

What the River Said

by Rev. Kathleen Scott

Presented at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Visalia

September 11, 2016

“This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like blood which unites one family... Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.” Chief Seattle, 1894.

Zen has been described as “a state of abrupt enlightenment.” One great spiritual teacher calls this the “opening of our awareness, a stepping out of our human-centered consciousness to the experience of “interbeing’.”

John Seed, an environmental activist, developed a group meditation practice that he called “The Council of All Beings.” Participants gather in a place of natural beauty. Each day the group members are asked to walk outside and connect at the heart level with the “voice” of a particular part of the earth. When they return to the group, each person speaks in the voice of the species or place with which they connected.

The Council’s focus was to create the awareness of the value of nature and our responsibility as human beings to concern our selves with the fate of all species. Another purpose was for the humans to actually receive help from the vast world of nature – to receive wisdom and strength. (*The Sun, 2012*)

I recently decided to drive up to Three Rivers, a small town at the foot of the Sequoia National Forest in Central California and I found a spot to do some listening on the Kaweah River.

I took my big Great Dane dog, Barkley, with me and together we clambered over rocks and piles of leaves and fallen branches, eventually making it to a huge rock sitting in the middle of the stream. There we sat and listened.

This is what the river said to me:

“I used to be hard cold ice, frozen high up in the mountains. The hearts of human beings’ hearts can grow cold and hard; they can become frozen in attitudes, resentments, opinions – then there is no growth, no movement.

“When the sun began to shine on me, I melted and began to flow. Now I flow over rocks and branches and every sort of obstacle on my journey to the sea. When love shines in the life of a human being, the ice encircling the heart melts and that one, too, begins a journey, flowing into the One Self.

“You too may encounter many obstacles on the path. It is important to keep moving, not to stagnate, because the journey itself is purifying.

“On my journey, I encounter many things of beauty, but I hold onto none. Human beings, too, encounter experiences, relationships, material wealth, things of great interest to them, but they must not become too attached; they suffer when they try to hold onto what is flowing away.

“Notice how I laugh as I go, enjoying the ride, the never-ceasing pull, the certainty of getting to my destination. And as I flow, I am a nurturing force to other parts of nature – trees, flowers, grasses, fish, birds, animals, insects and humans – all find me very refreshing.

“So it is with human beings who laugh and play, who are confident in their relationship to the Allness of Being, who are free and flowing. They are a nurturing force to all with whom they interact.

“Finally, notice how light is reflected by me, how clear I am; how, by gazing into the water, you see the sky, the trees, the clouds, all perfectly reflected in my flowing form. So it is with human beings who attain a state of clarity, of non-attachment to form, and who consistently move forward. They become a reflection of beauty—transparent -- revealing and reflecting the wholeness of Life.”

From the *Upanishads*: “God makes the rivers to flow. They tire not, nor do they cease from flowing. May the river of my life flow into the sea of Love. May I overcome all the impediments in my course. May the thread of my song be not cut before my life merges in the sea of Love.”