

# If Your Soul Is Open, Nature's Spirits Will Speak To You

[BY HAROLD STEARLEY](#)

## *Hiking Through The Rhyolite*

Ground yourself. And if you listen closely you will hear the spirits that surround us...

Many millions of years ago, a volcano erupted with hundreds of times the force of Mount St. Helens. Later, the earth would push the remains upward leaving the volcanic rock exposed to all of the forces of erosion. But the erosion was differential. Softer materials washing away first. Leaving columns of stone. Statues in precision alignment. Sort of like the Moai on Easter Island. Only here, they face inward to the center of the collapsed caldera. Covered in desert scrub, it is difficult to imagine the explosive forces that once coalesced here.

The monoliths can also have disproportional heads where the boulders appear to balance mysteriously on much tinier pedestals. All standing shoulder to shoulder like soldiers lining up on the parade grounds.

Before I enter these mountains, I sign in with the park ranger. They need to keep track if people go missing. Know whose body they may find days later if you don't return.

They warn me that there is a high chance of rain, and the trails across the ridgetop I've chosen to hike will have me exposed to lightning. But I don't believe the Thunder-beings have any interest in hurting me. They can be great messengers of the Earth and the source of replenishing energy.

I'm prepared for the 8-mile trek – as much as I can be. And as I wind my way through the monoliths, I follow an undulating path. Up and down, back and forth, snaking my way along switchbacks. That image of the snake's path accented by the mineral serpentine, mixed with green, blue, and gold lichens, reddish rhyolites, and specks of glistening mica. A colorful cacophony. Discordant reflections of muted color that shift continually as the sun makes its daily journey across the sky.

After a couple of hours, I reach the ridgetop. Black char on skeletal trees, evidence of a fire from a decade ago, mixes with the light and dark greens of new pines and oaks.

All of the washes and creeks are alive with a torrent of water. Small waterfalls offer the perfect intonations for meditation. Worn trails fragment as you hit flat rock. And segments of it vanish completely.

There was a flash flood the night before and if there had been footprints or trail markers they've all been washed away. Erased as if no person had set foot here for eons. And no one is here today other than myself.

***Often, I find myself in the wilderness where there are no other people. But I'm never alone. A troupe of painted redstarts moves through. Lizards scurry away. Butterflies seek out precious nectar from the red and yellow columbine that burst forth sporadically.***

I come upon a pine totally splintered from a bolt of lightning, probably from the day before because its needles are still deep green. No sign of this timber having dried. Totally debarked with pieces strewn in a thousand directions.

I pick up a small piece of this now energy-laden bark and place in my shirt pocket above my heart. You can feel the energy throbbing.

I hit another point on the ridge where the trail has cloaked itself. There are at least ten directions I could go. Four seem more likely. I climb up on a boulder to get a better vantage point and to my surprise, a solitary white-tailed deer is right below me. The doe doesn't seem to know I'm there. The wind coming toward me carries my scent the opposite direction.

I watch her quietly graze on low-lying tree branches. Then she raises her head and sees me. Stares right into my eyes. But I'm surprised by her actions. I expect her to panic. To run away as most deer would. She's unconcerned. Apparently feeling no threat. And instead offers to help.

She alters her path and circles back toward me and loops to my left. We lock gazes, and I follow her. Her gentleness lures me to the right path. And then she's gone. In an instant. A blink. As if she wasn't there at all. Her spirit saves me the time I would have spent trying to find the right route. Time is life out here.

Descending from the ridgetop, I make it to the center of the monoliths. How long have these statues stood? Holding this ground. Carved by forces that no human sculptor could match. They'll be here long after my physical body has departed. Silently keeping watch.

I hear an owl in the distance. Its affirmation tells me I am safe. I can take a break here. Take the load off my back. Hydrate and take in some calories to replace those expended. Breathe in the surroundings.

Native Americans used to inhabit this place. It's sacred Earth. I offer thanks for being allowed safe passage. I'm not the top predator here, after all. Black bears and mountain lions call this their home.

An injury here can mean death. Can't let your guard down even as you grow weary. Pay attention.

I hear a noise, and a yarrow's spiny lizard perches himself on a rock next to the path. He does pushups and flares his neck in a display of dominance. I stop to observe. When I turn back to the trail and start to take my next step, I notice a large stone in the center of the path. I had not seen it before and if I continued unaware I would have tripped over this stone and have possibly been injured.

Falling to the right would have landed me on the switchback 20 feet below. Falling to the left, into the rock wall there, could have meant a fractured skull. Falling forward, a twisted or broken ankle. I thank the lizard for his warning.

***Such is nature. Be attentive. If your soul is open, nature's spirits will speak to you. Warn you. Protect you. Give you energy. Keep you on the right path.***

The hike complete, it is time to center and reflect. There are always forces around us at work. This day was my mother's birthday. She passed away last year. And I can't help but think that maybe she is watching over me too on this day. Protecting me from all the dangers that surrounded this solitary hike into the wilderness.

As I drive home, hawks, ravens, and turkey vultures line the telephone lines. All facing inward. Like the monoliths, soldiers. These are the protectors, the shape-shifters, the visionaries. And they guard my route. Almost like a salute to a journey well completed. So many of them. Their numbers far exceeding and mingling with their prescribed territories. An

oddity?

Thank you, mom. Love you and miss you.

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [Women Who Run with the Wolves](#) .

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I felt like lying down by the side of the trail and remembering it all. The woods do that to you, they always look familiar, long lost, like the face of a long-dead relative, like an old dream, like a piece of forgotten song drifting across the water, most of all like golden eternities of past childhood or past manhood and all the living and the dying and the heartbreak that went on a million years ago and the clouds as they pass overhead seem to testify (by their own lonesome familiarity) to this feeling.

Jack Kerouac

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