

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. The steady flow of air in and out of my body matches the steady flow of the river beside me. I can hear the water making its way from here to there, merely meandering. It takes no thought of where it will go, nor how fast. I find that strangely peaceful. It is different from the nearby road filled with busy cars, intent on getting somewhere, blind to the beauty just beside them. Above me, a woodpecker taps out its lonesome song on an ancient tree. The wind picks up, whispering secrets for just for a moment, and then settles back down again. Grasses swish and sway, their seeded heads dancing in unison. They have no concerns for their survival. They stand in their appointed place, and simply are. This world is fresh, and tranquil, but at the same time, unspeakably old. It is primordial, powerful, slumbering.

The sun journeys across the sky as I journey far below on the earth. I am a mere speck, surrounded by entities much greater than I am. I am humbled. As I ponder on my own significance, I am reminded that I stand in a veritable temple. The river and its surroundings have become sanctified to me. They have granted me a refuge in which I can simply sit, and be still. They have given me a haven in which I can rest- if only for a moment- before reentering the careworn world.

Unfortunately, unless preserved, this haven cannot last. Instead of water, there will be dry, barren ground. In place of flowers, plastic. A lasting prevention to this tragedy is education. I don't mean education as in notebooks and homework. No, this education must be much deeper, much more important than grade school. This education, after all, will ultimately preserve the beauty that the human race so desperately needs.

If people are educated about the impacts of their actions on the environment, if they come to a deep understanding of what the American River and its canyons have to offer humanity as a whole, then they will respect the river enough to preserve it. And if the river is preserved, the exhausted will find quiet strength, the hopeless will find solace, and those buried in the commotion of everyday life will find peace.

This vision for the American River and its canyons is not just one of preservation. Preservation is essential, but there is a higher ideal to approach. As people are educated about the importance of the river to humanity, they will become renewed and healed. They will find refuge in the beauty of the river. They will be empowered and emerge as a help, not a hindrance, to society. The river can facilitate a change for the better in the human race. It can guide us to progress and lead us to where we should be as a people. That is my vision for the American River and its canyons.

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