

# Nature

Adapted from Heart to Heart by C. Robinson & A. Hawkins

Fierce landscapes remind us that what we long for and what we fear most are both already within us.

-Belden Lane

Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are.

-Jose Ortega y Gasset

My profession is to be always on the alert to find God in nature, to know his lurking-places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas, in nature.

-Henry David Thoreau

## *Consider This:*

Nature, whether oceans, deserts, mountains, rose bushes, pets or trout streams, offer us several avenues to experiences of spirit. This experience of transcendence in nature is the foundation of Pagan & earth-centered faiths, but it is also found in the Christian world. Nature-inspired spirituality was one hallmark of the 19th c American thinkers known as transcendentalists. Whatever our theology, whatever our language of reverence, Nature has gifts for our spiritual lives.

**Oneness:** The first of nature's gifts to the soul is the experience of oneness. When we sit by a stream, gaze at the clouds, stroke a pet or on a mountain hike, we experience sacredness and then a sense of unity with the universe. In his essay, Nature, Ralph Waldo Emerson describes this experience. *"Standing on the bare ground-my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space-all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing, I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God."* If you are one of the many people who reliably experience that expansive sense of unity out in nature, then regular excursions into nature should be part of the way you care for your soul.

**Humility:** Nature reminds us that we are small and that our lives are surrounded in mystery. This deeply spiritual feeling, sometimes called humility, can be found by being on a small boat on a big sea or by looking at grand vistas. Some people dislike this use of the word, humility, because it has connotations of bowing & scraping before a grand power. But the root of the word is the same as root of words like humus, meaning fertile topsoil or earth, and human. Experiences in nature offer a corrective to the hubris that we (our ego) is the center of existence & we have control over our environment.

**Mindfulness:** Nature also offers us a variety of opportunities to practice a combination of relaxation & alertness & to appreciate gifts of life. In all our nature excursions we have to pare down our needs to experience & enjoy nature (i.e.: leaving our screens to enjoy the feel of water

on our toes instead). The same sandwich that we would devour without thought in our kitchen is the best sandwich ever after a steep hike up the mountain or the ants that we might spray with toxins in our house become a fascination as we eat our picnic.

*Activities:* Before the gathering, reflect by doing one or more of the following activities.

Notice the season - Get out of your house, apartment or workplace. Notice where the sun is in the sky. How long is the day? What signs of the season are present? Do you feel cold, temperate or heat? Spend some time just noticing the season, the details & appreciate.

Bring Nature Indoors - Plants, pets, fountains, nature-inspired color choices, & pictures of outdoor scenes can enhance our spiritual life. Bring the outdoors in some way to your living space to remind yourself of nature's beauty & grandeur.

Journaling suggestion - Write about your memories of some profound experience you had in nature. A time when you felt "awestruck", deep sense of peace, or feeling of unity.

*Questions/Sharing Suggestions:*

1. How has the landscape you live in (or escape to) influenced who you are?
2. Share a profound memory you have of being in nature, did you feel a sense of awe, unity, humility?
3. Nature & landscape is constantly changing with the "progress" of humans. Do you have an example of this in your lifetime & how did it affect you?
4. Not all of us are able to hike up a mountain, bike across the landscape, or learn the art of fly-fishing. How do handicaps, whether physical, monetary, or location affect the way you experience nature? How can we as a society make nature available to all or do we already do a good job of making nature accessible?
5. Share how nature has invaded your indoor living space, either in good ways or less-than desirable ways.
6. Share your favorite books, movies, music or art that illustrates the concepts of oneness, humility & mindfulness in nature.

Next Meeting: May 9th