

Wunzh, the Father of Indian

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In time past—we can not tell exactly how many, many years ago—a poor Indian was living, with his wife and children, in a beautiful part of the country. He was not only poor, but he had the misfortune to be inexpert in procuring food for his family, and his children were all too young to give him assistance.

Although of a lowly condition and straitened in his circumstances, he was a man of kind and contented disposition. He was always thankful to the Great Spirit for every thing he received. He even stood in the door of his lodge to bless the birds that flew past in the summer evenings; although, if he had been of a complaining temper, he might have repined that they were not rather spread upon the table for his evening meal.

The same gracious and sweet disposition was inherited by his eldest son, who had now arrived at the proper age to undertake the ceremony of the fast, to learn what kind of a spirit would be his guide and guardian through life.

Wunzh, for this was his name, had been an obedient boy from his infancy—pensive, thoughtful, and gentle—so that he was beloved by the whole family.

As soon as the first buds of spring appeared, and the delicious fragrance of the young year began to sweeten

the air, his father, with the help of his younger brothers, built for Wunzh the customary little lodge, at a retired spot at some distance from their own, where he would not be disturbed during the solemn rite.

To prepare himself, Wunzh sought to clear his heart of every evil thought, and to think of nothing that was not good, and beautiful, and kindly.

That he might store his mind with pleasant ideas for his dreams, for the first few days he amused himself by walking in the woods and over the mountains, examining the early plants and flowers.

As he rambled far and wide, through the wild country, he felt a strong desire to know how the plants and herbs and berries grew, without any aid from man, and why it was that some kinds were good to eat, and that others were possessed of medicinal or poisonous power.

After he had become too languid to walk about, and confined himself strictly to the lodge, he recalled these thoughts, and turning them in his mind, he wished he could dream of something that would prove a benefit to his father and family, and to all others of his fellow-creatures.

“True,” thought Wunzh, “the Great Spirit made all things, and it is to him that we owe our lives. Could he not make it easier for us to get our food, than by hunting animals and taking fish? I must try to find this out in my visions.”

On the third day Wunzh became weak and faint, and kept his bed. Suddenly he fancied, as he lay thus, that a bright light came in at the lodge door, and ere he was aware, he saw a handsome young man, with a complexion of the softest and purest white, coming down from the sky, and advancing toward him.

The beautiful stranger was richly and gayly dressed, having on a great many garments of green and yellow colors, but differing in their deeper or lighter shades. He had a plume of waving feathers on his head, and all his motions were graceful, and reminded Wunzh of the deep green of the summer grass, and the clear amber of the summer sky, and the gentle blowing of the summer wind. Beautiful as the stranger was, he paused on a little mound of earth, just before the door of the lodge.

“I am sent to you, my friend,” said this celestial visitor, in a voice most soft and musical to listen to, “I am sent to you by that Great Spirit who made all things in the sky, and on the earth. He has seen and knows your motives in fasting. He sees that it is from a kind and benevolent wish to do good to your people, and to procure a benefit for them; that you do not seek for strength in war, or the praise of the men of the bloody hand. I am

sent to instruct you and to show you how you can do your kindred good.”

He then told the young man to arise, and to prepare to wrestle with him, as it was only by this means that he could hope to succeed in his wishes.

Wunzh knew how weak he was from fasting, but the voice of the stranger was cheery, and put such a courage in his heart, that he promptly sprang up, determined to die rather than fail. Brave Wunzh! if you ever accomplish any thing, it will be through the power of the resolve that spake within you at that moment.

He began the trial, and after a long-sustained struggle he was almost overpowered, when the beautiful stranger said:

“My friend, it is enough for once, I will come again to try you;” and smiling on him, he returned through the air in the same direction in which he had come.

The next day, although he saw how sweetly the wild-flowers bloomed upon the slopes, and the birds warbled from the woodland, he longed to see the celestial visitor, and to hear his voice.

To his great joy he reappeared at the same hour, toward the going down of the sun, and re-challenged Wunzh to a trial of strength.

The brave Wunzh felt that his strength of body was even less than on the day before, but the courage of his mind seemed to grow. Observing this, and how Wunzh put his whole heart in the struggle, the stranger again spoke to him in the words he used before, adding:

“To-morrow will be your last trial. Be strong, my friend, for this is the only way in which you can overcome me and obtain the boon you seek.”

The light which shone after him as he left Wunzh was brighter than before.

On the third day he came again and renewed the struggle. Very faint in body was poor Wunzh, but he was stronger at heart than ever, and determined to prevail now or perish. He put forth his utmost powers, and after a contest more severe than either of the others, the stranger ceased his efforts, and declared himself conquered.

For the first time he entered Wunzh’s little fasting-lodge, and sitting down beside the youth, he began to

deliver his instructions to him and to inform him in what manner he should proceed to take advantage of his victory.

“You have won your desire of the Great Spirit,” said the beautiful stranger. “You have wrestled manfully. Tomorrow will be the seventh day of your fasting. Your father will give you food to strengthen you, and as it is the last day of trial you will prevail. I know this, and now tell you what you must do to benefit your family and your people. To-morrow,” he repeated, “I shall meet you and wrestle with you for the last time. As soon as you have prevailed against me, you will strip off my garments and throw me down, clean the earth of roots and weeds, make it soft, and bury me in the spot. When you have done this, leave my body in the earth, and do not disturb it, but come at times to visit the place, to see whether I have come to life, and above all be careful to never let the grass or weeds grow upon my grave. Once a month cover me with fresh earth. If you follow these my instructions you will accomplish your object of doing good to your fellow-creatures by teaching them the knowledge I now teach you.”

He then shook Wunzh by the hand and disappeared, but he was gone so soon that Wunzh could not tell what direction he took.

In the morning, Wunzh’s father came to his lodge with some slight refreshments, saying:

“My son, you have fasted long enough. If the Great Spirit will favor you, he will do it now. It is seven days since you have tasted food, and you must not sacrifice your life. The Master of Life does not require that.”

“My father,” replied Wunzh, “wait till the sun goes down. I have a particular reason for extending my fast to that hour.”

“Very well,” said the old man, “I shall wait till the hour arrives, and you shall be inclined to eat.”

At his usual hour of appearing, the beautiful sky-visitor returned, and the trial of strength was renewed. Although he had not availed himself of his father’s offer of food, Wunzh felt that new strength had been given him. His heart was mighty within him to achieve some great purpose. Courage was like the eagle that spreads his wings within the tree-top for a great flight, within the bosom of the brave Wunzh.

He grasped his angel challenger with supernatural strength, threw him down, and, mindful of his own instructions, tore from him his beautiful garments and plume, and finding him dead, he immediately buried him on the spot, using all the precautions he had been told of, and very confident was Wunzh, all the time, that

his friend would again come to life.

Wunzh now returned to his father's lodge, where he was warmly welcomed, for as it had been appointed to him during the days of his fasting to walk apart with Heaven, he was not permitted to see any human face save that of his father, the representative to the little household upon earth of the Good Father who is in Heaven.

Wunzh partook sparingly of the meal that had been prepared for him, and once more mingled in the cares and sports of the family. But he never for a moment forgot the grave of his friend. He carefully visited it throughout the spring, and weeded out the grass, and kept the ground in a soft and pliant state; and sometimes, when the brave Wunzh thought of his friend that was gone from his sight, he dropped a tear upon the earth where he lay.

Watching and tending, and moistening the earth with his tears, it was not long before Wunzh saw the tops of green plumes coming through the ground; and the more faithful he was in obeying his instructions in keeping the ground in order, and in cherishing the memory of his departed friend, the faster they grew. He was, however, careful to conceal the charge of the earth which he had from his father.

Days and weeks had passed in this way; the summer was drawing toward a close, when one day, after a long absence in hunting, Wunzh invited his father to follow him to the quiet and lonesome spot of his former fast.

The little fasting-lodge had been removed, and the weeds kept from growing on the circle where it had stood; but in its place rose a tall and graceful plant, surmounted with nodding plumes and stately leaves, and golden clusters. There was in its aspect and bearing the deep green of the summer grass, the clear amber of the summer sky, and the gentle blowing of the summer wind.

"It is my friend!" shouted Wunzh, "it is the friend of all mankind. It is Mondawmin: it is our Indian Corn! We need no longer rely on hunting alone, for as long as this gift is cherished and taken care of, the ground itself will give us a living."

He then pulled an ear.

"See, my father," said he, "this is what I fasted for. The Great Spirit has listened to my voice, and sent us something new, and henceforth our people will not alone depend upon the chase or upon the waters."

Wunzh then communicated to his father the instructions given to him by the stranger. He told him that the

broad husks must be torn away, as he had pulled off the garments in his wrestling, and having done this, he directed him how the ear must be held before the fire till the outer skin became brown—as he complexion of his angel friend had been tinted by the sun—while all the milk was retained in the grain.

The whole family, in high spirits, and deeply grateful to the Merciful Master who gave it, assisted in a feast on the newly-grown ears of corn.

So came that mighty blessing into the world, and we owe all of those beautiful fields of healthful grain to the dream of the brave boy Wunzh.

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