

Crane, Holder of the Spirit

The sun, not yet emerged from the sea, cast a pale blue sky through the night-risen steam from a snake-like river. The river cuts its way through the ice and snow which lay, empowering the landscape. Dead reeds from last years marshes peak through the snow drifts. The trees stand lifeless to the sound of rippling water flowing around old reeds and other grasses. The sound of silence casts its melody of peace to the mountains in the far distance.

The Kushiro Marsh land of Japan bears the mark of being desolate and Baron as it stretches its flats snow covered Marsh for miles. The twisting River, which is a few degrees above freezing, awakens to a softened sun, as the steam from the river slowly fades. Within the river stand a flock of Japanese red crowned cranes with their heads tucked into their feathers to keep warm. They are standing on one foot as to keep the other from freezing, switching periodically. The river is their warmest and safest refuge.

Suddenly, a few cranes raise their beaks, for a predator has entered their danger zone. Feathers began to ruffle, heads begin to bob and sway. A black bear has entered the river and is slowly wading through the current looking for a bite to eat. The Bear, looking for fish, continues to walk toward the alarmed cranes. The majestic five foot birds begin to stir, running and flapping their wings, taking to the air. Like mass confusion, yet perfectly organized and graceful, the cranes lift themselves from the river. The Bear is not concerned with these birds until it notices and lone Crane who recently broke a wing by getting it caught in a telephone line. The Bear seizes its opportunity as the crane spreads its wings, reaching a span of over five feet. As it arches its neck and point its bill downward, displaying its red Crown like a war emblem, it begins to make threatening sounds like a growl. The Bear continues to rush as the crane began flapping its wings. With wings spread, head down, the crane and bear face each other. The bear rushes with razor sharp claws. The two entangle in battle as water and feathers begin to fly. With one last attempt, the crane lunges its Spear like beak toward the bear and pierces it into the skull, almost immediately killing the Bear. The battle has ended, but there are no victors, for the crane, slashed and torn, will also soon die.

Another crane comes to join the dying crane, sounding an alarm of distress and sadness. It raises its beak and calls, "Cur-lew, Cur-lew". The two cranes have been mates for over thirty-five years, having endured many hardships and joyous occasions together, but now that union has come to an end. The female Crane purrs quietly, then flies off to find the other cranes, for the cranes will not return to that spot for months because of the intruder.

Many days had passed, and the flock flies to a nearby corn field looking for handouts from farmers and school children. Food is so scarce in the winter with everything lifeless and frozen. At Tsuruimura(the village where cranes are), many of the vegetable farmers feed the birds through the winter.

With the sun having risen in the sky in the birds having had their fill, they begin to play. Often before a crane eats something, it will kick it around and throw it up in the air several times, and so game time begins. The cranes jump high into the air and sound their trumpet like high pitched voices, "Crew-whip, Crew-whip," as one crane begins to flap its wings and shout another and another join in until the field looks like a joyous festival of singing in dancing. With their bodies shimmering almost all pure white, except for a row of black secondary feathers and part of their neck, they look like angels courting each other any celebration of happiness. The cranes are a symbol of happiness, love, fertility to the Japanese and are even thought of to be divine, being called the "Marsh Gods". Because cranes had been known to live more than 80 years, they also are a symbol of endurance and longevity.

After a long cold winter, if you deal flowers finally push their way through the remaining ice, showing the first signs of spring. The cold days begin to give way to the warm temperatures, and soon the ice and snow will once again be gone. There is much activity in the flock of red crowned cranes. Peeking into the river for mudfish, tadpoles, frogs, and carp. Some cranes are in the reed eating dropwort, which is like parsley, and reed bulbs. The cranes are spread out over a large area, for they have lifetime mates. They prefer their own space, so they keep a distance of at least five feet from each other.

The morning is quiet, except for a few crows gathering nearby, when suddenly a crane raises its beak to the sky and cries to the wind, "Crrew". The sound of the trumpet echoes for miles from the three foot wind pipe of the majestic male Crane. Quickly, several other cranes begin to join in with the orchestra. The male crane approaches a lonely female who stands brilliantly within the rays of the suns. Both cranes gracefully arch their necks and their bills skyward. They raise their folded wings behind their backs, the male a little higher, and toss them lightly in time to their song. They perform their mudra in preparation for their kata (spirit dance/mating dance).

The male responds "C-rrew!", and the female returns with "Whip-Whip", "C-rrew", "Whip-Whip". The two arch their backs and with joyous sounds, create the kata of the cranes. Each move gracefully, each foot intricately stepped, and each call in unison with each other. Several pairs of cranes have joined in and the Marsh land sounds like an immense orchestra tuning up. But not all the cranes are enjoying this spirit, for at the age of two years, the cranes undergo a molting of their flight feathers which leaves them unable to fly for about a month. These cranes are constantly nervous and wary for intruders.

A male and female have recently built a nest nearby which contains two milk-white smooth crane eggs, twice the size of a hens eggs. The two cranes shared equally in their duties of parenthood. They both build the nest, incubate the eggs, and after the crane chicks hatch, they raise them together for two or three years.

The cranes love to play, jumping into the air with their wings spread wide, sounding their trumpets, and letting the good spirits of life surround their presence. The crane is a bird of happiness and wishes no conflict, but a crane is very territorial and proud. Though only a threatening gesture is all that is usually needed to send an intruder on its way, the Japanese crane is prepared if necessary

for violent conflict. Its sharp toes are deadly weapons, and the bill and wings can be used as well. A crane can easily throw an opponent off balance by simply flapping its wings.

Truly the crane is a rightful symbol of muscular strength, but more importantly, the crane is the spirit bird, and represents spiritual strength.

The crane will find its path, but more importantly, find its spirit. Cranes are not born with an understanding of the spirit, but through the trials and errors through the crane's long lifetime, they come to know. The crane is seeking, for every seeking for better.

The crane is the keeper of silent strength, the protector of truth and the example of peace. The Samurai fashioned his life after the iron, yet fluid, image of the crane. The crane truly seeks perfection in its thoughts and actions. It can stand like a tree with its roots reaching deep and can float through the breeze like a dandelion's seed. The Crane knows of the pearl of life and casts its image from its qualified eyes. The crane, and its meek and humble ways, is the professor of nothing, which is everything.

It is not so much as whether I see myself as the crane, but what do you see? For only he who sees my eyes of action could truly know, and who sees my eyes more than me? There are times when I am not a crane and wish to hide my face for I turn away in laziness and selfishness. Only he who is true to God, to himself, and to others, can be a crane. Only he who is selfless could possibly be a crane. Only he who continually seeks perfection can hold the mark of crane.

The crane is a symbol of utter chaos in perfect balance, and balance in non-balance, of strength within a blanket of peace, and ancient wisdom within childlike innocence.

For a person to live the spirit of the crane is to think before he acts, but acts without hesitation. His actions should always be of generosity, and most importantly, love. Every breath, every movement (and every moment), a crane has to represent, and be, truth, and walk on the path toward perfection. If he falters, which he will, there must be immediate pursuing toward recovery. A crane must be like a child, with high hopes, with great expectations, and a curiosity of life, always pressing at holding to innocence through continuing to seek the wisdom and presence of God. To be wise and love and humility, and fight against vice. A crane must have no excuses the whole firm to life's many challenges, always searching for better, and living what he preaches.

For about spindly legged crane in its still full silence, there is a time to raise your feathers and sound your trumpeted voice, for you are, and must be, the protector of the spirit.

The crane, the struggle, the commitment.

What can words truly express of its illuminating spirit?

*A crane must be proud, yet humble, broken but not destroyed,
on a journey through not lost, spirited in life.*

*The crane has infinite questions but lives its life by faith, seeks
physical opportunity but trusts in the unseen, and puts its trust in God.*

*Crane, like a child, innocent and free to discover a world of thought
and opportunity.*

*Crane, like a child, full of hope, full of life, conqueror, and holder of the
future.*

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Crane

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