

INTRODUCTION

It was dusk and I was walking with my Master around the grounds of the monastery. We had just watched the sunset and it was beautiful, one of the most incredible sights I had ever witnessed. A chill wind was starting up. We would have to start preparing for winter pretty soon. Our day's work had been done and now we could relax and chat about the more philosophical things in life.

I was talking about how I couldn't figure out the koan the Master had given me. I had tried all angles and I just couldn't get at the answer. It seemed futile to even try anymore. I was confused and didn't understand what I was doing in this lifetime anymore. We were walking through the stubble of a freshly mowed cornfield.

"It looks like this field will need plowing under," the Master remarked.

I continued talking about my problems. I was telling him how I couldn't relate to this environment, but I couldn't relate to the outside world either; so what was I going to do? I even contemplated suicide, but that wouldn't do any good either. I was more or less at the end of my rope.

"Look at that tree over there," he said. "There are a lot of crows in that tree."

There sure were. There must have been a hundred of them all gathered in that tree, a huge oak tree without any leaves. It must have been an annual crow's convention of some sort. Why did they pick that particular tree anyway? I couldn't stop dwelling on my problems, though.

"Master, I can't understand it. Why does the answer keep eluding me? I've been looking so long." I was on the verge of tears.

"Don't try so hard. It'll come to you in due time. Just relax."

We walked along a path through the woods which led around in a circle back to the cornfield. The moon was beginning to rise. It was a full Harvest Moon. The wind was blowing harder now. We wrapped our cloaks tightly around us to stay warm. When we got back to the cornfield, the crows were gone. The tree was empty.

I decided to try again. And I asked him, "Master, what is the meaning of life?"

And the Master looked at me with a significant glance and a kindly smile, and replied: "Where did the crows go?"