

The Lesson Of The Blue Jay – How To Live Your Spirit Walk

BY HAROLD STEARLEY

I heard what I thought was a Red Shouldered Hawk. I was in one's territory, and it would frequently make an appearance when I hiked this trail. I once saw it on the ground and, thinking it was injured, I approached. Instead, it quickly mantled the prey it had just caught, trying to conceal the now lifeless mole from me. It showed no fear and I knew better than to try to get closer. I said my hellos and continued on the path. But this wasn't the hawk I was hearing today.

These last days of October felt like November, those days when it seemed a shade had been pulled over the sun, now hibernating until March. It was one of those autumns where the conditions just hadn't been right. The moisture, temperature, sunlight, and the wind simply weren't cooperating.

Instead of the full spectrum range of reds, oranges, yellows, and pinks, mixed with the remaining traces of green, the leaves had rapidly browned out, and the wind hastened their descent to the now dormant ground. Like charcoal drawings on canvas, the bare tree trunks and their branches silhouetted the gray, cloud-covered sky.

Although it wasn't raining, you could taste the humidity that thickly hung in the air. That heavy air filled my lungs as I listened to my footsteps. It was unusually quiet for this time in the woods. It seemed all of the wildlife was napping, and then I heard it again.

I scanned the trees and located it in the lower branches of a bare hickory. It was a Blue Jay mimicking the Red Shouldered Hawk. The naturalists of old are said to believe that the Jay took delight in this deception.

But then they came. More and more Blue Jays, and they were landing on both sides of the trail. I found myself surrounded by an entire flock, all squawking at me. I had never seen so many Jays in a group before, perhaps twenty or more of them. No other animal was in the woods. No human other than myself.

I knew it was time to pay attention to the message being sent.

The Source was not going to let me ignore it. And this message came at a particular time when I needed it. I was sort of at a halfway point and needed to make that decision to push forward.

Once you do, there is no going back. The world will not be the same.

For those of us believing in a more natural order in the Universe, there is a lot of “bird medicine” surrounding us. And the Blue Jay has a particular lesson to teach, regardless if you subscribe to bird medicine or not. But before we get there, we have to make note of the rising awareness that religion or spirituality is shifting in its definition and form. It might be said that belief systems are returning to more tribal values and, perhaps, those are more valid and powerful because, for many, these systems hold more respect for the Earth and all life upon it.

I recently read the results from a study from by the Pew Research Center concluding that the American public is becoming less “religious.” Of course, being religious in this country is usually measured in terms of being a Christian, and my personal experience has taught me that many professing to be religious are living far from religious lives. But I don’t think true believers and practitioners were screened out from the professors of religiosity in this study.

Putting mythological error – I mean methodological error aside – Pew surveyed over 35,000 “adults” (a topic for another day) and determined that a growing minority say they do not belong

to any “organized faith.” The overall Pew conclusion, which was partially attributed to the Millennial generation, was that: “Altogether, the religiously unaffiliated, also called the ‘nones,’ now account for 23% of the adult population, up from 16% in 2007.”

“Nones.” What a strange term to apply. While I understand the concept Pew was trying to capture, I think the terminology is off. “Nones” implies non-spirituality and I believe many of these people are probably quite spiritual and probably much more faithful to their beliefs than many professed Christians, Muslims, or Jews. I just think spirituality is actually returning to its roots. And there are many roots upon which spirituality grows.

The New Yorker recently published a piece about Anthony Kronman’s latest book titled, “Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan.” Don’t get me wrong, I’m not endorsing this guy’s book, I haven’t even read it and doubt that I need to. But he is supposed to be a smart guy – a Yale Law School professor with a Ph.D. in philosophy. If you want to check out the article, you can find it [here](#).

What I think is important are the thoughts behind this work. Basically, people are combining philosophy, metaphysics, theology, law, biology, and history, along with their own unique experiences to compose a set of beliefs that is “spiritual.” After all, “spiritual,” at its most basic level, simply relates to the spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.

And some fundamental and universal themes apply, like it’s not a good idea to go around senselessly killing living creatures. This means all creatures as they all possess spirit. There is also a common belief against raping the planet. It, too – and every speck of dust upon it – possesses spirit. It is alive, struggling under human kind’s relentless desire to exploit and poison it, but the Earth, and every part of it, is a living

spiritual being. No need to have someone wearing a special colored robe to tell us that, or to propagate the falsehoods that one creature is superior to another, or that particles of awareness exclusively belong to humans.

Being “pagan” is not some foreign concept, and maybe “born again” doesn’t capture its increasing emergence in modernity. It’s been around a long time and anyone can tap into that which is, ad lib. Being a “pagan,” minus all of the connotations applied by those whom might feel threatened by anyone not subscribing to their own particularized religious theory, means simply, “a person holding religious beliefs other than those of the main world religions” – the “Big Three.”

So yes, there is becoming more of an ad hoc, hodgepodge, create your own, make it up as you go along, system of “unorganized” spiritual beliefs. And one can draw upon the Big Three, or Far Eastern religions that were around for centuries before the Big Three, or more native customs passed on through storytelling or apprenticeships.

I’m all for it, because I believe that intuitively, people know what it means to have a personal relationship with Great Mystery (just one term for the “Source” of all spirituality and life) than any one dogmatic doctrine could capture. The more one gets in touch with and in tune with nature, the more one will touch, hear, feel, and see the Spirit Source.

For me personally, this means an eclectic mix of Buddhism, Native American, Meso-American, and Aboriginal teachings, and my own naturalistic contact with the Universe. There are affirmations coming from nature constantly if one only pays attention and learns to interpret the language. And this brings us back to animal medicine, particularly bird medicine, and more particularly, the Blue Jay.

Native cultures will teach that each living entity possesses

its own personal power, and the power described is frequently in terms of symbolism. It is also symbolic in the cycle of life that if one species consumes another for survival, it absorbs or acquires the inherent power from that other species. Symbolism is paramount, as with all religions and religious artifacts. The symbols will differ, and so will their meanings and interpretations, but symbols are powerful.

If you think the Cross is a powerful symbol, you should take a ten-mile hike in nature and try to see and interpret all of the messages being delivered to you. Some can be affirmations that you are on the right path, others warnings, others general lessons, many about recognizing true gifts and having gratitude.

Of course, having an “unorganized” system of beliefs leads to the criticism of “who gets to decide what means what?” I’d say it’s up to the doctrines a person subscribes to, plus that individual’s intuition, with one caveat – one must be “authentic.” It’s not for others to decide for anyone else what someone should believe, but once a person decides what path, or combination of paths, they wish to follow, they should follow it (or them) and not constantly attempt to change the “rules.”

Master the doctrines or personal beliefs. Don’t engage in half-hearted horoscoping, cherry-picking, and manipulating of symbols to fabricate a self-aggrandizing prophecy of spiritual attainment or self-actualization. Not all spiritual messages will be glossed over, ultra-positive, or rose-colored

intoxicants. Pursuing spirituality is hard work. This is exactly what the bird medicine of the Blue Jay teaches us.

Interpreting symbolism can be a subjective endeavor, so drawing upon historical roots can be beneficial. Personally, I like the work of Ted Andrews in his book "Animal Speak," because he discusses historical and cultural interpretations of symbols, and ties the common threads together to form a cohesive way of deciphering meanings; translating the language of nature.

His interpretations also seem to match my own personal experiences. So, while some might say the Blue Jay signifies boldness, clarity, vision, truth, faithfulness, and solidarity, Mr. Andrews observes that this totem (an animal believed by a particular society to have spiritual significance) brings lessons regarding the "proper use of power." I would throw in the word "authenticity."

Tracking the Latin and Greek origins of the word "Jay" and the symbolism of the bird's markings and behaviors, Andrews notes the Jay has the ability to "link the heavens and earth, to access each for greater power." While the Blue Jay can be fearless, the problem it presents is that it dabbles in both worlds, instead of becoming a master of either.

The Blue Jay is also a mimic. So, when this animal totem brings its bird medicine message to you, it is time to decide if you are actually mastering ability in the psychic, metaphysical, and spiritual world, or if you're dabbling. Mimicking enough knowledge to give the impression of having mastered it. As Mr. Andrews concludes, "If the jay has flown into your life, it indicates that you are moving into a time where you can begin to develop the innate royalty that is within you, or simply be a pretender to the throne. It all depends on you. The jay has no qualms. It will teach you either."

Now, this is taking a spiritual message and teaching it with authenticity. It's not all "feel good" metaphysical-pseudo-religion, it is challenging you to take responsibility with the direction you take with your own spiritual path, regardless of what that may be – truly master it or mimic it, your choice. It's not a horoscopic prediction of finding your soul-mate or twin-flame. It is saying that it's time to get real.

Thus, the problem with the Pew study. They didn't measure authenticity. If they had screened out the mimics, they might have found the majority to be less religious than believed, and the "nones" perhaps much more so. That being said, I don't wish to discredit any form of spiritual practice.

Regardless if you are a follower of one of the Big Three, or any of the Far Eastern Religions, or if you're a Born-Again Pagan, if you can derive hope, kindness, and generosity from your practice; if you can demonstrate gratitude, tolerance, and compassion; if you can give unconditional love to every part and parcel of the spiritual creation, then you can become your authentic spirit.

At times, it may seem like we are always at a halfway point. We've acquired knowledge, dabbled, and seem to be waiting for something to happen to us or for us. I was at that point when the Blue Jays descended upon me. Signaling it was time to decide. And I did.

What we need to do is experience. Practice what we believe to be the means to the spiritual path. It's not about reciting, waiting, or even dreaming. It's about doing. Doing will make you authentic. Live your spirit walk.

If you want to talk, you can find me hiking through the many biomes, getting out of that comfort zone, exuding my unconditional love for all of life's forms, taking a risk that this walking meditation will place my spirit in a place to

confer with the Source. There is no looking back...

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [Love Yourself Like Your Life Depends On It](#) .

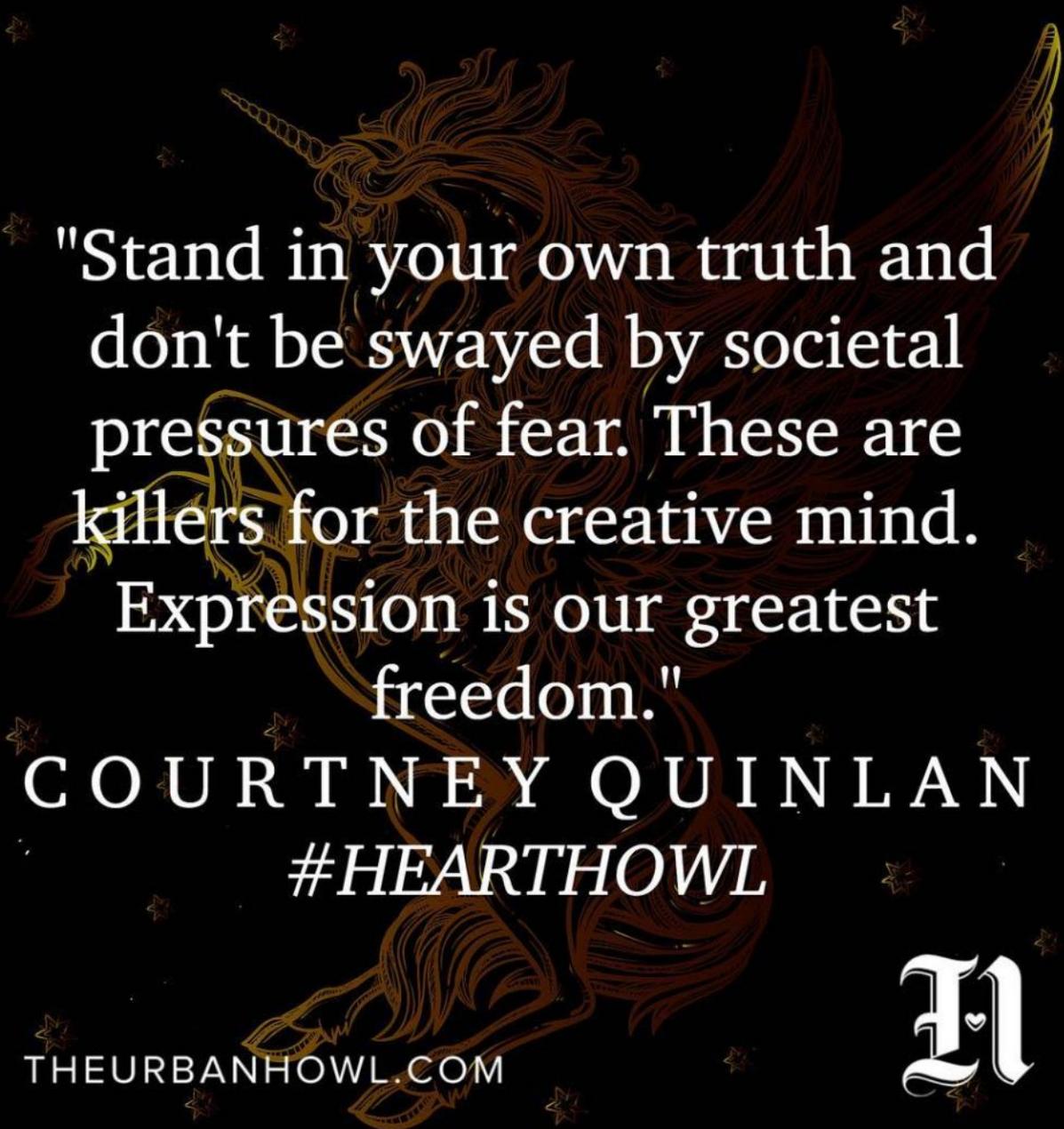
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