

The Stillness Newsletter

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Written by just me, Renee Baker. Thanks for reading!



An African Story of Twelve Cows

Once upon a time there was a man who had about twelve cows, and he loved his cows. Every morning and evening he would praise them for the amount of milk they were giving and praise them for their beauty. One morning he noticed that the amount of milk had lessened. Each day for a week he noticed the same thing.

So that night he decided to stay up and see what was going on. About midnight, he happened to look up at the stars, and he saw one star that seemed to be getting larger. It was – and the light got stronger as the star came closer and closer to earth. It came straight down towards his cow pasture and stopped a few feet from him in the form of a great ball of light. Inside the light there was a luminous woman. As soon as her toes touched the ground, the light disappeared, and she stood there like an ordinary woman.

He said to her, “Are you the one who has been stealing milk from my cows?” “Yes,” she said, “my sisters and I like the milk from your cows very much.” He said, “You are very beautiful. And I’m glad that you like my cows. And so this is what I have to say: If you marry me, we can live together, and I will never hit you and you won’t have to take care of the cows all the time. I’ll take care of them part of the time myself. Will you marry me?” She said slowly, “Yes, I will. But there’s one condition. I have brought this basket with me, and I want you to agree that you will never look into this basket. You must never look into it, no matter how long we are married. Do you agree to that?” “Oh, I do,” he said.

So they were married, and they lived together very well for six or seven months. Then one day, while she was out herding the cows, he happened to notice that basket standing in a corner of the house. He said to himself, “Well, you know, she is my wife, so it could be considered to be my basket. After all, this is my house, and the basket is in my house, and so it could be considered my basket!” After he had said this, he opened the basket and then began to laugh. “There’s nothing in the basket! There’s nothing in the basket! There’s absolutely nothing in the basket! Nothing! There’s nothing in the basket! He kept saying these words and laughing so loud that his wife eventually heard the laughter.

She came into the house and she said to him, “Have you opened the basket?” He began laughing again. “I did!” he said. “I opened the basket! There’s nothing in it! There’s nothing in the basket at all! There’s absolutely nothing in the basket! Nothing in the basket!”

She said, “I have to leave now. I have to go back.” He cried out, “Don’t go! Don’t leave me!” She said, “I have to go back now. What I brought with me in the basket was spirit. It’s so like human beings to think that spirit is nothing.” And she was gone.

Spirit Is Something

I have never been able to find the author of the African story of twelve cows, but is one of my favorites. I originally read it in *The Soul Is Here For Its Own Joy* by Robert Bly. I will admit I originally did not like the story. I was a bit ho-hum about spirituality then. That word spirit had not yet resonated with me. I always equated spirit with mind or intellect. I didn't have any belief that we had a spirit on the "other side". Trying to find answers on spirituality is like trying to find answers on what an electron is made of. We don't have concrete solutions. As such, so many will dismiss the existence of spirit. But as we are quick to accept the fact that electrons exist, then why is there so much fuss about accepting spirit? Is spirit something? Or can we humans assume the spirit is nothing?

A nice bridge into the spiritual something is through consciousness. Do you take for granted that you have an awareness that you are reading right now? If you can, then you recognize you have a level of consciousness. When we are further able to stay present, and not drift off, then that level of consciousness rises from that of a dream state. That *change* of consciousness brings us a knowing of consciousness itself. We become aware of awareness. What is fascinating is that while we are present and conscious, we have no choice but to love. They are correlated 100%. We love not out of fear of survival, but from a burning desire within us. We want to share our love. And with that, we can find our link to spirit. What I suggest then is that spirit is that consciousness that desires to love. That consciousness is our being itself. With that, yes, spirit is something.

A Personal Note

Every now and then we get blessed to meet our heroes in life. I was tickled to get to meet Robert Bly after a poetry reading in Austin. It is amazing I didn't pee my pants. My partner Wendi laughs at me because I get so excited at such times. It is good to have a partner that grounds me when I get off balance. Anyway!

Bly was famous for his book *Iron John* and many writings and poetry on deeper primitive shadow work. His work has always challenged me, surprised me and often irritated me. It's often the irritation in our pants that spurs us upwards out of our chairs. Learn more about Robert Bly on his website at www.robertbly.com.



Meeting Robert Bly in Austin at the Texas Nafas production "Angels Knocking At the Tavern Door" with Bly and Coleman Barks. August 11, 2007. For more on Nafas, a metaphor for spirit, see <http://texasnafas.org>.



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