

A Profound Meditation

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In 1995 I had just sold a business that I had established nine years earlier. Ann and I were still eight years away from divorce. We decided to drive the length of I 40. The only plan was to take a picture in Wilmington, NC of a mileage sign that indicated Barstow, California was 2,583 miles and another photo when we reached the end of the interstate out west in Barstow. We were going to mount both photos in a frame, side by side, as a memento of the journey. There was no reservation at motels or schedule. We would just drive each day until we were tired and stop to look at stuff when it seemed interesting. We had the money and the time. But, this story is not about the trip. It is about the stop that turned us around.

On the fifth day of the trip we decided to leave I 40 and head out through the Navaho Reservation, in Arizona for some local flavor and to visit the Grand Canyon. About three quarters of an hour into the reservation we passed a sign that simply read, "Now entering the Hopi Lands." I was very excited because I had recently read The Book of Hopi, by Frank Waters and through this interesting book; I knew them to be an amazing group of people.

As we wound our way through the scrubby Navaho desert, through dips that were mere dry stream beds where the asphalt ribbon crossed instead of a bridge, and past a herd of sheep tended by a scruffy border collie without a human being in sight, I felt that this road would be the real reason we had come this far. There is much to describe here but this story is about a spiritual deepening.

I met Alph Sacucco behind a little gas station near Second Mesa, Az. There was a little adobe building back there with a simple sign that read, "Hopi Art." I found him sitting on an old chair, the survivor from a '50s dining room suite, the table nowhere to be seen. It was turned around backwards on a hard packed dirt floor where he straddled it and leaned, cross armed, on the back. He smiled broadly below his black cowboy hat, and stood up saying, "howdy." Aware of the meeting of two cultures, I said, "Well howdy, y'all," and smiled back at him. Despite the dirt floor the walls where the paintings and dolls hung were pure, no, pristine white. After the introductions he said, "The thing I want you to know is that the word Hopi means 'Peace,' and that this is not a tribe. It's a religion."

We talked for 45 minutes about kachinas, dolls used for teaching spiritual understanding, and kevas, the meeting place for religious observances. My head and heart was full of this Hopi man's culture as I left his little gallery. Ann and I decided to spend the night on the top of Second Mesa at the Hopi Cultural Center, which was an un-ratable motel with a gift shop and decent restaurant, which served really tasty blue grits. The next morning I got out of bed early for meditation and decided to do it on a rock overlooking the desert floor some 300 feet below our lodging on the mesa.

I found my way to a large rock right at the edge of the mesa behind some dilapidated old Hopi homes and spread my meditation blanket out so that I could face east toward First Mesa. The sky was cloudless and directly overhead it had a deep rich blue that I have only seen when gazing down into the ocean far from land. Low on the horizon it faded to a light Carolina blue where the sun was about to rise. There was a soft breeze rustling the dry brush around me and breathing on the back of my neck. The equivalent of a block or two behind me, a dog barked a lazy staccato message to the householder to announce my presence. The main road swerved back and forth behind me on its way down the hill to the desert floor and occasionally a car passed by on its way to work or a visit or any one of many modern

destinations. I, on the other hand, was cross legged at my morning destination.

My reading that morning was, as always, chosen at random from World Scripture, Andrew Wilson,(ed.) and featured readings from all the religions on the Divine in Nature. I can't remember the exact reading but I do remember a Hindu writing that pointed to the shared nature of Brahman that we share with each other and everything in the Universe. I chanted my familiar prayer for understanding and closed my eyes for meditation. Barely into the search for awareness the breeze stopped, the dog became silent, no vehicles were whizzing by me, and for the first time in 50 years I experienced profound silence. On my eyelids, I could tell that the sun was beginning its daily adventure above the horizon as the light grew more intense. Off to my right and nearly inaudible I heard the voice of a man, a Hopi man, in his morning meditation. He must have been a mile away, and while the sound was just perceptible, I could tell that he was shouting at the top of his lungs. His chant went something like, "yet a heaaaaa nea, yet a heaaaaa nea, yet a heaaaaa nea." I didn't know anything about him or what he was saying, but I knew that at that precise time in space, he and I were one in the universe. The meditation seemed to only last a few seconds. The

light on my eyelids stopped growing in intensity, the sun having risen above the horizon. The breeze sighed again from the Southwest, rustling the brush around me. A school bus went by on the road with the sound of children laughing and talking loudly. The faithful dog took up his duties again. It was as though the world had stopped briefly for this morning service in the tabernacle of life.

Usually, my morning meditation last much longer, but in these few seconds I knew that something profound had happened. It was as though the whole trip had really been to that spot for that experience. When I returned to the room Ann was up and ready for breakfast. We talked about the meditation and decided to go no further. We returned to Wilmington by a different route which allowed her to have her own memorable experiences. After all this time the stop in the Hopi lands is still fresh in my mind. I fill with happiness when I think of the other man chanting his heart out.

Since then I have read Thomas Mails' "The Hopi Elders," and described the event to my friend, Chief Leon Locklear of the Southern Band of the Tuscarora, in Maxton, NC. He says that the unknown chant is similar

to his people's chant that simply says, "Welcome, Welcome, Welcome." I like to think that man and I were welcoming the new day in many ways.