

It's the break of day at the top of the mountain. I walk slowly along the forest trail. I am observing the great oaks and the mostly-bare maple trees and how they are spaced apart symmetrically, like soldiers dressed in camouflage. A gray squirrel and a few blue jays are in the tree branches, part of the costume worn by the forest. I feel that the trees can sense my footsteps as I tread on the dark brown earth beneath them.

I inhale and take a step. With my exhale, I take the next step. I feel my heel and toe touch the earth. My steps are like whispers. I am still enough to hear my heart beat four times between each step: *thump...thump...thump...thump*. The orange sunrays peek through the leaves, and a few golden beams spotlight down upon overzealous grass patches. The shadows near the tree trunks show a dark contrast, and broken twigs lie randomly scattered about. I can smell the moss draped on the northern side of each tree. I slowly step forward on the path out into the rays of sunlight. It shines on my hands and cheeks. I pause to feel the warmth and welcome it on my skin.

In the distance, I hear the gentle, deep tone from a set of wind chimes. *Ding...dong. Ding...dong*. There is a gigantic set of chimes dangling at the top of the retreat mountain. They are here to represent the elements of the wind. I see the four shining, silver bars, like elephants' tusks, hanging down from forty feet above, where they are tied to a branch of a giant oak.

I slowly, step by step, make my way to the giant chimes. I stand underneath them and slowly gaze up. The gigantic chimes are suspended directly above me. The sound reverberates through my cells. When I move slightly to the right or left, the perfectly resounding tone is distorted. I remain still in my chamber. The energetic tone is thick, like warm chocolate being poured on my head. I feel it drip down my arms and chest before it forms a small puddle around my feet. I am tempted to stoop down and take a lick. But I remain still.

I look down another trail. There is the silhouette of a man walking in my direction. As he comes closer, I can distinguish that he is wearing slightly weathered jeans, leather work boots, and a blue sweatshirt with the hood over his head. The cloth veil over his face glistens. It is tucked in under his hoodie to cover his face. But I know him by his walk. One hip is tighter and slightly pulls out. His short steps, combined with his white beard behind that veil, resemble that of a wizard. He is my mentor, Wise Wolf. I am glad to see him here. He is on the mountain as a participant in his own ten-day retreat.

As he approaches, I smile and expect him to acknowledge me. He knows I am here. It is obvious. I hold back the urge to give him a big bear-hug. That is how he usually greets me. Yet, Wise Wolf peers straight ahead; he is focusing intensely within. Perhaps this walk in his heart is melting the trauma and stressful hours he spends as a hospice worker. His retreat time is precious. He holds every drop of energy compassionately. He continues to deliberately step forward, as if a cement statue has broken free from the mold to take its first few slow, silent steps. There is not so much as a nod as he walks past. I am mesmerized by his slow, mime movements. Or is it the inward concentration?

I reminisce about our past mentor meetings; how he would sit on the edge of a chair, listening intently. Once he said firmly, "Why are you beating around the bush? If you have something to say to me, just say it!" He was right. After that day I did. He was the first man older than myself that didn't scare the crap out of me. I felt he trusted me, and I trusted him. I was comfortable enough to talk about anything with him. This meant a lot. It was a breakthrough, because both The Lion and Pastor R.I.P. had instilled the belief that they would not trust me.

Wise Wolf was there to listen during my darkest moments. I confided in him that I sometimes had mixed feelings about being on a spiritual path that involves yoga, Native American traditions, and Jesus. I find that many Christians are offended by my involvement in Native American traditions or yoga. They expect me to follow Jesus, exclusively.

Wise Wolf said, "All these paths come together within you."

I desire to obey the Holy Spirit. When I participate in yoga or Native American traditions, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are right beside me. If I am not sharing them as part of my truth, then I am offending myself. The Holy Spirit wants me to be myself. Some people may not be pleased with my not following Jesus, exclusively. It is not my role to make them happy. Regardless of what others think, I need to respect and love myself, every day. The real question is: *Can they love me for who I am?*

When one initiates in the Sufi order, they are supposed to have a guide for life. At one point, my guide said she would guide me on retreats, but could no longer be there for personal advice. After that, Wise Wolf unofficially took over. It was clear that he cared. He was more than just a mentor. He is a friend who shares wise counsel. He teaches me more with his silent intention than he could with words. During the moment Wise Wolf passes, I realize the levels of depth that one is capable of attaining on a silent retreat. I continue to watch Wise Wolf out of the corners of my eyes, without turning my head, until he disappears.