

Wednesday Meditation
Being Nature
8.3.22

Time in the mountains
Under the trees

High up on the bones of the earth

Educated by my friend and guide Roddy McCalley

Privileged, certainly, to be able to take the time to do this – and humbled by the vastness the spaces and the sweep of time, and saddened by how much most of us live above the land not of the land.

I am just sharing my own experiences here, and there are many people who are much wiser than me about these topics, and much more engaged with them. In particular, the first people and their indigenous wisdom have a tremendous amount to offer, for example in the book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which I highly recommend.

I invite you to consider your own relationship with nature, not as something you visit but as something you ARE. You might relate to this talk, which will be relatively brief to open time for discussion, as a kind of meditation.

To keep you alive, your body and brain are continually creating an apparent separation between you and the world, and continually trying to stabilize inherently unstable, dynamic, impermanent processes.

But the reality is that we are each continuous with the world. The apparent boundaries are soft and blurry. Yes, the mountain and the tree are distinct in some ways, but the tree takes the mountain into itself from the soil, and the tree and its companions help to hold the mountain in place when the storms come.

As Thich Nhat Hanh wrote, a cloud never dies . . .

It's all too easy to relate to these teachings as cool slogans for a calendar with pretty pictures, and not as piercingly intimate descriptions of your own original nature.

To be whole, to live wholly, we must include our whole selves, which extend out into the plants and insects and animals, and into the whole of life. We inter-be, as Thich Nhat Hanh put it. Or as the profound teaching from Africa, Ubuntu, that I am learning about, puts it: I am because you are.

But this is not how most of us live today, is it? I'm all for modern medicine and the internet. But even as someone with more time in wilderness than many people, still there has been something missing in my own life – and what's been missing became sharply clear to me on this journey I recently took. Do you feel this yourself? There is a knowing deep down when we feel divided from, outside, the web of life that is our true home.

In this knowing can be a kind of mourning for the loss of something we never knew we had. When it's no longer there in front of you, over time you can forget it was ever there. But somehow you know something is missing.

Story of driving out of Sequoia into the central valley contrasted with John Muir's description of it.

Alongside the longing to feel whole by being IN the whole, the whole living breathing fabric of life, can be a grieving for what humanity is doing to our precious planet. I learned a term, eco-melancholia, the sorrow and outrage at the climate crisis and mass species extinctions, and the knowing that so much that is torn apart and lost each day will never, can never, be mended or restored.

And yet, and yet life goes on in its ways despite our delusions of separation. It is not too late, it is never too late to come home. Never too late to take a single breath – right now – and feel your vulnerable intimacy with air and the gifts of oxygen in it from many green growing things. Receiving all those little atoms, dependent on all

those little gifts, and then sharing your own gifts as you exhale carbon dioxide, offering those back to plants around the world.

We ARE nature, already, inescapably. Our work is not to be nature, but rather to recognize what is true, and surrender to it. And in that submission is tremendous peacefulness and joy.

What might that look like, concretely, for you?

My friend Roddy asked if I knew the names of the 20 or so birds and trees in my home and neighborhood. Not as an academic exercise, but as a way of being neighborly. Like knowing the names of your friends.

When you sit down to eat, can you take a few moments to consider where that tomato or juice or piece of meat came from? Can you consider the primordial elements of earth and water, fire and air that have flowed through those foods into your own body?

Can you find some cherishing of something in nature? Some plant or creature you tend, perhaps something wild and untamed? Perhaps a simple blessing, some simple metta for an ant on the sidewalk or a pigeon cooing up on a power pole?

Can you look up at the sky and down at the ground, and remember that you are IN the world, OF the world, made BY the world, eventually all of your atoms being released back INTO the world?

Can you take a little time each day, and a lot of time occasionally when you can, to sit amidst whatever is nature for you – for me as simple as sitting where I can see a tree and the sky – and let the wild preciousness of life (to paraphrase Mary Oliver) seep into you? And know as well that you, too, are precious life, a large land

mammal, with your own place in the natural world. Of and in and as the natural world, not apart from it in a single atom or single breath.

Most broadly, as it is real for you, can you feel the edges softening in body and mind, and feel and maybe know, even for just a flash, that you are woven into the single fabric of reality. One fabric with many patterns – many mountains and valleys, many trees and bears and birds, many people and many stories, and all one single tissue.

Let's sit with this for a couple minutes . . .