

Mary Patterson
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Jump

Have you ever doubted your ability to make sound, life-transforming decisions? I have. The result for me was a life sentenced to vanilla mediocrity. The bedrock of my existence had become a sheer mountain of weight, developed over years. Layers of control and granite boulders of tightly wound feelings created this mountain. Standing on the highest pinnacle I wondered, "Should I jump?"

Nature offered up the visual that spurred me to do just that.

Over the years, I began to practice listening with a meditative mind and when I do, I always get my answers from people, places, and things that crop up in my path. This is my understanding of a spiritual practice. I will explain one such event that set me on a hot mocha, cinnamon-spiced course of adventure.

A trip to Seattle offered reunion hugs from loving family, time to meditate, and time to chew these jerky-like thoughts. I needed to mash, grind, and pulverize them into mush. Then spit them out concluding they were un-digestible to me. Only then could I, exhaustedly, surrender the fact that this was just too tough and too scary for me, alone. I needed a walk. I needed my Mother. I needed my Mother-Nature. I needed motivation that would sustain me through the trying times ahead. I needed more than a friend cheering me on. Nature often offers up the visuals I can hang-on to when I grow weary.

According to an internet site authored by Seawolf, "In Native American Tradition, Medicine is anything that will aid the seeker in feeling more connected and in harmony with nature and all life-forms. To find a special Medicine that would give answers for a personal challenge or problem our Ancestors would often walk in the forests or on the mesas to observe the portents or signs that would assist them in healing and seeking wisdom."

As usual, my walk began in deep contemplation of my dilemma and the need for a decision. I asked questions. What was it that was so lacking in this marriage? What did I want if this was not it? Why did I so often feel the sting of under-developed personal interests? Why did I overlook constant critical and crotchety behavior from him? Maybe it was too late for these changes in my life. Oh my God... what if I lived another 30 years like this?

I journeyed about a mile and a half before letting go of my own thoughts and questions to live in the moment, where my feet were, each moment. The setting was plump with vivid, crisp greens in variegated tones. Tiny purple flowers were beginning to sprout up randomly in the grass and the freshness of walking in an unfamiliar Pacific Northwest gave me a spring-like, optimistic anticipation of a fresh perspective. I was actively participating in all that I could see.

Then, as if begging for me to hear their story, two trees lured me closer. Reading them, I began to wonder how they came to be together. There was no obvious planting or planned geography around me. This was a field and other trees around were not nestled into each other. One tree was not an offspring of the other. A majestic, towering fir tree and a full-canopied, deciduous tree stood side-by-

side. It was, possibly, the odd outstretched branch of the fir dipping deep into the canopy of the smaller that caught my eye. The rest of the branches were relatively uniform. This comforting, shoulder-hugging gesture gave me pause.

Each tree had a unique identity that spoke to me. The fir was a rich luxurious green with black and brown undertones in the depths. Contrasting silvery tips glistened on the sun-drenched outer needles. Only peep-holes of light shown through its core and the ground beneath was barren save for the pile of last year's shedding. Occasional scars protruded from a fine-textured trunk, telling tales of past violating amputations. It had tightly woven needles on closely guarded branches. The moss-covered matrix of confused switches buried deeply, close to the heart. Towering above the other tree, it assumed an obvious air of gallant, but did not hinder the sunlight from the smaller tree. That fir had endured many days. Its progressive point soared into heaven majestically while the trunk was anchored deeply into its physical, life-giving earth and the roots of its counterpart must have been intertwined... protected from view.

The movement of the smaller tree was visible and it bent and leaned under the sturdy fir's protective arm. It danced to its own drum, yet was somewhat protected from harsher elements by the fir, standing to its north side. A twisted curved eruption from the ground, the trunk, gradually moved upward and unfolded into a graceful, full, voluptuous canopy of delicate, lively greens and chartreuse. Lacey voided spaces surrounding the entire core gave it a joyful, wispy, light-drenched inner dance. The graceful arching arterial vessels were visually available. It was open, shedding light rays of hope and life to the ground below, as the grass grew beneath it.

The story they told was of endurance, autonomy, acceptance, and care regardless of the obvious differences. Each simply allowed the uniqueness of the other to flourish. Neither tree had light or nourishment at the other's expense.

Was this an accident? Did these two trees give credence to the necessity, within a marriage or relationship, that each individual has separate needs and an identity, purely their own? Did Mother Nature answer my questions and solidify affirmatively that I was making the correct move? I have determined so.

The "ah-ha" moment that solidified my answer had arrived. I most definitely would perish, if not literally, figuratively, if I did nothing. It was also apparent that if there ever was to be another, together with me, each of us must stand together, apart.

Does this seem far-fetched? Can nature educate us in ways of wisdom? Do others use this same spirituality to transform themselves? William Blake speaks of such a thing when he writes, "The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity...and some scarce see nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself." Cliff Edwards gives credibility to nature-led spirituality that has transformative power in *The Shoes of Van Gogh*. He says, "Vincent's painting of one awkward pear tree suggests the power of transformation hidden in the most ordinary things around us." I suggest, from my experience, that Nature can be a spiritual practice that is able to teach and thus transform a life.

Edward goes on to discuss individuality and quotes Picasso's similar view of Van Gogh's experience and contribution of his vision saying: "Painters no longer live with a tradition and so each of us must create

an entire language. As soon as we saw that the collective adventure was a lost cause, each one of us had to find an individual adventure.” (Qtd. in Edwards xii).

Knowledge is often not motivation enough to produce epic change in one’s life. I knew the basic answers to my questions instinctively, but until that knowledge went from my head...to my heart, I was unmotivated, uninspired, and stunned with fears. I knew what I didn’t want, could not imagine what I did, and lacked the spirit of courage. The trees offered a vision of something better and confirmation that I am spiritually guided. Nature would share her wisdom with me and assist me in a careful decision that I could trust.

I want to live the story the trees told. I’m happy I jumped.

Works Cited

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