

It was another day in the high desert. The morning sun slanted down on the red rocks. He had decided that day to walk to the fins; there would be shade there until midday, the sand would be cool, and the breeze, northwesterly, would be favorable to sweep through the parallel rock faces. He traced his path from cairn to cairn, drinking in the beauty of the landscape that he had come to love. As he reached his next cairn, he paused, unshipped his waterskin from his shoulder, and raised it to his lips. He closed his eyes against the sun's glare, and as he lowered the waterskin and opened his eyes again, he saw.

He saw stone. He saw how it was around him, under him, supporting him, bearing him, bearing everything. He felt its strength and he understood his own. He saw how stone interlocked with sky, and he felt the deep rightness of the shape of each. He saw how each shape was composed of smaller shapes, and each smaller shape composed of smaller shapes still. He sank to his knees, to the stone beneath him, and he saw within the stone, saw how it was composed of an infinitude of grains of sand, each itself a stone, each itself right. He saw how each grain of sand caught and reflected the light of the sun, was warmed by the sun, and he lost himself in its beauty.

A breath of wind on his face drew his gaze back up. He saw the wind itself, not only in the motion of the sagebrush and the pinyon, not only in the fantastic shapes it patiently carved from the rocks, but in its own right, the shapes it made in the air, the contrasts of movement and stillness. He breathed in, learning the wind's delight in its home inside his chest, and breathed out, feeling the wind he created with his breath.

He saw the plants around him, anchored by the stone, held up by water, composed of the air, shaped by the wind, holding fire and sunlight within. He saw the endless variety, the strength of wood, the tenderness of leaves, the pliability of grass, the quiet resolve of cactus spines, the toughness of lichen. He saw the rightness of green leaves and dark wood against the red rocks and the white clouds in the blue sky. He felt inside himself the determination that lets a seed split solid stone, and the generosity with which a stone parts itself and embraces the fresh new roots. He suddenly understood the sacred cycle through which all life ends in favor of new life, that which he had profaned before with words like "rot" and "decay," and he realized that he had known its holiness all along.

A flicker of motion in a nearby pinyon caught his eye, a bird taking wing, diving to pluck a jeweled beetle from the stone, life ending to sustain life. He looked around himself and saw a lizard basking in the sun, the prints of a coyote, a hawk describing lazy circles in the sky. It screamed out its piercing cry, and the sound smote his heart with the fierce joy of being alive.

The sunlight glinted off the distant river and he saw the water. He saw its unchanging impermanence, its constant flowing nature. He saw the water in the air, the water in the plants, the water beneath the stone, and he knew that it belonged everywhere and stayed nowhere. He felt the new understanding sweep through him, like water sweeps through the narrow canyons when it returns all at once from the air to the ground. It picked up the scree and rubble of his life

and bore it towards him in an overwhelming mass. The weight of the water pressed down on him, but the stone beneath his feet and the wind at his back held him up. He was struck with a thousand thousand sharp-edged memories, heavy and solid as stones. As each one went by, he comprehended it, embraced it, and let it go. Battered, bruised, and clean, he stood in the present, and the wind dried the tears off his cheeks, and a new fire kindled itself in his heart.

He opened his eyes once more and suddenly saw every thing together in a single grand whole: ancient, timeless, new, powerful. He supposed that every word he had ever learned could fittingly be used to describe it. He supposed that in so doing, each word would be elevated, perfected, transcended. He suddenly recalled the tale he had once been told of a finger pointing at the moon, and he suddenly understood.

A new language washed over him. Through his new eyes, he saw it written in the shapes of every thing, each declaring itself through itself. Through his new ears, he heard the wind whisper the words, and he felt the rightness of those words in his bones. In his new mind, he knew the shapes he could draw, the shapes his mouth could make, and he also knew their precise inadequacy. The grand whole spoke to him in welcome, inviting him into his place, and he spoke back in gratitude, accepting his place, his power, and his interdependence.

He knew then that nothing would ever be the same.