

The Temperance Stone

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There was once a young lad that kept a particularly interesting stone nestled safely in his pocket. He kept it there nearly every day; occasionally pushing his hand between the soft cotton linings of his trousers to make certain of its location. He kept it there for many reasons, and those reasons constantly changed.

In fact, even the stone often changed. Some days it was a deep, bluish-black piece of flint whose color shone with a reflection like a clear night sky. He would often stare at its surface, half expecting to see stars deep within its hues. There were other days when the warm patina of a deep, yellow-brown stone would rest in the safety of that same pocket, also caressed numerous times a day by his searching hand. In his mind, he could see suns setting with the same brilliant hues as the piece of flint he held. Still other days, the stone was of a pale, whitish sort with swirls of bright orange mingling within its core, much like the rising of the sun on a particularly cold winter's morning.

These stones were all artifacts...arrowheads of the Native American Indians. And despite the beauty of the stones and their rich heritage, the stone itself was not the reason for a location as improbable as the front pocket of a dusty pair of jeans. Its beauty was only part of the process of his choice to keep it there; but its purpose was altogether different.

Many days, this lad would find himself grasping for this stone and saying a few quiet words to himself. He might then pull it from its warm safety and admire its wonderful color. He might rub his thumb across its heavily-chipped surface. He might...under the most extreme situations...pull it close to his face and absorb comfort from its hand-carved shape. It was a comfort to him like none other. Even though this fellow had many comforts in his life, the *offerings* that these stones delivered were of the utmost importance. Strange as it may seem, these simple pieces of flint were an enormous part of his everyday. They were a life choice...a betterment of his soul. They were constant reminders to him. And few understood their magnitude.

These stones had been knapped thousands of years ago, long before the white man had entered this country, bringing with him his values and beliefs of Christianity and a God like nothing the Indians had ever known. How could they have gotten to heaven before the arrival of Christianity? Could there be Native Americans in heaven? These questions bothered this young lad. Surely, a good and loving God would not create a group of souls unworthy of heaven.

Was it not He that created them? So, as time passed, this young lad began to study the facets of his heaven...and theirs. Perhaps there is more than one heaven, for more than one group of people, he wondered.

The more this lad studied, the larger his subject matter grew. How about the Pagans and their love of nature? They were the first of the tree-hugger folk, only hundreds of years earlier. Their natural love of living things seemed remarkably close to the Native American theories of the Sun God, Rain God, or whatever other naturally occurring phenomenon might be.

What of the Buddhists, and their thoughts of the little birdie theory? They believe that there is a tiny bird that rests on their shoulder. It is there for guidance. What if, little bird, today is my last day? Am I living life as if I were leaving this world tomorrow? Am I worthy of dying?

And what of Christianity? How should he decide on what version to study and believe? There are as many variations of Christianity as there are churches. And there was a different church every mile or two in this lad's home in the Bible-belt.

What if I asked every church? What if they might give guidance? He chose to ask them, and what he learned surprised him.

They gave counsel freely...yes, quite freely. Each felt that everyone but their denomination is going to Hell. No question. No theories of thought-provoking conversation aimed at the betterment of our human souls. Nope. It is our way...or the Hell way. No gray area. You will all torment for eternity...unless you rejoice with us every Sunday morning and Sunday night. And oh yeah, Wednesday night too. Of course, Saturday is the only proper day if you are of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. And you all must spend it here...in a house of God.

House of God. Now there's another good topic, the lad thought. Who is to say what a house of God is? Men built it. Men laid its bricks...poured its footings...nailed its walls. How about a Teepee of God? Temple? Synagogue? Mud hut? Could it be that a house of God is within one's heart?...or only a fabrication of wood and mortar? House of God. This thought, too, weighed heavily on the lad's mind.

What if I die in the wrong house...just desperately trying to find the one and only true location to be saved? What if I choose to believe a liar...a deceiving soul...or some true-believing soul that has been misled? Each religion

has convincing stories of good and evil. They have reason for their religion. Who is to have the final say?

These were all hard and harsh views and theories for a young lad to absorb. With the strongest of faithful teachers, all of these simple questions had long and complicated answers...if in fact, they were answers at all. It might be that these were merely *versions* of each religion's point of view. Each had right to argue.

So, without even realizing his actions, this young lad began a practice. It seemed simple. It seemed worthwhile. And, perhaps, it might have been the easiest and most compassionate way to deal with all aspects of soul-searching. Although he never stopped studying all religions, he started a simple practice. He started the most common of daily rituals. He began an ordinary, plain, unassuming little routine.

He started carrying a stone.

Reflecting on the stone's existence, he could feel centuries of natural, Native American life pulsating in the cold, but beautiful, stone. After all, it was a humanly-chipped piece of ancient rock, created by God for whatever purpose. Perhaps it was solely for his own benefit?

This stone reminded him of his own religion...the cross, the resurrection. It was a solid reminder of God's love...right there in his pocket. It was there when he needed reassurance...needed faith. It was just a reminder, but it was there, nonetheless.

It was his Buddhist little birdie. This, quite possibly, was the easiest comparison for his young mind to comprehend. Is this my last day, little stone? Am I living life as if it were my last moments on Earth?

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And so the lad grew into a man. He studied in churches. He studied in Libraries. He was a student of life...always attentive to the simple and subtle happenings that presented themselves everyday. He tried to learn as he lived.

So when times got tough, and also when the tiniest of annoyances would happen each day, he would find himself reaching for that stone. Is this how I want to live my life, little stone? Is this how I want to be remembered for reacting to this situation? How would I have it done if the shoe was on the other foot? What is the proper way to handle this predicament?

He took it a step further. Instead of only using the stone to help him combat the unfortunate troubles of his day, he also unknowingly began to use it as inspiration. Have I told my family how much I love them? Have I corrected my children when they were wrong? Have I complimented a friend in need of affirmation? Does my wife have my complete and utter affection?

When asked these questions, the stone would deliver answers. The stone would give proper advice. Could it be that it was only his own self conscious working out the words of the Golden Rule? Could it be that *do unto others* was being brought out into view? Perhaps. But maybe, just maybe...these simple stones helped pave the way to a better man. It might be that these simple pieces of flint carved the future man...knapped at the soul of a solid individual, honing it into a finer product. Maybe he had become a better person...constantly reminding himself of right and wrong with the use of a tiny stone icon.

And perhaps with these simple thoughts in mind...maybe we should all seek our own special stones...

...if only for the reminding weight in our pocket.

