in the North Pole!

We are living in the ice age of emotions. The number one killer in this generation is loneliness.<sup>1</sup> Why do millions die of starvation? In part, it is because kindness has been dying out from the human heart and selfishness and greed are taking over.

Think about it; the world is full of pain, violence, devastation, yet we can go on because there are *some* who are kind and compassionate.

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It has been scientifically proven that kindness and compassion are factors enabling people to live longer and happier lives. Psychiatrist Alberto Alberti said, “Love that is *not* expressed becomes hate; joy that is *not* enjoyed becomes depression.”<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note that Sri Buddha in his teaching talked about the many benefits of kindness. He basically said that if you are kind, you will sleep well; you will have happy dreams; you will be able to love. People love you; celestial beings love you; weapons will not harm you; your face will be radiant; your mind will be serene; you will have a happy ending.<sup>3</sup>

In this booklet is a poem that I wrote. The poem has everything to do with the present tense—the way in which we choose to live this day before us; everything to do with how we see others. It is a choice we must make to see the people around us which will in turn cultivate empathy, which then leads to compassion and kindness.

## INTRODUCTION

Aldous Huxley was a pioneer in the study of philosophies and practical ways to develop human potential and understand the meaning of life. When asked what the best technique for achieving happiness and transforming lives was, he responded by saying, “I have to say that the best answer is—just be a little kinder.”<sup>4</sup>

The Dalai Lama’s motto, “My religion is kindness,”<sup>5</sup> sounds so simple, yet it is so profound.

Do we not read in the Holy Bible, “God *is* love”?<sup>6</sup> And all of God’s revelation is summed up in this, “Love God and love *others*.”<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of caste, creed, nationality, colour of skin and religion, we all are created by the living God who made us in His image, and one of the reflections of that is love and kindness.

It was just hours before writing this poem that I was on the way to the

## WHO AM I?

airport to catch another 21-hour-long flight on a journey to another nation and another people. It is not fun anymore for this soul. I once told someone, “It looks like my home is the suitcase!”

My mind wandered throughout the many journeys I had taken before. I thought about the many people that I have met and visited with, from so many nations and peoples.

I could see the people I had met in the slums and in the leper colonies. I thought about the plight of women and young girls selling their bodies in prostitution. I remembered all I had read and learned about human trafficking, and of the thousands who commit suicide. My mind went to people who are dying from starvation, the millions of child labourers toiling without any choice. I recalled watching the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* that made me weep.

All of a sudden, I began to see myself in the shoes of those tens of

## INTRODUCTION

thousands of broken lives that I had encountered over the years. I could feel their anguish. I was humbled. Out of that reflection, I wrote the poem included in this little book, “Who Am I?”

I hope this little poem that comes from my journey of imagination helps you go one step further in living more compassionately.





# WHO AM I?

Born I was, for sure . . .  
but when,  
where,  
to whom—  
I don't know.

*Who am I?*  
A beggar boy  
An orphan  
on the streets  
A coolie  
at a railway station

## WHO AM I?

A servant

to a rich family

A seller

of peanuts and lottery tickets

A sick, dying man

on a government hospital veranda

A trash-picker

trying to make a living

An untouchable boy

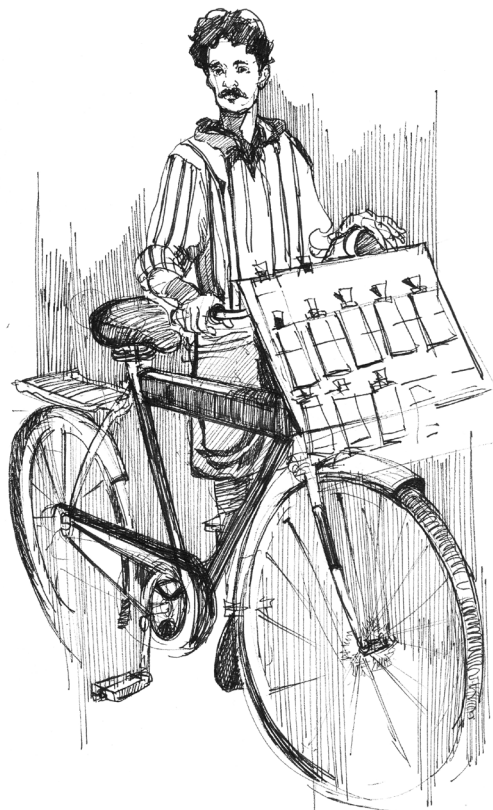
who is a slave to a landlord

A thief

caught by police for stealing food from a shop

A scrap-buyer

striving to feed my family





WHO AM I?

A half-naked coolie,  
    for I own no change of clothes  
An aborted child  
    for they did not want me  
A *beggar* for a pimp<sup>8</sup>  
    I was kidnapped and blinded  
A prostitute  
    in a cage with no freedom of my own  
    abused often for any kind of resistance  
An untouchable,  
    hated by all  
An outcast  
    afflicted with leprosy just like my parents.



WHO AM I?

*What is life?*

I walk all day long  
for I have no money to board  
a train or bus.

I own no cycles; I just walk.

Sometimes I eat,  
often I go hungry.

I beg for food, my stomach is empty.  
Many times I have survived by the mercy  
of kind hotel owners;  
they let me wash and clean  
in exchange for food.

My nights are like the day,  
for I sleep on lit-up shop fronts.

## WHO AM I?

Often I awake with the sound  
of barking dogs.

I look for work but find none,  
I am too young or too old.

I own no phones.  
Toothbrush and toothpaste  
I have heard about,  
but I never owned them.

Pounded more times than I can remember,  
sometimes by police that mistook me for  
the thief they were looking for.

I don't read or write  
for I have never gone to school.



WHO AM I?

I don't have any friends.

I am alone,

a wanderer having nowhere to go.

I limp on one leg, for an auto rickshaw

ran over me.

Hospital I went to,

but they threw me out.

My past is present and my future is

present.

I pray but don't know if God hears me—

a lonely shadow that no one notices

What is life?

I ask a hundred times,

I ask again.

## WHO AM I?

Thoughts of killing myself under the  
force of a speeding train.

How many kill themselves?

How many simply disappear  
from streets and slums,  
boys and girls like me?

Only God knows.

WHO AM I?

*Who am I?*

A dalit child eating mud to survive.

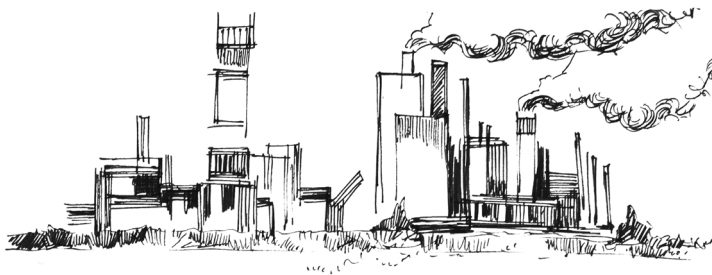
Wandering half naked on the streets  
with many like me.

Sometime, I cry alone  
while hundreds of flies crawling all  
over me.

Drinking muddy, dirty water from the  
sewage  
to quench my thirst.

Crying  
for the monkey snatched away  
my bread.

Kicked and driven away by railway police



WHO AM I?

for I was picking food crumbs  
from the railway platform.

I take a bath from public water taps,  
but I cannot dry myself for the  
lack of a towel.

The only clothing I have is the torn,  
one-piece cloth I own,  
black and dirty  
for I have no soap to  
wash it.

## WHO AM I?

*Who am I?*

A runaway child, trying to find hope in a  
mega city.

I get a verbal abuse from my mistress that  
I work for in a kitchen.

I did nothing wrong—  
but I cannot complain,  
for where can I go?

They have a temple in their house,  
but I am not allowed  
to see their god.

I wonder: *Who is this god they are praying to?*  
*Is he only their god and not a*  
*god to the poor and destitute like me?*







WHO AM I?

*Who am I?*

I am one among the thousands of street  
children,

the ones who do not know  
where they come from  
or where they are going.

Sometimes on public street corners,  
I hear a politician speak.

I do not understand what he says,  
but others tell me  
we will get food and clothes if we  
vote for him.

Then others say, he is a liar, rich and  
affluent—

WHO AM I?

do not trust one word he says.

The life of an animal is much better  
and I wish I was born an animal  
in India, my homeland.

Shivering from bitter cold in winter time,  
for I own no blankets.

Forced to sell drugs by older kids.

Often bullied by bigger kids

Rejected

Molested

Accused

Maligned.

Failed more than succeeded.

## WHO AM I?

Never been loved or accepted.

Called dumb by friends.

Often angry and bitter at being betrayed  
by those I thought to be friends.

I *try* myself to sleep from the  
pain of loneliness.

WHO AM I?

*Who am I?*

A peddler of trinkets on the streets  
for my living.

Tourists take pictures of me,  
for them I smile  
but they do not know on  
the inside I cry.

In return for food,  
sometimes I wash plates and cups  
and clean latrines in hotels.

At night I sleep on the shop verandas.





WHO AM I?

*Who am I?*

A hired servant I am to a rich family.

My working hours are from sunrise  
to midnight.

I collect my boss' children from school  
every day.

I ask them to teach me.

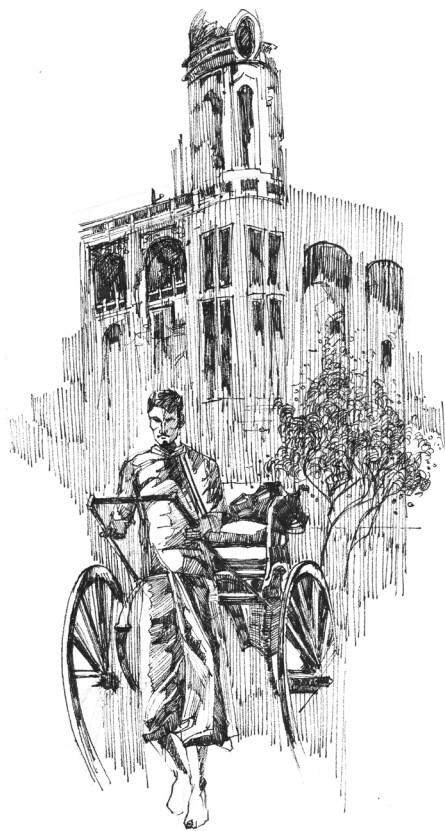
They mock me,  
saying, "You have no brain;  
you cannot learn."

WHO AM I?

*Who am I?*

I am a common labourer,  
a daily wage earner  
trying to feed my mouth.  
Days without end—  
I find no job and we starve,  
waiting for another day to  
bring hope.





WHO AM I?

*Who am I?*

A homeless man living on the street,  
still a meanderer,  
picker of trash  
for a living,  
newspaper delivery man,  
but my body is weak  
and cannot walk fast anymore.

I wish I had a bicycle  
that could help to save me—  
but it is only a dream...

Now I cannot walk anymore,  
I am sick  
in every inch of my body.

## WHO AM I?

I settled on one corner of the street,  
people by the thousands walk by my  
“plight.”

A few good and kindhearted people  
give their coins.  
Some joked and laughed, thinking I am a  
con artist.

Some nights the dogs keep me awake.  
There is *one* little dog that likes me,  
and he is my only friend  
in this world

When I sleep he watches over me;  
sometimes he becomes  
my pillow to rest on.

WHO AM I?

Looking into my deep, sorrowful eyes,  
my dog cries and mourns,  
and I know he cares.

From hunger pains, I curl up like a “C”;  
drank the water I had.

My loving dog disappeared,  
I do not know where he went.

He appeared with a large piece of bread,  
like a bone in his jaws.

Dropped by my side, he woke me up  
like a mother would do.

He wagged his tail in love  
when I ate it all.





WHO AM I?

Where did the dog get the bread?

Did he steal it?

Or snatch it from somewhere?

I know he did not buy it.

Maybe a kind man gave it to him  
seeing a hungry dog?

Kindness overshadows.

I am no doctor,

but the way my loving dog looks  
at me,

he knows something

I don't know.

WHO AM I?

My days on earth are coming to a close,  
and now the only worry I have is  
for my only friend—my dog—  
what will happen to him  
when I die?

I am sad,  
he understands  
and I hug him as often as  
I can.

He does the same to me,  
licking my tears.  
He sleeps beside my lifeless body and  
dirty old blanket.



WHO AM I?

Finally I fall asleep  
and wish to myself  
it would be eternal.





WHO AM I?

I dreamt

Dressed in black,  
galloping toward me—  
the Angel of Death.

Frightened.

Gripped with fear,  
in despair,  
scared to death  
afraid to die.

I cried out to all the gods and saints  
I could remember,  
including Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Jesus Christ—

WHO AM I?

to take pity,  
to have mercy on me.

For I felt, I was the worst human being,  
at the bottom of the pit,  
all so dark and gloomy.

Wonder of wonder!  
Frightening joy!  
Light so bright!  
Glory unspeakable  
—engulfed me in it.

Did not know whether  
I should cry or laugh.  
There beside my fragile body

WHO AM I?

the *most* beautiful,  
incomparable,  
so glorious  
woman appeared.

Clothed in a pure white sari,  
the end of her sari  
covering her head.

Instantly I knew  
it was the Blessed Mary,  
the Mother of God.

Her eyes beamed with  
love and kindness.

I wanted to fall at her feet  
and worship.

WHO AM I?

I tried,  
but she stopped me,  
“I too am His creation like you,” she said.  
“He, Jesus, sent me to *you*.”

Sitting beside me,  
she stroked my forehead.  
With her loving hand,  
*love* began to flow  
into my broken life.

When she spoke,  
it penetrated my whole  
being, like music  
that I had never heard.

She got up, and I tried

WHO AM I?

to grab her feet,  
for I did not want her to go.  
Said I in desperation,  
“Please, Mother, take me with  
you.”  
Smiling with love,  
she simply said,  
“It is Jesus you need.  
He loves you—  
enough to die for you.”  
I sank down crying.  
All of a sudden, I saw Jesus—  
hanging on the cross.

WHO AM I?

His blood being poured out.

“For you, my son, I am  
dying so you will live.”

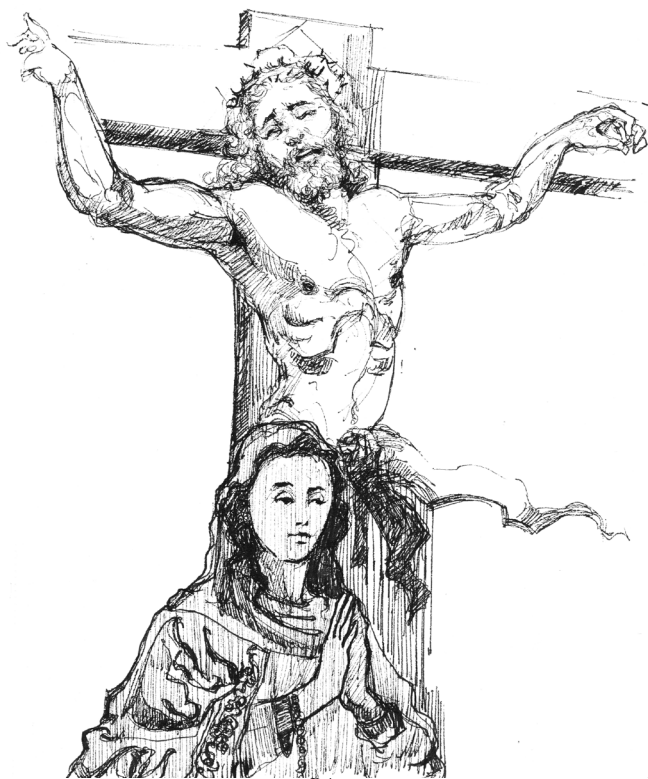
Words so powerful  
from His mouth.

My heart was bursting!  
With love and hope!

I cried out, saying:  
“Jesus Christ!  
Have *mercy* on me.”

Voice so gentle,  
I hear from the cross:  
“You are healed of sin and death.





WHO AM I?

Come.

Follow Me.”

*Awakened* from my dream,  
awestruck.

It took days for me to  
believe

it was real.

Freed from sin and guilt!  
Healed in body and mind!  
Heart filled with love!  
Even my dog looked changed.

A week goes by,  
still walking in ecstasy,  
thinking of the most beautiful

WHO AM I?

face of Mother Mary  
and of the new life I now have.

I no more think of death,  
for no more the death angel  
has power over me.

A week later,  
I was strolling along.  
I saw a church so beautiful.  
In front of it  
was a statue of Blessed Mary.

I walk my dog to the door,  
hoping to find someone to tell  
what had happened to me.



## WHO AM I?

I enter the church,  
my dog and I,  
surprised to meet the priest with  
a smile as a welcome sign.

It was as though  
he knew I was coming.

And hearing my story  
he hugged me, saying:  
“You saw Mother Mary,  
and the Lord Jesus even spoke to  
you!

You are so blessed,  
more than I ever can be!”

Now I am not alone,

WHO AM I?

will never be alone.  
For I am part of His *Holy Church*.  
Slowly but surely,  
the *season* of my life changed.  
From poverty and nothingness,  
a small business I started  
with the help from my priest  
flourished beyond words.  
No more I am homeless.  
Blessed with a family.  
which I never had  
I say, “God You are amazing!”  
I still keep a piece of my *old blanket*,



## WHO AM I?

a daily reminder, 'who I am'.  
Yes, my loving dog is still with me.  
All seems like a beautiful dream.

Life is so beautiful  
when overshadowed by God and His Holy Church.  
I think in silence  
and ask myself,  
Who Am I?

The answer I hear,  
deep within,  
a dying body,  
the dwelling place  
of  
my soul and spirit.



WHO AM I?

Invisible now

but it will not always be so,  
and someday  
the invisible  
will be visible  
and *God* I shall see,<sup>9</sup>  
all the saints and hosts of heaven  
where time shall no more be.

A world where

end is always the beginning  
and there is no beginning or end!

Imagine!



## A REFLECTION

I woke up from my daydream and the world of imagination. *None* of what I had imagined was true of my own life, but so much of it is a result of my encounter and conversations with hundreds of broken lives in my brief pilgrimage on earth. Empathy let me enter and walk into their world for those moments.

Earlier that night, a dear friend had called me and reminded me of some of the accomplishments of my life. My friend remarked, “How can someone do so much in such a short time of their earthly life?”

I never really stopped to think about things like that. While my loving friend was talking, all of a sudden, I was struck by a strange thought, *Who am I without this list of accomplishments? Why was I allowed to do these things?*

## WHO AM I?

As I was reflecting, I thought about King David who made the confession, “Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that you have brought me this far?”<sup>10</sup>

I found myself thinking, *I am the youngest of six sons, born and raised in a tiny village in a tiny state in India. Why, Lord, did You call me to serve You?*

Think about this: You and I never made a contract with God Almighty, “If You let me be born in this particular home, nation and circumstance, then I will do all these good things for You and others.” We had no such choice. It was and is all God’s mercy and grace. There is no reason, nothing for us to be proud of or take credit for our accomplishments or success.

I am the least and the last in every way, and I never felt qualified to do what I am doing. It was only by God’s mercy and grace that any one of those stories I saw and imagined were not my own.

## A REFLECTION

I looked at myself and was grateful to God for His great mercy in giving me a life of giving to others, a life blessed beyond what words can describe. I fell on my knees asking God for forgiveness for the sin of presumption. Here was another day, another moment to make a vow to embrace humility and learn. Who am I? A big ‘zero’ without God’s mercy.

So, who am I?

You tell me.

I am simply a few pounds of flesh hanging on some bones, yet deep inside and invisible there is a soul and spirit.

So, who am I?

Nothing... except the *invisible*.<sup>11</sup>

May God help all of us to embrace deep humility always and in all our ways!<sup>12</sup>



# PRAYER

*Dear God,*

Our finite minds cannot fathom or understand why there is so much suffering in this world. We know that You created all that is visible and invisible. You have all power, yet there is a mystery that we grapple with: Why are some spared from suffering and pain, and others suffer like Job?

Even when we do not understand the mystery of Your doings, we choose to believe in Your sovereign grace and mercy.

Forgive us for so easily forgetting we are no different or better than anyone we meet or live with.

Those of us who are blessed with better health, finances, skills and

## WHO AM I?

circumstances have no reason to be proud of who we are and what we have. It is all Your mercy and grace.

Please help us to remember, we are blessed to bless others, to be the visible hand of the loving God for those who are less fortunate than us.<sup>13</sup>

May we grow in humility and compassion, in the way You lived on earth when You became one of us. Thank You, that You even chose Your name to be “Jesus”—“the One who saves.”<sup>14</sup>

We pray for the suffering millions without any hope. Please, in your great mercy and love, draw them to You by the Holy Spirit and we pray, if it takes a visit from the saints in heaven, angels or the Blessed Mother Mary to point them to You Lord Jesus, their only hope, please do it.

Almighty God, we ask of You to help us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who is our example, as to how we must live during this brief time You granted us here on earth.



## PRAYER

We say this prayer to You, Father in heaven, in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray to You in His name. Amen. ✠



# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey>. (Accessed October 25, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Piero Ferrucci, *The Power of Kindness: The Unexpected Benefits of Leading a Compassionate Life* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2016), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ferrucci, *The Power of Kindness*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 4:8 NIV\*

<sup>7</sup> St Matthew 22:35-40 NIV\*

<sup>8</sup> Watch the movie, *Slumdog Millionaire*.

<sup>9</sup> Job 19:27\*

<sup>10</sup> Job 19:20\*

<sup>11</sup> 2 Samuel 7:18 New King James\*

## WHO AM I?

<sup>12</sup> “May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”  
(1 Thessalonians 5:23)\*

<sup>13</sup> “So teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12)\*

<sup>14</sup> “As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.” (Psalm 103:15–16)\*

<sup>15</sup> “For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night. You carry them away like a flood; They are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up: In the morning it flourishes and grows up; In the evening it is cut down and withers.” (Psalm 90:4–6, 10)\*

<sup>16</sup> “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever. (Ecclesiastes 1:2–4)\*

<sup>17</sup> “He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)\*

<sup>18</sup> “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” (St Matthew 1:21)\*

<sup>19</sup> “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.” (St John 16:23b)\*

<sup>20</sup> “Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” Mark Twain

<sup>21</sup> “Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for a kindness.” Seneca

<sup>22</sup> “It is a kingly act to assist the fallen.” Mother Teresa

## ENDNOTES

<sup>23</sup> “If you count God’s blessings, you can never number it; surely God is All-forgiving. All-compassionate.”  
Quran 16:18

<sup>24</sup> “When a person responds to the joy and sorrows of others as if they were his own, he has attained the highest state of spiritual union.” Bhagavat Gita 6:32

<sup>25</sup> “Wisdom, compassion and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men.”—  
Confucious.

<sup>26</sup> “Our God is the same God, where compassion is equal for all.

For we did not weave the web of life.

We are merely a strand in it.

Whatever we do to the web we do to ourself.

Let us give thanks for the web and the circle that connects us.

Thanks be to God, the God of all.”—*Chief Seattle, Native American Leader*

P.S. I would love to hear from you: [tometropolitan@bec.org](mailto:tometropolitan@bec.org)

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\* 6–7, 9–19 Quotations are taken from The Holy Bible





