Sitting one day, against an oak on the edge of a field, I heard the cry of a hawk and looked up to see a hawk flying into the forest towards the south. I slipped into the hawk’s lodge (a blind made of half-rotten boards I had propped up against a large tree) to watch without being watched. Becoming quiet, I noticed that titmice had encircled the blind and were screaming at me, not fooled by my hiding. Ignoring them I scanned the mandala of beauty that stretched out before me. I saw a purple spire of liatris reaching towards the sun expressing Being with its beauty. Goldenrod, including the rayless ones, were tall but not flowering yet, hinting that soon the field would become more yellow than green. St. Johnswort bloomed here and there, tiny yellow flowers obscured by the green of its tiny leaves and stems. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the hawk glide over the field, feather his wings, and descend. Seconds later he emerged carrying a limp mouse.

Thinking about the mouse, I wondered what the gift of her life meant to the forest and field ecosystems in general and the hawk in particular. My thinking was purposely from a perspective of Gift, one that acknowledges, celebrates that all sentient beings received a gift upon incarnation, one that is uniquely theirs as species but is individual too, a gift to be freely given. The plants, the stone men, the animals and humans, the wind, the stars, the waters and skies, everything, has a gift to give and the ultimate task, role, function, niche, of all of these “beings” is to discover that gift and give it. To a mind dominated by Western abstractions and scientific conceptions, ideas and ways of thinking taken to be the sole arbiters of truth, nature has become either effectively dead or thirsting for blood. Tennyson’s poem calls raw nature “red in tooth and claw,” poeticizing the nearly universal idea, at least in the West, of malevolent animals hunting and devouring terrified, cowering creatures that
scurry to hide, cringing in fear. Such a perspective fits the facts and is therefore true. This view is exclusively a Mouse-View, not the way this particular mouse sees the world, but a more general way of seeing of all mice. Think of how this mouse sees there in the goldenrod field, running through grass burrows, nose-close-to-the-ground. The Mouse-View sees only what is right in front of her nose. The world is far too complex for an exclusive Mouse-View.

Eagles and hawks, sitting in their perches high above, provide quite a different view. They see the whole from a distance, as a panoramic whole: Hawk-Seeing. By combining these views we get yet another way of seeing. Hawk-Seeing may be combined with the Mouse-View into a way of seeing that integrates parts and wholes, a blended way that can see both perspectives at the same time. The Bear-View is yet another perspective. It sees what is within the feeling heart, focusing there for feelings about sense perceptions. Bear-Seeing opens a plethora of possible meanings, a polysemy that “mind” may have missed. The Bear-View combined with Hawk and Mouse-Seeing is yet another view, the Horse-Medicine-Way that unifies all views.

The perspective of integrated Horse-Medicine-Seeing provides psychic space for taking seriously the Gift perspective, the suggestion that all members of the collective nation’s hoop, whatever their tribe, seek the giving of self for the sake of this hoop. The role of individuals includes the giving of self. All clans are related, the mouse clan and the hawk clan, and all clans are to be honored so that the entire hoop, the hoop of all the many nations, may become strong so that all the people, all the sentient beings, from the two-legged to the four-legged, the winged ones and the finned fishes of the sea, and to the chthonic beings who live on and under the ground and their brothers the stone men, might not only live but flourish.
From the perspective of the Horse-Medicine-Way, from the perspective of gift, we might see the hawk-mouse scenario quite differently. Is it possible that in nature a sense of the giving of self for the hoop is primary? Is it possible that the role of mice and hawks and all members of the many tribes of nature is to give of self by becoming their gift to the world? From the perspective of the hawk, overseeing the whole and not the parts, one might discern an overall plan being wrought in nature as it arises in a unity, but we overlook something fundamental by being so far removed.

From the perspective of the mouse with nose close-to-the-ground, separating and isolating events, we might see things differently. Perhaps nature appears to be all tooth and claw, but we cannot know the full truth because we are too close to see behind it or perhaps through it. No complete sense of truth can be discerned with the mind alone, which is why Western science must not be the only medium for discerning it. Western science sees the truth of nature objectively, dispassionately, from far away. This is a cold way of seeing, one that blithely assumes a hard, cruel world: the struggle for survival. Unable to see in any other way, this seeing filters out Bear-Seeing, abolishes it or at least discounts it and so vindicates the world as it is assumed to be.

Hawk-Seeing sees a hawk on a limb waiting for movement in the field, which he finally sees. Leaving his perch, he swoops down on the unsuspecting mouse who hears the sound of wings at the last moment and is enveloped by fear mere seconds before he is crushed by claws, minutes before he is ripped apart and devoured. In this view the hawk is a destroyer, the enemy of mice, a cruel menace. One might imagine a Merry Melodies cartoon image of mice picketing against hawk cruelty, singing invectives that denounce the meanness of hawks. This “scientific” perspective inevitably arises when subjects
become separate from objects, dispassionate watching, recording. But that is not the only way to see this event.

If we look at the same scene from the perspective of the Bear-View, a looking within, a searching for feelings, we might “see” that everything works in a circle. Death is not the end but another beginning, one that cannot be fathomed with reason. In nature, the circle rules; the circles of life and death are ineluctable stages of growth. If matter and energy are interchangeable, then all beings are essentially energy as both shamans and scientists have both maintained. If beings are neither created nor destroyed but merely changed, that change may be seen as a new beginning. I do not pretend to understand the nature of that new beginning or what form it might take, but a lack of understanding does not render it unreal. In such a view, we might see near-death-experiences as near-rebirth experiences, the tunnel and light reminiscent of a birth canal. The first thing a new-born child sees is light.

Exploring further this concept of Gift and its relation to tooth and claw, would it be too big of a stretch to consider that the mouse may know his role in the ecological picture and part of that role is to become food for the hawk? Without the mouse, hawks cannot survive. For the hoop of the nation to flourish, there must be hawks and there must be mice. Hawks must eat, and mice are really good hawk food. What of the possibility that the mouse may voluntarily somehow be giving her life to the hawk so that hawks may live? Could this be possible? If it is, the mouse’s job would not be to make it easy on the hawk because that would not help the hawk be hawk because such a hawk would soon cease to exhibit hawk-ness. The easily-fed hawk would eventually become a shadow of a hawk in much the same way that a dog is a shadow of a wolf. Such a mouse would engage in the mouse dance as she moves out into the field knowing that there are hawks about yet she goes anyway, spurred on by her predilection, her desire to become a
mouse. The hawk is aware of the mouse’s presence as he sits on a limb, alert, watching. The mouse too is aware, aware of her surroundings as images blur and focus as she moves around on the grassy floor looking for seeds to eat. She performs the mouse dance, her last dance, and she performs it with passion, looking this way and that, moving her nose into the soft, cool earth, holding her nose in the air searching for an odor, the odor of food, or a mate. All in a dance, almost in slow motion, as the hawk swoops and strikes, the mouse’s dance ending in a flash. Her time was up.

In this Horse-Medicine View, we see that the hawk too danced as he spied movement in the grass from his perch on the forest edge. He danced as he swooped gracefully on thermals straight to the distant mouse. The hawk dance was perfect as he slowed himself a little by feathering his wings allowing the mouse to clear the cover of the tall grass into a barren spot. We see that the mouse danced her last dance, manifesting her mouseness fully. She moved carefully through the grass, smelling this way and that, searching this thick patch of grass and moving over to another, an equally thick and almost impassable patch of grass. She exhibited pure mouseness as she perched her nose in the air searching for a smell before a shadow crossed over her and she scurried ahead to escape, out of the cover of the grass, for just a moment. What would it be like for a human being to manifest her true nature so completely?

Perhaps the giving of self, mouse to hawk, is an act of love, a perfect act of selfless love. Perhaps the mouse and the hawk are not enemies but allies in some strange, incomprehensible way. In this Horse-Medicine perspective, the mouse acts in a gesture of love to the hawk to enhance the integrity of the collective hoop of the nation, the ecosystem the mouse and hawk share. In such a scenario, nature is not tooth and claw but replete with deeply empathic encounters between being and being. Such a view corresponds to experience as well and is therefore an accurate description. Sitting ensconced in nature without
agenda, with preconceived notions stilled–just sitting–one feels a world not of tooth and claw but of profound beauty and deep joy and peace. Just sitting–under a tree, listening to the song of the cicadas, feeling a gossamer breeze play across a face, watching the butterfly flit here and there, heedless of the blue jay that plucks it from the sky. Even at such death-dealing moments one smiles, feeling the peace of nature.