

## Introduction

In 2001 an old man came to my home in the Middle Valley of the Rio Grande in New Mexico. He was short, slight, and burned from working in the sun. He wore a suit that was clearly new, though very cheap. His shoes were polished, though very worn. With black hair, parted at the side, he came bowed from what must have been much work in fields or with animals.

I do not know how he knew of me, of my dedication to DOG. But he knew. He spoke only a little English, and I spoke Portuguese, which was close enough to Spanish that we were able to communicate.

He came, he said, from a small village in the state of Chihuahua in Mexico, which for the safety of him and his fellow villagers I will not name. There, he told me, they have followed in the way of DOG for many generations, so many they cannot count nor remember who was the first. They have preserved the stories and the wisdom and the ways of DOG, he said, and of DOG's only Puppy, NAV. They know these, he said, by telling them at night as they share their food, the frijoles and maíz and chile, with sometimes a little meat from a rabbit; at the great holy days they slaughter a goat. They fear now because there are many narcotraficantes who demand that they help with the carrying of drugs and that they give their land to growing drugs. They resist but only in peace, they will not harm a human nor a dog. But the narcotraficantes are not moved, and those in the village fear now that their village will be no more.

They have protected for many generations, no one knows how long, what they are sure are writings of the way of DOG. They are written in a strange script on tabletas de oro, and he showed me one, a small tablet of gold, about 12 inches by 7 inches by 1 inch. It was beautiful, polished gold, shining with a kind of inner light. The others, he said, they have buried, they are afraid of the men with the guns who are greedy. This and this only he was able to bring to show me. It was gold, no doubt, it was solid gold. On it were a series of paw prints, tiny paw prints, in lines across the tablet, one line, then a space and another line, and another line until the entire tablet was filled. These he was sure contained the stories and the wisdom of the way of DOG and of DOG's only Puppy, NAV. But we cannot read them; perhaps our ancestors knew, but we do not. There are many of them, he said. Then he brought from his cardboard suitcase many sheets of paper. These, he said, they are made by frotando, rubbing across the tablets with crayons. The tiny paw prints stood out, clearly enough, though

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often smeared. I looked at them and at the tablet of gold with awe. The stories were true: they, the ancient ones, had placed tablets of gold throughout the world with the stories and wisdom of DOG.

And now this old man, wizened, had brought one for me to see, to know that they do exist, and with it the rubbings from the other tablets. These, he said, are all the writings we have. We hope they are all. We do not know. They have always been preserved as the Bark of DOG, and we cannot believe anyone would have lost or sold one.

He gave me the rubbings, the copies he had made, and begged me to decipher them, to read the strange script. I could not. I told him I could try, but it might take much time. It was only markings to me; I could not see the pattern in them. Stay with me, I said, tell me the stories and the wisdom of DOG that you know. But the old man shook his head sadly. Necesito regresar, I must return, they wait for me, they are afraid, and I tell them the stories and wisdom of DOG so we will be strong in our love and not hate those who would hurt us. They wait for me. I will leave with you the rubbings, the marks of the tablets. I will take with me the tableta de oro, it must be with the others, to take it away even this little time was hard, a great risk, so far from our home and the place where the others rest. I must bury it with the other tabletas, all the tabletas de oro together, so that the men with lust and hate and greed do not find them. I will leave with you these rubbings. They must be enough. Find the meaning in them. Then come to us with these stories, this wisdom that we may know and correct what we have been saying. Our words and the small dogs' barks are always a little different each time we tell the stories. We want to know the true Bark of DOG.

I was shaking. I could only nod, yes. Yes, I would try, it might take much time, but I will dedicate myself to understanding these marks, the paw prints. I begged him to stay and tell me the stories, I would drive him to the border, I would give him all, all I had, to him and to his fellow travelers in the way of DOG. But he shook his head, no. It is not for me, it is not for us. It is for the teaching of the way of love and peace that you must work. I must return the way I came, not with visa, not with papers, only my poor body across the Rio Grande. I have a little money, not much because I bought this suit when I arrived so I would not be ashamed in the presence of one who is holy to DOG. I nodded, filled with my mission, and said to him: Be never ashamed. Poverty is no shame, to be poor is no shame, there is no ceremony or glorious clothing we must wear. The only real poverty is the poverty of the heart that cannot love, the poverty of one who would

grasp for power instead of sharing. You are rich, much richer than I. You know the stories, I said, you have the power of love. Perhaps as I learn to read the paw prints on the tabletas de oro I will become as strong in love and sharing as you.

I took him into the town where he said he would wait for the bus to El Paso. I gave him food, I tried to give him money, I stayed with him every moment I could, listening to what he said of his village and the followers of DOG. The bus came. “Vaya con dogos,” he said. I took his hand and said, “Vaya con dogos.” And he left.

It has been a great burden, a great calling to understand these tablets, to find the way to their meaning. I feel it every day, and I feel that I am not worthy. DOG, I am not worthy. But I persist. After eight years, alone on my small ranch, I finally was touched by DOG, he placed his paw upon me, the mark of his paw is there on my shoulder, always it will be there. And I was able to see. The prints are a script for Classic Sumerian, an ancient language. So ancient that these writings must come from more than 2,500 years ago; the gold does not tarnish. Studying that language, hour after hour, day after day, month after month, now four years, I have come to understand the paw prints. Slowly the meaning has emerged. And I have become stronger in the way of love, the way of peace that DOG’s only Puppy, NAV, has taught us.

Now I have translations of the markings. I want to go to Mexico to find the old man and his village, to celebrate the stories and wisdom of DOG. But it is far, and I am old, and there is much danger. I have not heard from the old man since he left, and when I look at the satellite photos where the village should be I see only ruins, buildings aslant, and the fields look to be barren. I fear for them, though I know that if they have passed, then they have passed into the great flow of love of DOG and NAV and all others who have learned to love. Puede ser que se acabó el pueblo, pero no se acabó el amor.

Growing strong in the way of peace and love that DOG has given us, I have seen that my dogs are different with me. They play and bark with me, but they also seem closer, almost in awe. They have barked some message to me, and other dogs have come and smelled me and howled then jumped and danced with my dogs, circling me, playing, howling in some kind of joy. Those dogs leave, and others come, they smell me, howl and circle in a kind of ecstasy. One night I understood, DOG breathed in my ear, that I am now the DOGGY LAMA, the first human DOGGY LAMA. It is a great responsibility—not honor, for there

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is no honor to walk in the way of peace and love that DOG's only Puppy NAV teaches us. No honor, but the responsibility to live well, to be an example, and to teach.

I have translated as well as I can the paw prints, the strange markings that seem now to me as familiar as my hand. I understand them, I think, for I will never be sure. But this is what I have, and it is this I have written here. The rhythms, the rhymes of the Classic Sumerian I could not put into English. Each who translates must add his or her own voice, for me, the voice that DOG has given me. I put the writings in the order of the stories they tell. At the end of the chapter "The Birth of NAV" I have added a short paragraph of what the old man told me. And at the end of all I have put a little story called "The Animal Shelter" that I learned from my dogs and those who are near me. I have also included a report of a similar script for a prayer to NAV with the explanation of the provenance of that. But I have not been able to include a copy of the rubbings the old man brought to me. A year ago when I was gone from my ranch to get supplies, someone or something broke into the house. All that was taken, it seems, were those rubbings, the rubbings from the tabletas de oro—nothing else. I am not good with the computer, so I never made a scan of them. I kept them in a fireproof box, and I was certain my home was safe, no one had ever bothered it, far from other people at the end of a narrow dirt road. But they are lost, and in their place in the house, for many days, a lingering smell of cat, a smell I abhor.

I offer these writings, the stories and wisdom of the way of peace and love that DOG has given us through his only Puppy NAV. Read them slowly, no more than one on any day. Think. Then think with your heart. Practice the wisdom that we may live together in the flow of love.