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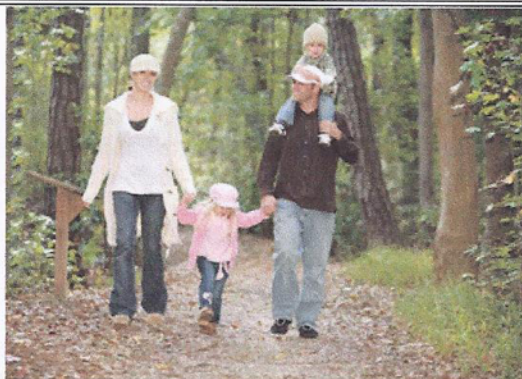
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## NATURE: The Forgotten Gateway

by Karen Reed Hadalski



Children are instinctively drawn to nature--as are geniuses, philosophers, artists, and holy men. Nigel Calder tells us in *Einstein's Universe* that this genius "wondered with an intense, child-like curiosity about the workings of nature and had a very good intuition concerning them...." Albert Schweitzer's active philosophy of reverence for all life took root in childhood, when he and his mother used to wander for hours among the mountains, lakes, and woods of Alsace. The internal lives of Shakespeare's characters closely parallel and reflect the natural world in which they find themselves and the music, art, and poetry of the Romantic period elevate nature to Nature and find transcendental meaning in things as commonplace as the horizon, the change of seasons, and "leaves of grass." Jesus went into the wilderness and Moses to the mountaintop to commune with God. Gautama Buddha experienced his "Great Enlightenment" while sitting under a Bo tree.

As for the rest of us, we tend to grow up and grow away from nature, simultaneously. We work in an office, shop in a mall, relax in front of the television or computer, and worship in a church, mosque, or synagogue. In today's world, being in nature isn't "natural" at all--it takes planning and effort and travel and time--just to get there.

The Psalmist's mandate, "Be still and know that I AM God" is not an easy mandate to follow. Although we are spiritual beings, we possess physical bodies and brains that are programmed to be acutely attentive to all that is happening around us--programmed for "fight or flight." Being in the natural world can help us to still and purify our five senses so that they are able to receive and know. A simple walk in the park or along the shore can help us to remember that the dawn chorus of birds, the pounding surf, the wind rustling through the leaves are what were created for us to hear--not screaming sirens, simultaneous cell phone conversations, and bone-shaking rap music; that the air after a spring shower and lilacs in first bloom are what were created for us to smell--not diesel fumes and Mr. Clean; that the brilliant colors of autumn and the crystalline night sky are what were created for us to look at--not the hypnotic glare of a television screen and gigantic, view-obstructing billboards.

We have to be aware and tuned-in if we are to receive the knowledge that nature has to offer. If you need help in this area, empty your head, take off your earphones, and really be with your dog when you walk him this evening. Animals are great teachers. I never cease to marvel at how my young collie, Odin, delights in his daily walks. Although we take the same general route each day, he is completely enthralled with the sights, smells, and



sounds he encounters each and every time. Each scent is captivating and deserving of intense scrutiny. Every bird and squirrel commands the same wide-eyed observation today as it did yesterday. He never passes up an opportunity to sample the taste of new grass or dig, just a little, in the damp soil. His ears twitch and turn to receive sounds that I can't perceive, and, if a distant siren punctures his reverie, he howls out his discontent. Odin greets every dog he encounters with a playful bow and does a little dance of joy if they return his greeting. Every once in awhile he turns to meet my eyes and rub his head against my side as if to say, "Thank you." Being with animals helps us shift our attention to the present moment and to experience life with the same intense awareness as we did when we were children.

The natural world is instructive. It prompts us to question and helps us to understand spiritual truths, natural laws, and our place in the scheme of things. It is symbolic. And, once we discover the deeper meanings inherent in its symbolism, we discover something about the essence of its Creator as well. In his essay *Circles*, Ralph Waldo Emerson writes: "The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world." St. Augustine described the nature of God as "a circle whose center was everywhere and its circumference nowhere."

To my child's mind, the falling of an autumn leaf, and the almost immediate reappearance of a bud in the exact spot where the dead leaf broke off, was symbolic. It made me imagine that the essence of each leaf never really died--that it went to some mysterious, invisible place within the tree's massive trunk to emerge with a new, invigorated body when it had completed whatever it went there to do; maybe take a rest. It made me wonder whether or not the same thing happens to us when our old, dried up bodies fall away. The red oak tree in our backyard prompted me to explore the possibility of reincarnation.

We think of animals in symbolic terms all the time: the lion symbolizes courage; the owl, wisdom; the fox, cunning; the beaver, industry. There is a "language" of flowers and both they and gems represent different sentiments to us. The natural world is full of symbols for us to ponder and learn from.

The cycles of nature provide us with a perhaps unconscious sense of security, hopefulness, and optimism: light always follows darkness; warm, luxurious springs push through cold, barren winters; radiant, rainbow-streaked skies appear after the worst of storms; and regeneration, in some form, follows even the most devastating of natural disasters. Nature is ordered and, once we understand her laws, predictable.

Earth's mystics, and even some of her scientists, believe that the created universe mirrors and responds to the internal life of her inhabitants. Masaru Emoto's documentation of the interaction between human emotions and water molecules/crystals is a perfect example of such interconnectedness. If this is so, we must begin to pay closer attention to what is happening around us and adjust our mental, emotional, and ethical lives accordingly. Our world is certainly responding to plunder and pollution and our blatant disregard for ecosystems, other species, and the natural order of things. Environmentalists provide alarming statistics and scenerios about what we will have to deal with in the future if we continue in the same direction as we are currently headed. But, there is hope! Gregg Braden, author of *The God Code*, notes in his spring/summer 2004 newsletter, "Translations" that group prayer/meditation results in measurable outcomes and that "first effects" can be discerned when the number of people participating is "just greater than the square route of one percent of the population. Imagine this: If only 8,000 of the world's six billion inhabitants prayed or meditated with the same intention and at the same time each day, we might actually be able to reverse the current momentum of ecological destruction and replace it with a deep-seated commitment to heal the planet that was made by the same Creator that created us, and with the same love and care that was invested in us.

The union with God that we strive to attain during meditation can be enhanced by moving our meditation time outside. As our senses take in the feel of the earth, the smell of the air, the sounds of other life forms around us, aloneness becomes all-oneness. And, as we experience ourselves as being an inseparable part of all creation, we join Creation's primal compulsion to reach up, open up, give praise and--at last--to experience at-one-ment with



our Creator.

There is a reason that contemplatives and holy men and women retreat to the mountains, forests, and deserts to commune with God. And, I believe this is the same reason that inspired Edgar Cayce to suggest that we both meditate and reconnect with nature. Our Source is a creator of both visible and invisible worlds. As human beings we are a marriage of both matter and spirit; and, if we are to fulfill what many believe to be our highest calling--spiritual Self-actualization and re-union with God--we must embrace and come to know both sides of our self, intimately. We need to go into and through that part of our being which is one with the natural world to meet that part which is one with the spiritual world. While angels might minister to our souls, the beauty, harmony, purity, and vitality of nature can minister to our bodies, minds, and emotions every single day. We just have to be there.

Karen Reed Hadalski is a free lance writer and author of the award winning novella Enduring Destiny (Publish America). She resides in Virginia Beach, Virginia and has recently completed a non-fiction book on the subject of Karma. She can be contacted at: [karenhadalski@netscape.net](mailto:karenhadalski@netscape.net)

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