

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-two

Ways of Knowing

Senses Unfamiliar

Friday, October 18, 2019

One of the gifts of Native traditions is their openness to wisdom from many avenues beyond rational thought—community, ancestors, dance, drumming, nature, and symbols that speak deeply to the unconscious. I am humbled to learn from our Pueblo, Apache, and Navajo brothers and sisters here in New Mexico, and I invite you to learn about the indigenous peoples who live near you or have been forcefully removed from the land you now call home. [1]

*Read the following passage from Kent Nerburn's book *Voices in the Stones: Life Lessons from the Native Way with your heart wide open**

to unfamiliar and unexplainable ways of knowing. Imagine you are there with him:

I am standing in a lonely field, far from the nearest road, in the open prairie country of northwestern Minnesota. Just beyond me, the Ojibwe man who brought me here is overseeing the reburial of the bone fragments of two young girls, maybe fourteen or fifteen years of age, that were unearthed by a farmer during an excavation on his land.

We know they are girls and their approximate ages because modern science, with its tools and technologies, has analyzed their anatomical structure and drawn this conclusion. Yet beyond those facts we know nothing about them. They are thought to have lived over a thousand years ago. . . .

How wrong it felt to watch the bones of children being placed in a pit and covered by a front-end loader. These bones had once been young girls who had run and laughed and played on this very land. . . .

Who were they? How did they live? And are their spirits still present, as my friend who oversaw the burial believes?

I do not know. I cannot know. I can only bear witness and hope that my witness somehow does honor to their memory.

We are quick to draw lines where our awareness stops. Our streets, our alleyways, our history on the land—these form boundaries enough for us.

But there are truths that lie beneath our consciousness, just as there are truths that lie beneath our feet. That we do not know them does

not mean that they do not exist, only that we do not have the patience and humility to hear.

Many years ago I stood in a dry creek bed in Alaska north of the Arctic Circle, staring out over a river of stones that wound, sinuous, into the purple arctic twilight.

Perhaps it was the strangeness of the setting, perhaps it was the power of the moment, but, as I stood there, those stones began to speak. It was a clacking sound, a clattering sound, like the fluttering of wings, the descent of birds, the pounding of a hundred thousand hooves across the frozen tundra.

I could not name it, but neither could I deny it. It came to me through senses unfamiliar, claiming me with a knowledge I did not know. That it was not within my rational understanding did not make it any less real.

The bones of these girls and the forgotten thousands of people who walked on these lands before us and gave their bodies and spirits to this soil speak with that same voice. We hear it, if we hear it at all, with a sense that lies far below our conscious awareness.

Gateway to Presence:

If you want to go deeper with today's meditation, take note of what word or phrase stands out to you. Come back to that word or phrase throughout the day, being present to its impact and invitation.

[1] See "Tribal Nations Map,"

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/06/24/323665644/the-map->

[of-native-american-tribes-youve-never-seen-before](#), and the Native Land website and app, <https://native-land.ca/>.

Kent Nerburn, *Voices in the Stones: Life Lessons from the Native Way* (New World Library: 2016), 125, 130-132.

Image credit: *Tableau No. 2/Composition No. VII* (detail), Piet Mondrian, 1913, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York

