

A powerful, passionate story of leadership like none you have ever heard before! — MARJORIE SUNFLOWER SARGENT (MATTAPONI)

# ONE WITH THE PEOPLE

Everything you need  
to be the leader  
they need!

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# JACK KING

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*Everything You Need To Be the Leader They Need!*

JACK KING

Charlottesville, Virginia

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*To my girls,  
Gretl, Grace, Hope, & Faith,  
and girls everywhere  
who shall reclaim lost harmony  
and lead us  
through the dark night  
so we may be awakened,  
like the dawn's breaking of a new day,  
to the profound possibilities of life, love,  
– and leadership –  
which invite us to  
embrace compassion,  
restore goodness,  
and become more loving;  
profound possibilities  
that blend the sacred colors of man  
into a single hue of humanity  
that shines like a thousand suns.  
Peace.*

1

**Love: Be as the Soaring Eagle ~ One With the Wind**

*A very great vision is needed for life,  
and the man who has it  
must follow it — as the eagle seeks the deepest blue of the sky.  
~Crazy Horse, Oglala Lakotah*

The young girl of 12 winters stopped, careful not to make another sound. She heard it again, and she wanted to know its significance. But who would she ask? Suddenly, a very old Navajo man of great beauty stood before her, appearing as though he came down from Father Sky. She knew there was nothing to fear; their friendship is a sacred one. So, she asked him.

“Sani,” she whispered.

“Yes, Topangah,” Sani replied. “What is it?”

“You are *bataalii*, a healer, Sani. You are the center that receives power and gives it to any who are in need. You see how body, mind, and spirit are connected, not simply within a single being, but across families, communities, relations, Earth Mother, and the universe. You know what it is like to care for another more than you care for yourself.”

“Yes, Topangah. That is what I do.”

“I know, Sani. But I don’t mean it that way.”

“What *do* you mean, Topangah?”

“Well, I think there’s more to it than that. So much more. I watch you. And I pay attention. You don’t put others first because you have to. You do so because it is your nature. You understand the natural order of things, Sani. Mother Earth and Father Sky have taught you the necessity and the importance of maintaining balance and harmony with your surroundings, with the world around you, and with yourself. We see this balance and harmony in your love and compassion, and in your giving and receiving. That’s why the people have chosen you to lead us. You have come to know more

than many will ever learn. Because you help us understand every chant, every offering, and every action has meaning, your ways bring together balance, symmetry, respect, harmony, and connectedness to lift us. Your ways are humble and honest. Your ways are wise; they reflect the deep respect you have for our people. Your ways invite us to be our best.”

“Yes, Topangah. The people call it *bózhó*, or *bózhóni*; you might hear some say I ‘walk in beauty.’ It is the way of living a balanced and harmonious life where everything — people, spirit, and nature — is connected, and influences everything else. It enables me to lead, not simply because the people have asked me to lead them, but because the people see in me a reflection of our multi-dimensional world, a world of one where every relation is important to the next because it is in touch with all aspects of one’s world; the people see in me a way of life.”

“Yes, Sani. But it’s even more than that, isn’t it?”

“What are you saying, Topangah?”

“Sani, I can see the path to becoming a medicine man — a singer, a healer, a spiritual teacher, and a leader — is not easy. Because it is full of trials and tribulations, suffering and sacrifice,

challenges, and learning, it requires patience, understanding, and compassion. It surely must encompass all facets of life and human nature, extending beyond the physical to include the mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of our lives.”

“You have learned much, Topangah. As you have reasoned, it is for me to take on the suffering and the fear, the hate and the anger, the pain and the confusion, and the sickness of our people. Like the season of new life, traditional ceremonies, medicine, sacred dances, and ancient rituals come to my aid.”

“Sani, I believe there is something more.”

“Yes, Topangah.”

“Sani, you are *bataalii*, our singer, healer, and spiritual teacher — our leader — because you are not afraid to love us.”

Looking up to *Yádilbil Shitaá* (Father Sky), Topangah smiles. High above the broad piñon trees near the crest of the colorful mesa, her friend, Eagle, circles higher and higher over valleys, fields, and mountains like the smoke offered to Great Spirit rises from the pipe to carry our prayers from the physical world to the spirit world. She has seen him many times before. Each time, he

appears to know she is near and calls for her as only he can: E-e-e-ya! E-e-e-ya! And each time she hears his cry, she looks to Above World with an angelic smile.

Eagle is her friend. He represents everything good about her life. In Eagle, Topangah sees and learns of love. She asks Sani, a wise old tribal leader gifted as a ‘word sender’ and the ancient art of storytelling, what it all means.

“Sani, why does Eagle soar with such grace and purpose?”

“Little Topangah,” replied Sani, “Eagle makes no effort to be. He simply is.”

“Can we fly with him?” Topangah asks. After a short pause to reflect, Sani affirms, “You already do. Walk with me.”

It is not a long walk, but it is a beautiful one! Stepping over stones along the Wolven trails, Sani and his adopted granddaughter, Topangah, soon reach the mesa’s glorious expanse. They stop to fully absorb the majesty. Sitting with their legs not merely touching, but clearly in touch with *Shimá Nahasdzúán* (Mother Earth), they look again to Father Sky’s deep blue palette.

“Topangah,” Sani softly speaks with a rather sacred solemnity, “although it is not for you to know the passing of times I have seen, keep your eyes on our friend, Eagle, as I talk of the important duty that befalls man.”

Topangah, serenely and comfortably sitting with her legs tightly crossed under her small frame, learned early on from her Elders the importance of being close to Mother Earth. Her grandmother fondly remembered the days of her youth, and often spoke of lessons learned over a lifetime. “Our people, the *Diné*,” recounted her grandmother, “love the ground upon which they sit. It is a reminder of one’s closeness to maternal power. Within the warmth of earth, one finds strength, healing, cleanliness, and a restful peace.”

Topangah could not mistake the strong smells of wildness, the desert, and her people as she quietly considered her grandmother’s soft voice and the warmth of her words of encouragement in the voice of the wind. Lost in the moment, she unexpectedly found herself face to face with the sound she heard before, the sound that first drew her to Sani. With her concentration broken, Topangah wanted more than ever to understand what it was she heard. Sani was not stirred from his contemplation but, she noticed, perhaps

for the first time, her friend Eagle heard it, too, as he continued to paint endless circles onto Father Sky's deep blue, cloudless canvas.

"Topangah." Sani's voice was as the thunder that breaks the silent vigil at storm's edge. "Our Elders teach us many things about life. From our earliest years, we learn life, not unlike the path our friend, Eagle, now takes as he sails upward out of man's grasp, is a circle extending from childhood to childhood. From our Lakotah, Nakotah, and Dakotah brothers in the north, we learn all things in the circle are equal. The circle creates unity, not just among men of every sacred color — white, yellow, red, and black — but we find a place on the circle for all living things: every animal, every tree, every plant, and every man, woman, and child. And just like every other living being, we generally leave this world much as we entered it. The difference is what we learn along the way. For many, their learning accounts for so little. For others, their learning makes all the difference, not only for them but, more importantly, for the rest of us. Do you know why, Topangah?"

Topangah could not express the answer Sani sought. But she knew his words to be true. She saw it in her people. And she saw how her people might be drawn to one more than any other. Sani was the perfect example. They did not draw to him because they sought healing. They were drawn to him because he understood

the people and their needs, and he believed in them. He knew their strengths and weaknesses, and he knew about power, love, reality, healing, and life. He believed in the power of a positive attitude. He looked to their future as he looked for the good in everyone. He encouraged them, he valued them, and he cared about them.

They were drawn to him because he loved them.

Topangah whispers, "Love?"

Topangah and Sani look heavenward to Above World. As they do, Eagle looks upon them. Time stands still as Grandfather Sun dances with Mother Earth across Father Sky.

Sani again breaks the silence. "Like Grandfather Sun, Topangah, we come. We stand in the footprints of our Elders as we walk. Sometimes we dance. We heal someone's hurt. We restore another's hope. We leave. Yet, we remain, always close by!"

Topangah thought for a moment. "How can we leave yet always be close by, Sani? Is it because our people know us, and remember?"

“Yes,” says Sani. “And, no. They know us, but knowing is not enough. They remember, but memory fades, just as Grandfather Sun’s setting rays disappear each night beyond the canyon rim.”

Topangah was wrestling with this idea when Sani spoke again. “Topangah, the air you breathe does not belong to you. It belongs to all living things, those now in your presence, those yet to come, and those who came before you. The words you speak travel the winds that have brushed the hair of young girls in faraway places, in times distant and near. The bones of our Elders, in their journey to the other side, have provided nutrient to trees that shade all who now walk under their branches, and all who shall walk there in the days and nights to come.”

Topangah urges Sani to stop. The full explanation will have to wait because the view over the mesa has carried her to a new place, a place of deeper understanding. “Sani,” Topangah says with a smile. “Gifts given with no regard for anything in return bring remembrance of the giver. As we can see, Grandfather Sun brightens the day for all the same. It has been this way since the beginning. And behold our friend, Eagle: those who will take notice soon discover he warmly smiles down upon all. He is wise; he sees everything in the heavens and all things on Mother Earth.

For this, he is held in high esteem and the people regard him with much respect.”

Sani, delighted with Topangah’s discovery, waits a moment before adding, “It is not because he gifts us with his presence that we remember him, Topangah.”

As she ponders Sani’s remark, it comes to her. “Of course, Sani. We learn from our childhood to respect the gift — and the giver — because *love* connects us.”

“Yes, Topangah,” Sani kindly whispers as he continues to look skyward. “Love and friendship speak to our kinship with soaring eagles, and it is this love that gives us reason to remember. It is a story shared by all peoples upon Mother Earth.”

Both sit enjoying the moment.

A little time passes when Sani asks, “Who do the people seek out to lead them?”

Topangah knew, immediately, who they sought. “They seek those who are unafraid to love them. Like you, Sani.”

“Yes, Topangah,” Sani acknowledges. “They seek those who are unafraid to love them, and the message that pours out from within their hearts is no different than the yearning of your own. It is the same as the cry of many hearts who have walked before us. Each heart seeks the same thing. To know love. This is no different for our friend, Eagle. His knowing, we learn, comes from his giving. And it is in his giving *we* come to know what he already knew. Love is the driving force that feeds our hopes, our expectations, our songs, and our dreams.”

“You see, Topangah,” Sani continues, “The people don’t seek leaders, they seek to know love. And it is the power of that love shared between them that gives rise to leadership. Like the medicine man who knows his gifts, talents, and knowledge do not rise from his own power but, instead, belong to the people so, too, do true leaders recognize — and appreciate — it is they who are empowered, not the other way around. A true tribal leader assumes a leadership position, not because they sought it but, rather, because that leadership role has chosen him or her. A real medicine man or medicine woman, not unlike any other authentic leader of the people, should never have to identify him/herself as such. It is not the Indian way.”

Topangah does not want Sani to stop. She is not certain why Sani has singled her out, but she is certain she is not alone in her eagerness and her desire to learn more. She and her young friends have always looked up to those who lead them with love. (For Topangah, it was always more than merely a mark of respect.) But do they know why? What is it they see when they look up to them? Before now, Topangah would open her eyes but she did not see. Though she now *sees*, is seeing everything? Could there be something more than spiritual knowledge, tribal myths and legends, healing arts, rituals, and ceremonies?

Topangah couldn’t say she never gave it much thought. Truth is, from a very young age, she lived in her own little world, a world of color, sound, and movement that danced within dreams that later became tools for self-discovery, spiritual self-development, and healing. Though she knew little to nothing of sacred naming rituals, tobacco burning ceremonies, doctoring ceremonies, sweat lodge ceremonies, potlatches, moontime rituals, spiritual training, vision quests, story-telling sessions, or talking circles, she knowingly possessed a gentleness, understanding, sensitivity, and gift of compassion beyond her years. It is as though the way she *sees* and the way she understands has always been with her. Topangah now, more than ever, wanted to know what *they* see. Do her leaders see *her*? She knows Sani sees her, but what of the

others? What do they see in her? What does Sani see in her? Why do the people choose to follow only certain ones?

It is at that moment Sani breaks the silence.

“Topangah, when you look up to a leader of our people, what do you see? What do your young friends see?”

“Sani,” she replies, “I now see that they *see*.”

Sani smiles.

Continuing, Topangah adds, “Perhaps for the first time, I realize I matter to them. I am not just one of many. And our people matter to them, too. They begin their work from where we are, not where they want us to be. We matter enough for them to honor and respect our experiences, to affirm and connect our identity with our culture, and to say yes to our asking them to lead us.”

“Yes, Topangah. It’s quite simple really. Leaders do what they do because people matter. The people matter because *love* matters.”

Topangah concentrates on Sani’s words, but says nothing.

“Let me help you understand, Topangah. Leadership is not a thing. Nor is it a way of life. Leadership knows nothing of position, power, or prominence. It is not self-seeking, nor is it self-serving. Are you listening, Topangah? Do you understand? I’m not suggesting it ‘shouldn’t be;’ I’m saying leadership cannot be these things.” Continuing, Sani makes the point more clearly: “At its heart, Topangah, leadership is love manifest, and leadership without love is no leadership at all. Consider our friend, Eagle.”

“I love Eagle, Sani,” Topangah interjects. “As Eagle soars, my consciousness merges with his so I may be one with him, relaxed, happy, and at peace. His strength inspires me. Eagle is my friend, and he knows my thoughts.”

“Topangah, Eagle sees what we cannot see. The Elders tell us he sits in the East with the direction of leadership and courage, emotion, and fire. Eagle, is important to us not because he seeks greatness but, rather, because he avoids its attachment; he shows us why we must love to lead.”

“Sani,” Topangah asks, “is that all our Elders teach about Eagle?”

“There is much more,” Sani tells Topangah. “To know Eagle is to know the Creator, to feel a deep, abiding, brotherly love, the love most visible in humanity. Eagle teaches us a love shared with others must derive its strength from love of oneself, a love that draws on our love for the Great Spirit. We learn Eagle, because he can reach higher into the heavens than all the creatures, was chosen by the Great Spirit to represent this lasting truth. Eagle *is* love.”

Sani stops briefly to watch Topangah. Then he adds, “Eagle reflects everything we hold dear. In Eagle, we see power, beauty, skill, a life in harmony with nature, the ability to see into the hearts and minds of the *Diné*, a reason to nurture and care for another, and loyalty. Topangah, the Elders speak of Eagle with a great respect. As Eagle seeks the deepest blue of Father Sky, it is said he lights our *good red road* as it winds its way through the heavens, spilling over the star people onto our sacred mountain tops, and rolling down to find a home among the *Diné* before being lifted to Above World in our songs and prayers to complete its journey, a continuous circle of life, a sacred hoop. In so doing, we may not be able to see Eagle, but he can always see himself. Such is the lesson for our life. The Ancients tell us the good red road is a road of humility and understanding where one stands on equal ground with all others. The river that runs by it is wise and the wind that blows over it knows all things. To know the good red road is to know

sacrifice and to always know we can do better. As we walk the good red road, the beauty in all things becomes clear. It is here we pray, dance, think, dream, teach, learn, grieve, and sing. It is here we see the truth in our oneness. Let us always be mindful of what we can see in ourselves even if others cannot see us.”

“Please tell me more, Sani,” Topangah implores.

“Like the soaring eagle is one with the wind, Topangah,” Sani continues, “leaders must be one with the people. Just as the wind lifts Eagle, it is for the leader to lift the people. Even the eagle feather says, ‘I will do good things for my people.’ In turn, it is the power of the people that becomes the wind beneath the leader’s wings. Without this power, the leader can no longer soar. With this power, the people soar, too. High above the tops of the mountains visited by Grandfather Sun. What do you think this power is, Topangah?”

By now, Topangah is hanging on Sani’s every word. Her response is immediate. “It is love, Sani.”

“Through this love, Topangah, Eagle teaches something more.” Topangah’s eyes are wide with anticipation as Sani enlightens her. “From Eagle, we learn the language Grandfather

Sun shares with those mountains. It is the sound that brings order to the chaos of our world. It is the sound that brings right to our wrongs. It is the sound of silence.”

“That’s it, Sani! That’s what I heard.”

“What did you hear, Topangah?”

“Silence, Sani. It was so beautiful!”

“It is beautiful,” Sani repeated. “The Elders teach us silence is respected, and courtesy is expected. Silence, they tell us, is not the absence of activity but the evidence of it. It is in this silence we come to understand what it is our heart seeks: the opportunity to serve. And it is in this service a man’s ‘greatness’ is revealed. You see, Topangah, our heart brings to life the story we need to hear as silence waits with us. Silence is a sign of acceptance, serenity, peace, and harmony between man and nature. The Lakotah of the Plains teach us silence produces courage, patience, dignity, and respect for all living things. The man who turns from silence, we learn, turns from his people. Our brothers say it like this: ‘Man’s heart away from nature becomes hard.’ Teachings of the Chippewa, timber people to the north, urge us to listen in silence to all teachers of the wild — mountains, streams, fields, waterfalls, lightning, thunder,

trees, animals, and all living things — so we may learn. In this way, one may inherit the wisdom important for our people, even if our people are not yet ready for us. For, you see, some will make fun of us, others will talk bad about us, while still others may not understand our powers and knowledge come from our relations with nature.”

This was a lot for Topangah to grasp. She had much to learn but she was exceedingly grateful for all Sani and Eagle will teach her. She had questions, but she knew the answers were before her. She somehow sensed she had only to listen to her friend to learn from him. And as she watched — and celebrated — her friend soaring unfettered in his blue heavenly realm, she sought, through the power of love, the same freedom to fly, strong and noble, among dreams of her own.

“O’ Great Spirit, let me learn to listen,” Topangah whispered as Sani stood alone in the stillness to keep a hushed vigil on Grandfather Sun, “so I can help the people begin to better understand the world that surrounds us — Grandfather Sun, the stars shining in the indigo sky, Moon Woman, the wind through the forest, the sacred mountains, the rivers, lakes, and streams, the animals, both two-legged and four, and the winged creatures.”

“O’ Great Spirit, you have taught me the power of Eagle is also the power of the messenger. Let me learn to listen so I can help the people begin to find themselves as one with the life that empowers us — Mother Earth, the wind, the water, and the fire.”

“O’ Great Spirit, let me learn to listen so I can help the people begin to give back like the boundless blue of Father Sky and the clouds illuminated by Grandfather Sun’s rising give of themselves freely to us.”

“O’ Great Spirit, let me learn to listen so I can help the people cause no unnecessary pain to the living. Let me learn to listen so I can help the people learn to love — and respect — again.”