

Nature's Place in One's Life: A Perspective

The mountain, I become part of it.
The herbs, the fir tree
I become part of it.
The morning mists, the cloud,
the gathering waters
I become part of it.
The sun that sweeps across the earth
I become part of it.
The wilderness, the dew drops, the pollen
I become part of it.

This Dineh chant reflects my feeling about participation in activities in the outdoors. I have only begun to understand how much a part of nature I truly am. There are three areas I will address relative to the integration of such experiences. The first is the use of nature exercises as a vastly unused healing source. The second, related to the first, but in a broader arena, is the restoration, or enhancement, of an individual's sense of self. The third is a bit more nebulous, but I call it "exploring the mystery."

In her book, "The Fruitful Darkness; Reconnecting with the Body of the Earth," Joan Halifax said "Leaving behind the anthropocentric view that holds us away from the world and discovering how we are related to and embedded in all that exists has profound political and environmental implications. The earth is imperiled. It is suffering. Living as part of its body, we suffer with and through it. Awakening through this suffering, we might be able to help the Earth and ourselves heal it, and thus heal ourselves." Many times when I am spending time in nature, I have felt a sense of calmness and peace soothe me and nurture me. It is this grounding in nature which has powerful healing potential. Through introducing friends, family, or clients to these experiences, a new awareness can begin to emerge. Through exposing people to time in the outdoors, a safety net can be created where people can let themselves go, explore their connections with nature, and not have to worry about where they might fall. By having a safer place to question the cultural destructiveness, they may be willing to risk more towards healing the planet and in the process become healthier themselves.

In modern times, we have separated ourselves from our natural essence We are out of tune with the nature of our lives, and thus out of tune with nature itself. The earth suffers the burden of our separation. Our own species, and untold others, are endangered.

Steven Foster, School of Lost Borders

By being out of tune with the nature of their lives, people's sense of self is being constantly eroded. I see time and time again that the key element of my work has nothing to do with presenting problems, but in reintroducing an individual to himself or herself, and mutually reconstructing a sense of self. There are many exercises which can facilitate this process in such a gentle, blossoming manner that often individuals are not even aware of the transformation until discussing their experience days later.

In "Reconnecting with Nature" Michael Cohen said "The state of the world shows that, disconnected from nature, we have not the intelligence we need to resolve our runaway personal, societal, and environmental problems. Our thinking is mentally deficient when it is nature deficient." To me, a part of that deficiency is such a mystery. Yes, humans compete against everything, even themselves. Yes, there is some drive to conquer. But a science fiction writer, Charles de Lint, wrote:

It is part of a deeper mystery, the kind that catwalks over the marrow of our spines, the kind that wakes awe deep in our chests and makes our ribs reverberate with their sacred tones. The kind that we may experience, but only briefly at any given time. The kind that is not shared precipitously because of its intensity and mystery. Often there is no conscious understanding, only the certainty that the path for our soul healing or, if you will, soul retrieval lies along the path to the understanding of that mystery.

That is what I have difficulty with. How can one experience that sense of peace, that sense of connectedness, that timeless awe, and that thrilling expansion of the senses which only occurs in nature, and not want to know more. Not want to feel more. Not want to do whatever is necessary to protect the source of those experiences. Through personally exploring a variety of exercises in nature and from reading a broad range of recent literature, I have begun to explore that mystery just a little bit. I will probably be exploring it even more over the next several years. And hopefully the discoveries will enhance, even more, my first two points, greater healing of nature and the individual, with a corresponding enhancement of each person's sense of self.

No experience (neither place nor time) in the outdoors can be more important than another. That would be like saying one part of nature is more important than another. In creating a therapeutic practice I have utilized a variety of approaches in introducing people to nature. A profound outcome is the personal opportunity to

continue to explore the mystery with which I am consistently exposed in nature as well as the gift of seeing others recognize the spark of connection within themselves.

I started with a Dineh chant and I am going to close with a Cherokee prayer that I use before going out in Nature.

O Great Spirit, help me to always speak the truth quietly,
to listen with an open mind when others speak,
and to remember the peace that may be found in silence.