

PARABLE OF THE YOUNG FELLOW

Once there was a tribe of woodland dwellers. They had lived in the woods all their lives, just as their fathers and their fathers before them unto many generations. Every morning they would awaken to the music of the babbling brook and the sweet song of the colorful fowl that dwelt in the boughs of the trees.

Being a hearty, robust people, they would bind on their clothing, lay their broadaxes across their shoulders and go marching down to the place of woodcutting. There they would work with pleasant expressions until evening, just as their fathers had done before them. They did not know why they cut, only that it has always been done, and the way things would still be done.

There were laws to live by and rules to follow. No one questioned the laws, or the rules, they just obeyed because it was traditional to do so. Those who did not labor and keep the traditions were considered peculiar, a rebellious outcast.

Now in the cool of the evening, the Elder head of the household would call every member around him and would begin to tell them of the bounty of the Great Forest and beautiful woodlands. He would speak of the joyous life-giving brook, and of the facilely dressed fowl. He would mention how many wonderful woodland creatures scampered about and played happily on the forest floor. Opening his hands in pride, he would brag about the lovely house his hands had provided. He would tell the children how fortunate they were that their forefathers long ago discovered the wonderful woodlands and came to live here.

Then he would begin to tell them of the stubborn people who remained behind to dwell in the caves of unfruitfulness on the lava lands north of the forest. Their forefathers tried in vain to get the people to come live in the plush, living, forest where all the gifts of the Creator were.

The children would listen intently without making a sound as the Elder told of the dry orange clay caves with laws carved upon their walls. He would tell about the crude wooden tools the tillers would use to chop the hard, crusty, soil and there plant the precious seed of life. The children would cringe when they would hear of the fierce sun that scorched their backs as they labored in the heat, hacking away at the sparse yielding ground.

Then they would all stand and thank the Creator for the bountiful woodlands and for their forefathers who dared to venture into it. Then they would vow deep within themselves never to go into the lava lands of heat and misery.

One day there was a young fellow not yet old enough to be respected, or held in high regard, but a thoughtful fellow was he. Catching a breath from his day of labor, he surveyed the deep, ugly, gashes in the eroding forest floor where all the trees used to stand with majestic living boughs.

"Look what is happening to our beautiful forest! What will happen to us, and the children after us when all the trees are gone?" He asked an Elder working near by.

"Gone! Do not be ridiculous, foolish fellow, the trees will always be," he replied with a grunt.

"Not if we keep cutting them down," he reasoned, looking around.

"Our fathers cut trees. We will also cut trees. Enough of this foolishness. Back to work with you." The Elder scolded.

After several months of serious contemplation, the young fellow came to understand that despite tradition, the elders must see the beautiful gifts of the Creator would soon be gone. No one seemed to understand, or appreciate, why the Creator had given them. The gifts were misused, and taken for granted without the slightest thought about why they were slowly disappearing. The bountiful gifts would someday all be gone, and the people's land would lay waste, barren of life and without blessings.

So, being a fellow of foresight, he sat about trying to get the people see what they were doing. That proved to be a bigger task than he expected. His words went unheeded and he soon became wearisome to the Elders. 'Why, it was just unthinkable that there would come a day when there were no gifts.' It was outrageous, and the Elders were furious at such sacrilege, no more gifts, how foolish. So, the Elders stirred up the people against the young fellow, and they took up stones, pounding him, until he fled bleeding into the forest.

Hurt, starving and alone the young fellow sank exhausted down the under a tremendous oak. In his ears were the sounds of the woodlands he loved, while all around him were familiar sights and smells, but he found no comfort in them. The confusion, pain and loneliness of his heart had turned all the things he loved into hateful reminders of the cold, cruel stones. He moaned deeply, and wished for death to ease the aching unrest in his soul.

There in his misery, from somewhere deep within, came a still small voice. It was hard to hear at first, but as he listened it became clear and understandable. It was

soft and refreshing like a gentle breeze on a hot day. "You are not alone. Arise, take courage and continue on."

He had not heard this voice before being too busy cutting trees, and playing games in the lush forest, but as his soul grew silent he heard it. He knew the voice had been there all along because it was familiar, as familiar as his own life. He had just been unaware of it. Now the unrest within turned to courage and he arose in the strength of that voice and it guided him onward.

Only occasionally now did the sounds of the woodlands, and the babbling brook distract him from the comfort he had found in the still small voice. Onward he went nothing seemed familiar where he traveled, and sometimes he was sure he was lost, although it did not really seem that way.

As unexpected as was the still small voice, the forest gave way to a dazzling fertile valley. Rolling hills with fruitful trees welcomed him. The air was perfumed with the sweet fragrance of blossoms, and every imaginable color and shape of flower greeted him. A soft breeze cooled his cheek like a loving kiss, and his heart sang and joyfully leaped within him. There would be no hard soil to chop, or trees to cut here. This was a place of rest where no labor was needed for all things pertaining to life were provided. This was the face of the Creator.

Now, his mind raced back to the woodland people. If they could just see this place, if they only knew of the oneness with the Creator found here. He was sure they would want to come live here for this was Beulah Land, ...home, truly home.

Yes, it would mean they would have to leave the woodlands and their beautiful houses they had made for themselves, but who would not give all that up just to be in a place like this. The gifts can compare nothing to this place of love and peace.

'I will go back and tell them,' he thought, '...and bring them here.'

With a song in his heart and peace in his soul, his feet hardly touched the ground as he hurried back through the forest, and to the people he loved.

There were warm handshakes and friendly smiles the night he returned. It was as though the old grievances were gone. Even the stone bruises did not seem nearly as bad now. He was excited and anxious to tell of the wonderful new place he had found to dwell. Ah, but alas, as he stood to tell of it the smiles faded into frowns. A place that is better and lovelier than our forest woodlands, impossible. His words fell to the ground, and the people wagged their heads

sadly turning away one by one. Soon, he was left standing alone. No one wanted to hear of his discovery.

He must make them believe. Somehow, he must convince them. So, he went to each one of the Elders to reason with them, but they ignored him. They refused to listen, stopped their ears, and become angry. Again, he faced their stones, and again he fled into the forest.

'I must try again,' he told himself, '...they are my people.'

So, he returned, but they just went about as though he was not there, and when one did talk to him it was only to encourage him to go back to work and forget this nonsense.

Slowly the peace he had found deep within began to ebb away, and frustration quickly took its place. The still small voice seemed silenced by his own words as he tried even harder to get someone, anyone to listen. It was then that he realized that these people were satisfied and content where they were, and unless something happened to what they already had, they would never consider leaving or looking for something more.

Fear grew in his heart for the voice of guidance was silent, and that was unbearable. Frighten, he ran from the woodlands. He ran and ran seeking what he had lost. Finally, he fell still beneath his anguish, and again found with joy the peace and comfort of his soul. This time, however, it came not as a small voice, but as calm assurance and knowledge that brings a deep peaceful confidence.

In his heart he knew he would have to leave behind all that the loved, all that was familiar, and return to the place of the face of the Creator. He no longer belonged to the woodlands of his youth, but to a beautiful place far beyond. The inner peace seemed to fill the void left by his friends and woodland home. Never again would he be alone because he now dwelt where the Creator was and that was enough.

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