

# RUSKIN BOND OF INDIA: A TRUE SON OF THE SOIL

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## ABSTRACT

*Ruskin Bond is a well-known nature writer. His reactions to the natural world are reflexive. His father first hinted at the seriousness of this commitment. Bond recounts his father's introduction to the wonders of nature through planting trips on the Dehra hills in many of his books. His outlook on the natural world is influenced by the writings of Thoreau and Richard Jefferies. He has stated his fondness for Jefferies' works thusly. Bond has fully embraced the stoicism of the pagan religion. According to him, Mother Nature is the ultimate divinity, and the entire cosmos is a manifestation of her might. Bond admired Rudyard Kipling greatly for his fervent devotion to the vast Himalayas. The words of Kipling echo in his mind: "This is the true smell of the Himalayas, and if once it creeps into the blood of man, that man will at last forgetting all else, return to the hills to die" (Bond, *The Complete Stories and Novels*. 16).*

**Keywords:** *Ruskin Bond; Nature; Himalayas; Indian Culture; Children's Novels*

## INTRODUCTION

Bond is a huge fan of the outdoors. He lives off of Nature and creates through her. It's a never-ending love affair that never gets old because the scenery and hues are constantly changing. According to him, Mother Nature opens her arms to both mighty and meek alike. The perceptions of different people account for the variation. Bond is so in love with nature that he chooses to live in complete harmony with it, whereas the other two may approach it to conquer her or exploit it. Since he couldn't bear to be away from the fresh scent of pines, Bond has made his home in the Garhwal Himalayas, where he can observe and record the ever-changing colours of the region's snowy peaks and dew-spattered meadows.

Bond sought solace in the comforting arms of nature. Bond's father had died tragically, yet the hills were there for him to feel safe after his loss. His veins felt like they were carrying mountains. The plants and trees around him took on the role of a kind spirit as well. They resembled the guiding influence of his cherished father. Here, Nature acts as a powerful soother, dispelling his sadness and isolation. He is able to overcome death and restore his sense of redemption through nature. That man and nature are inextricably linked is reaffirmed. Bond is able to overcome his own concerns with the support of nature in a therapeutic setting.

Those with delicate psyches can find an emotional counterpoint in nature. For Bond, it serves double duty. He might use the information as inspiration for story ideas and plot developments. His creative energy is renewed while being recharged. Writing a novel is arduous work, and even a small bird or a flower outside his window might do wonders to revive him. His

imagination is revitalised as a result. His writing exudes an exquisite gentleness, like the tinkling of raindrops, the warbling of birds, the rippling and gurgling of brooks, the whispering of plants, and the dancing of the summer breeze. The occasional writing obstacles are also eliminated by the benevolent effect of nature.

Bond's characters are also derived from the subset of the population that maintains a harmonious relationship with the natural world. This group consists of retirees, gardeners, tonga drivers, small business owners, and farmers. Innocence, simplicity, and purity are defining characteristics of Bond's characters. They personify the best quality of life, the capacity to take pleasure in ordinary things. When surrounded by nature, people feel renewed.

Bond has a naturalist's affinity for flora, fauna, and insects. He has a special insight into their routines thanks to his extensive time spent with them. Butterflies, caterpillars, beetles, squirrels, and bluejays are just few of the small animals that have a magnetic allure. Everything is scrutinised, including repulsive things like lizards and leeches. Nothing escapes the scrutiny of his small vision. Bond, taking notes like a scientist, photographs their daily lives to tell the tale of their culture.

The natural world takes the stage as a mood-setting backdrop. Bond is talented in painting global vistas that fit the story's theme. Nature serves as a further character enhancer. Nature itself controls the flow of events. Bond's appreciation for nature progresses from a focus on the senses to a more universal humanism. His works of fiction have a way of gently reintroducing us to nature, where we might rediscover our innate trust and innocence.

Bond brings his personal world of Dehradun to vivid life and draws his readers in. The Garhwal hills, the subtropical Siwaliks, and Dehradun all come to life thanks to his vivid descriptions. He captures the specialness of the everyday while evocatively evoking its landscapes, customs, occupation, and hardship. His works of fiction have the flavour of regional or national literature. His depiction of the people and culture of the hills is characteristic of a nature writer.

Bond's novels provide us with recognisable landmarks that may be used to create a mental map, such as a shopping centre with its stores, a park with its typical trees and flowers, a formerly grand but now dilapidated mansion or church, and a significant cemetery. His descriptions of settings in his writings read like travelogues. He finds inspiration for his writing in the purity of nature and in the hearts of children. Bond's protagonists are all children who are quite old for their years. With the help of nature as a backdrop, he has crafted believable individuals with whom readers may empathise.

Bond is a multitalented author who has received praise for his works for children, his deft handling of short stories and novellas, his taxonomic delineation of flora and fauna, his honest and authentic representation of the marginalised, his lucid and straightforward language, and his upbeat humanism. The gentle strength of his stories comes from his compassion for the downtrodden and unsung heroes. Children and the natural world are constant themes in his

work. The purpose of this research is to analyse Bond's use of nature and the relationship between children and nature in his novels and short tales.

The novellas written by Ruskin Bond are a jubilant ode to nature in all its glory. Bond's debut novella, *The Room on the Roof*, depicts his feelings and thoughts as he interacts with nature. Scenes are described in great detail, so readers may imagine themselves in Rusty's shoes. When Mr. Harrison Rusty disobeyed his guardian and went to the bazaar, the guardian beat him severely. Rusty bolted. After exhausting all other options, he decided to settle at the market. The allure of the bazaar's bustle and commotion was strong. The natural setting portrayed here emphasises Rusty's isolation and disappointment. The skinny puppy, the woman's mournful song, and the jackal's howl all reflect Rusty's own ruined state. Rusty's typical anxiousness and panic are brought to life by the environment. Rusty is lonely and destitute yet he is hopeful for future. Bond's vivid description established the story's tone and atmosphere. The story's tone is established by the swaying trees, rustling leaves, howling wolves, raging winds, pouring rain, dazzling lights, and desolate bungalow. Bond's amazing skill at character development is a reflection of his exceptional powers of observation and description.

### **RUSKIN BOND'S VIEWS ON NATURE AS DEPICTED IN HIS WORKS**

Bond's treatment is unparalleled because it is difficult to find any literary artist, let alone a modern Indian fiction writer, who achieves the same effect. His works are like a novelty shop for the wonders of nature. A humble Bond collects the award, saying, "I cannot think of anyone comparable for whom the mountains have been a constant motif... There doesn't seem to be any notable Indian literature that originated in the Himalayas, at least not in the modern era. One possible explanation is that it is simpler to approach publishers in India's plains, where many writers must remain for work. This sort of sensitivity to the natural world is unusual, however. Bond spent time in the mountains, and he says the mountains have always treated him well as a writer. Despite the challenges he's encountered as a freelance writer, he says, "Writing in the hills, on the hills, and its people is, to say the very least, a most, satisfying and rewarding experience...."

In his mind, Bond has already climbed Everest. He has written volumes on the captivating beauty of mountains in his own individual way although he feels there is a lot more to explore for mountaineers as well as authors. Each time, a different layer of complexity is ready to be uncovered. As the road winds around each bend, a fresh panorama of rolling hills and deep valleys opens up before the traveller's eyes. Hills were naturally appealing to Bond because of his deep appreciation for the outdoors. In contrast to the uniformity of the plains, no two hills or mountains will ever be the same. A person "... can live on the loneliest mountain top without feeling lonely."

Among contemporary writers, Bond stands out as someone whose character and writing have been profoundly shaped by the mountains and their enormous, entrancing grandeur. Bond has a deep and abiding connection to the hills due to his upbringing there. He recounts: "I had

grown up amongst those great blue and brown mountains; they had nourished my blood." The natural splendour of his "... chosen heartland, the Garhwal Himalayas" inspired him to greatness. It enticed him, and it educated him in the ways of nature communication. The proximity to the majestic, brilliant, and calm Himalayas was no ordinary impact; they served as a living preceptor and a loving guardian to him throughout his life. They have cared for his needs and helped shape his personality.

After leaving India for a while, Bond recognised his need for the Himalayas. The stunning Himalayan scenery had left an indelible impression on his brain, and a gorgeous but lonesome island like Jersey, where he had gone to shape his profession, had brought this loss home to him in a powerful way. Although Bond enjoyed the wide and free environment of London, he yearned for "... the freedom that only the mountain can give." Even at his most alone moments, the thought of the hills brought him comfort. He says that "though I was separated from them by thousand of miles of ocean, plain and desert, I could not rid them from my system."

Bond, a very perceptive individual, is moved by the breathtaking splendour of nature. He constantly extols the wonders of nature and uses tremendous eloquence in his descriptions of them. Clearly, he feels much at home amongst rustic occurrences. Nature serves not only as a background but also as a character full of life and sentiments. Because practically all of his works are set in the mountainous Garhwal region, critics have pegged him as a local author. He has caught the Garhwal hills' lively moods throughout the year, tethered to the location dear to his heart. His descriptions of the Garhwal Mountains, a paradise for painters, are as vivid and nuanced as any painting. He successfully captivates his audience by painting a vivid and genuine portrait of the setting. He has an in-depth understanding of these mountainous regions of Northern India. He considers this part of India to be the true India, and he has set down deep roots there.

'My Father's Trees still grow in Dehra,' a short story written by Bond, is set in this picturesque town in Northern India. He states that "The valley of Dehradun lies between the first range of the Himalayas and the smaller but older Siwalik range." Dehra was first found by the British because of the country's temperate climate and stunning scenery. "... the rolling hills of Dehra ... reminded them, just a little bit, of England's green and pleasant land." They also liked the area since it serves as an entrance to the picturesque Mussoorie hill station. To get away from the heat of the plains in Northern India, the British made their home in this valley. They established educational facilities in Dehra and Mussoorie, leading to its growth and prosperity: "Dehra... grew and flourished; it acquired a certain size and importance with the coming of British and Anglo Indian settlers."

Bond's original book Dehradun appears as a setting in both *The Room on the Roof* and *Vagrants in the Valley*. The time after independence is portrayed in detail. During this time, most Anglo-Indians had already left India for England or elsewhere in Europe. Few stayed behind because they doubted their ability to make a fresh start elsewhere. They also found that India offered numerous amenities that were unavailable in Europe. Rusty's guardian Mr. Harrison had stayed back in the country for he possessed property and some shares in the tea-estates of Dehra. On

the outskirts of Dehra, you may find residents from several European countries. Only Rusty, a young man, remained in this town full of retirees. The homes in this neighbourhood are all built in a traditional English design. It was hard to believe, amidst all the English architecture and signs, that 'India' actually began just a mile away. For these Europeans, the ".....country district of blossoming cherry trees was India," thus they avoided visiting the "real" India.

This partitioned Dehra into two distinct regions: European India and India as it is known in the 'bazaar.' Europeans were not allowed in the bazaar because they thought it was too dangerous. In defiance of this strict categorization, Rusty set off for India. After walking through "..... Debra's westernised shopping centre.....," he reached the town's iconic clock tower, a hexagonal structure constructed in 1948–49 to honour India's independence. On the opposite side of the bell tower, he discovered the bazaar. "The bazaar and India and life itself all began with a rush of noise and confusion." The plot centres on the clock tower, the bazaar, and the maidan since that is where Rusty learned who he was. He was a frequent visitor to these regions of Dehra and eventually blended in with the locals.

As the book draws to a close, we follow Rusty from Dehra to Haridwar, where he goes to see his old pal Kishen. The novel concluded with their return to Dehra. *Vagrants in the Valley* takes place in Dehra once more. The lads who had nowhere else to go were able to meet their basic necessities at Dehra's abandoned church. On the outskirts of Dehra stood an ancient St. Paul's Church. The church has been abandoned due to a lack of funds and care. Haridwar, a sacred city and a destination of pilgrimage, Rishikesh, a beauty spot with lovely terrain and sylvan surrounds, Lansdowne, the Siwalik hills, and the oak and deodar woods of Kotli all play significant roles in the plot. By the end of the book, Rusty had had enough of Debra and had gone for England to find himself.

Tom Alter, a well-known actor and theatre director who is also a friend of Bond's, writes in his review of *The Room on the Roof* and *Vagrants in the Valley* that he can relate to Rusty and Ruskin because they both spent part of their childhood in Dehradun. He adds: "....." the clock tower, the maidan, the bazaar, the railway station, the church all such important landmarks, and characters, of Dehradun and Bond's book - form the sign posts and book-marks of my youth as well."

Bond's fiction not only focuses on Dehra, but also briefly discusses a number of other nearby cities, towns, and villages in Uttar Pradesh. Bond himself resides in Mussoorie, making it the second most notable of these locations. His stories often take place in a variety of locations, including Lansdowne, Rohana, Raiwala, Doiwala, Foster Ganj, Rishikesh, Haridwar, Pipalnagar, Shahganj, Panauli, and others. Most of them are from the Garhwal area, but that is not a must. In his stories, James Bond rarely travels further afield than Northern India.

'The Cherry Tree's' Rakesh and his grandfather had a house on the outskirts of Mussoorie, close to the woods. His grandpa worked as a forest warden and eventually retired. Since his parents' hometown lacked a suitable educational facility, he was required to relocate to the area

around Mussoorie. There weren't many fruit trees in this area of the Himalayan foothills due to the stony terrain and dry, chilly air. Rakesh, a man with a deep appreciation for red cherries, put a seed in the stony soil, and soon the fruitful tree was an integral part of his life.

In 'The Eyes Have It,' we follow two passengers with visual impairments who share a train car. The other was a young woman, and the narrator was one of them. While his female travel companion was off to Saharanpur, he was off to Mussoorie. The youngster, who has a passion for mountains, mentioned that she would want to visit Mussoorie in the month of October. When she said, "The hills are covered with wild dahlias, the sun is delicious, and at night you can sit in front of a log fire and drink a little brandy," the narrator agreed with her, saying that October is the ideal time to visit the hills. Now that most visitors have left, the roadways are rather empty.

There is also a short story called "Who Killed the Rani?" that takes place in Mussoorie twenty or so years ago, when cars weren't common in the hill station and even the police officer had to walk everywhere on hurting feet.

"The Leopard" is one of the few preserved wild areas left in the area around Mussoorie. After a long day in the city, the storyteller came to the hills to relax and recharge. He predicted that after visiting the hills once, one would have to go back. Woodlands of oak, maple, and Himalayan rhododendron grew below his house. There were wild dog roses, creeping plants, slender bamboo, and red sorrel and raspberries. Bond points out: "It is surprising how closely the flora of the lower Himalayas, between 5,000 to 8,000 feet, resembles that of English countryside." While walking every day to the stream and the forest, the narrator saw many wild animals, including oak and laurel trees, pine martens, porcupines, red foxes, bears, and langoors. It surprised him to see a strong orange-gold leopard so close to Mussoorie. Continuing downstream, he found a small pool and a cave. Seeing a spotted fork tail in the stream made him very happy. Although there were no tourists or other guys in the beautiful spot in the green valley, he felt like he owned it.

Since most of James Bond's stories take place in the hills, it's clear that the characters are also hill people from the places that are named in the stories. Bond knows everything there is to know about the hills because he lives there. The land and people that live in the Garhwal Himalayas have taught him a lot of different things. He recounts with rapture the beauty of the countryside. His use of their manners, customs, and superstitions is very correct because he knows them so well. Since hill people tend to be shy, he thinks that they have kept their youth, humility, and patience.

In "The Blue Umbrella," Binya is a girl from the hills. The woman "..... belonged to the mountains, to this part of the Himalayas known as Garhwal." She was brave and bold because she went a long way to get fresh grass for her cows. Bond writes, "Like most mountain girls, Binya was pretty strong. She had pink cheeks, dark eyes, and black hair pulled back into a pigtail." She wore a necklace made of glass beads and pretty glass bracelets around her arms. An animal claw from a leopard hung from the chain. It worked like a dream. People who live

in the hills hang the claw of a tiger over a child to keep bad spirits away. Even though Binya grew up in a hilly area, she wasn't scared of the dark, dense woods or the empty hills. The only time she felt lonely and nervous was when she was in the market and got lost in all the people.

Bond seems to have a deep-seated mistrust of contemporary metropolitan life, and it shows in his writing. Even a desert with date palms and camels is enticing to Bond, a Himalayan devotee. If forced to choose, he writes in his autobiography, he would rather live in a desert than a city. He cares least about the advanced industrialised nations. He escapes the bustle of city life for the quiet solitude of the mountains. He explains that "In an odd way, it was my reaction to city life that led to me taking a greater interest in the natural world." He cautioned Bisnu, "Keep away from the big cities." Kishen Singh, the main character of 'The Tunnel,' possessed a healthy respect for nature despite his location in a forest close to a tunnel on a hillside. He was so used to the life of a forest that he had formed affection even with the leopard that walked about near his hut. It's safer in the woods, he reassured Ranji, than it is in the city. Nobody bad lives out here. My pocket got picked just last week while I went out in town! Leopards don't commit petty theft.

Bond thinks that the animals and people of the highlands are superior to those of the plains. Bisnu, the protagonist of "Panther's Moon," walked through an oak grove on his route to school in Kemptee, which is located close to Garhwal. Lovely langoors made their home in that woodland. They possessed long tails, long black faces, and silvery grey bodies. They wrestled and wrestled, eating the leaves off the oak trees about Bond, even the "..... hill scorpions and centipedes are not as dangerous as those found in the plains, and probably the same can be said for the people." The langoors were a dignified people who didn't share the cheekiness or dishonest tendencies of the red monkeys of the plains.

Another instance where Bond's conviction in the purity and inviolability of the Himalayas is demonstrated is in the chapter "Meetings on the Tehri Road." The child was shivering in a flimsy shawl and was lying in a hollow on the hill where he often walked. Instinctively, he went back to the youngster to assist him with the blanket, but a fleeting idea of the horrible crimes he had heard about entered his mind. On second thinking, however, he felt at ease as he realised, ".... this is not Northern Ireland or the Lebanon or the streets of New York." Landour is located in the Garhwal region of the Himalayas. He knew right away that a lad of the hills could not be a criminal, so he brought him along to help set up his bed and blankets.

According to him, spending time in the hills and interacting with nature may be quite therapeutic. A man who withdraws from the stifling atmosphere of the city to the revitalising hills, feels and acts in a different manner. It has the power to completely alter a person's outlook, mentality, and worldview. Alps ".....have retained their power over the minds of men because they still remain aloof from the human presence, barely touched by human greed." Those that find refuge in the hills receive a measure of their strength, independence, and respect in return. It is because of this ".... that the people who live on the mountain slopes, in the mist - filled valleys of Garhwal, have long since earned humility, patience and a quite reserve."

The hills have a restorative power, as seen in *Delhi Is Not Far*. The ecstatic narrator insisted that his friend Suraj come with him to the hills. He was sure that the fresh air and natural surroundings of the highlands would help Suraj, who had occasional convulsions. Pine, cicadas, walnuts, apricot, oak, deodar, and many more trees and shrubs were all there during his excursion to the hills he recalled. The beautiful and captivating scenes of the sun rising and setting beyond Nanda Devi were brought back to his mind. He even went so far as to say that someone's life was lacking something essential if they had never seen or lived in a mountainous region.

Since the soul of nature is fundamentally similar to the soul of man, Bond feels confident in the possibility of communing with it. It's been shown that spending time in nature has a spiritual as well as a moral elevating effect. It has a revivifying effect, cleansing the spirit and mind of the one who opens himself to experiencing realities beyond the range of ordinary perception. Only in his mind's eye can a guy see them. Though Bond's depictions are factual, he has added a creative touch whenever necessary. His belief is that the mountain has power over both the living and the dead.

## THE NATURE AND CHILDREN IN RUSHIN BOND'S WORKS

Children have always had the option to play outside, and when given the chance, they almost always choose to run away to the nearest wild area, be it a large tree or bushy area in the backyard, a nearby water course, or a nearby woodland. The late 20th century saw an increase in the urbanisation of many children's environments. Kids used the sidewalks, streets, playgrounds, parks, greenways, fields, forests and streams as recreation areas. All children were allowed unrestricted time outdoors to play, discover, and learn. Now the culture of playing outside has gone and children's lives has changed to the indoors. Therefore, children are losing out on a classic childhood experience: unstructured time in the great outdoors. Bond's stories provide kids a chance to develop a love of nature through entertaining short stories. White and Stoecklin detail the essential elements of a child-friendly natural setting. It consists of things like water, an abundance of native trees, bushes, flowers, insects, and butterflies, the changing of the seasons, wind, light, sounds, and weather, and safe, undisturbed places to sit, stand, lean, climb, and find cover and shade. Bond's writings are rife with natural settings, which aim to enchant young readers with tales of the outdoors. Motivating children to conserve the environment out of gratitude and to have affection and concern for the adults who supported them when they were little, as well as instilling in them an optimistic outlook and the confidence to take on the world with bravery.

In India, Ruskin Bond is revered as a literary forefather. Bond loves his boyhood very much hence all his children stories whether autobiographical or semi- autobiographical conveyed his wish for a happy upbringing. He finds that children are more honest, open, and vulnerable, thus they appeal to him. Writing novels for youngsters allowed him to satisfy his own unmet needs and desires from his youth. Bond writes for a young adult audience. Bond's positive outlook on childhood can be traced back to his early exposure as a teenager to the works of British and Indian Romantic poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, and Mulk Raj

Anand, as well as to Sudhin Goshe, whose major works often feature depictions of Indian childhood. He respects the people of the hills Garhwali villages because he sees dignity in their everyday lives and simple ways of life.

After finding success with his adult fiction, Bond shifted his focus to writing for younger audiences. Writing about children helped him deal with his troubles in the 1970s, he explains in the book's introduction to *The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories*. He had previously penned only a handful of children's tales. After transferring to his new house "Ivy Cottage", he started writing more frequently for children since he filled the role of grandfather to Prem Singh's kids. One of his groundbreaking moves was to have youngsters take centre stage in his fiction. His need to recount his lost youth through fiction was fulfilled. Thankfully, he was able to find solace in the timeless works of children's literature.

Bond is one of India's most popular children's novelists. Many kids today grew up reading his short stories and books with straightforward narratives. He shows India the way Indian children know about their nation, where nature has a significant part to play. Stories for kids are fun, educational, and full of creative potential. They develop into potent instruments for moulding the character of young minds. Until recently, ecocriticism and children's literature were two distinct fields of study. In his stories, Bond recognises the crossover between the two disciplines. There's a common belief that kids and the outdoors have a complex relationship. One hand, kids are given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to appreciating nature and its perks. On the other side, it is assumed that it is the responsibility of adults to teach children about the natural world around them because youngsters do not have any inherent connection to nature and have little to no experience or comprehension of it. Pamphlets arguing that environmental education should start in early childhood were issued by the United States Department of Education's Office of Educational Research. The authors of the leaflet hold that exposure to nature plays a significant influence in forming the values, beliefs, and habits of individuals throughout their lives. There are two premises that support this view. The first is the belief that young children will never learn to respect and value the natural world if they are not exposed to it and its preservation from an early age. The second, more fundamental idea is that a child's engagement with his or her surroundings is crucial to normal growth and development. Bond's genuine care for the environment is clear. The exposure to nature and environmental protection that youngsters acquire from reading his stories is crucial to their healthy growth and development.

Bond is an avid writer of short fiction. He likes it because of how quickly it can be written and how much room there is for improvisation in terms of plot, tone, and character. The themes and tones of Bond's stories are subdued and moderate. Young people are drawn to his work because of his use of first-person narrative, plain language, and straightforward storytelling. Children, on general, have a limited attention span. Shorter works of fiction are more popular with this group. The kids like the first-person perspective because it makes it seem like a kid is telling the story. Bond's ability to convey complex ideas clearly and concisely has won over the hearts of many young Indian readers. Jasbir Jain's "The Plural Tradition: Indian English Fiction"(83)

boils down his main concern as being that Ruskin Bond's sensitive depiction of the countryside, his being so much in tune with nature, and the vignettes of childhood—remarkable for their range—open up a new dimension of Indian writing in English.

## CONCLUSION

The natural world and the goodness of people are both celebrated in Ruskin Bond's works. He promotes environmental appreciation and a happy coexistence between humans especially children and the natural world through his writings. Bond's descriptions of nature are so vivid and engaging that they take the reader to peaceful places and make them feel as though they are there, experiencing everything from the sights and sounds to the smells. Bond's writings serve as a gentle reminder of the importance and wonder of the natural world, inspiring readers to value and protect it. By infusing his works with a great appreciation for nature, Bond creates a deeper knowledge of the human responsibility towards maintaining and caring the natural environment. His impassioned and evocative writing makes the reader wish for a place in nature's welcoming arms, where they can find peace, inspiration, and a feeling of community.

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