



## NATURE WAS ONCE LIFE IN EARNEST

The experience and knowledge that nature possesses is infinitely larger than ours. Over millions of years, life has been adapting to changes in the environment, while also creating favourable conditions for its own expansion. For example, as the ecosystem of a forest grows, it also fosters soil fertility, produces food, cleans the air and the water, and sets up the conditions for all living beings to breathe. Unlike us, "nature not only takes care of itself, but it also takes care of everything that its descendants will need."

But all this implies that we cultivate an attitude of humility in relation to our environment, rather than setting ourselves apart from, or above, it, as we have been doing so far.

And I think that it also implies that the processes of nature may amaze us anew, that we may feel an enchantment that our culture seems to have lost. We need to be amazed by the ability of a plant to transform light, water, and earth into energy, as it shows off its colours and scatters its seeds; to be amazed by the ability a spider has to build extremely strong webs, or by the ability of molluscs to develop their shells by transforming carbon dioxide into calcium. That the Earth continues to revolve around the Sun, and that each spring leaves sprout from trees, is continual proof of how extraordinary the smallest and simplest things of life are.

In spite of what the dominant utilitarian view — a view that sees the world as deprived of magic and soul — wants us to believe, all human beings are born with an innate capacity for enchantment. Children marvel at things, are surprised by everything they see, and ask a thousand questions about everything they feel and observe. They often behave like true philosophers, yearning for answers, data and proof.

Although it is little recognized and valued, in part because it is considered a "childish" attitude, the capacity for wonderment is a form of sensitive knowledge that can be extremely useful to us throughout our lives. It is a source of joy, enthusiasm, and personal enrichment, and it is the basis of motivation, creativity, and learning. Moreover, as with any other ability, we can develop it by following our children's example.

Contact with the natural world not only helps children and adults act in a more respectful, ecological, and sustainable way towards the environment, but also connects them with values that will help them enjoy a pleasant and relaxed existence that values and respects life.

Vegetables, for example, teach us that frenetic activity hardly leads to success, and that stillness, patience, and wisdom can be much more effective. They also show us that cooperation and a slow, steady growth are indispensable in a world where all beings

depend on each other, and are interconnected with one another. Vegetables teach us to trust the Earth's wisdom, and to surrender ourselves to life.

At a time when we have almost completely lost contact with wildlife, it is rather curious that our children grow up surrounded by animal toys and images. This is probably a way of expressing, and recognizing, an ancient human longing for the company of animals as a means to alleviate the loneliness of our species. Animals show us other ways of living and enjoying life, and teach us qualities and values such as faithfulness, constancy or acumen.

Together with plants, water, and rocks, landscapes take us back to where we belong, to our centre: a space of balance, equality, and authenticity, which can help us respect ourselves and all living beings. Landscapes are silent and humble teachers who need no stages or speeches, and who teach us by example.

Besides beauty, natural spaces also offer us peace and tranquillity. A simple walk in the woods or on the beach can fill us with serenity, even when we are very sad or worried. Problems that once seemed overwhelming become easier to solve, as if all things had gently returned to their rightful place. Nature allows us to travel beyond conventional time and space, and invites us to stop thinking, to empty our mind, and to meditate.

The smallness of us and the immensity of space, as well as the unforgettable experience of merging with our surroundings, help us recognize that we are part of a whole, and that without us the universe would not be complete. This not only vouches for the meaning of our existence, but also makes room for true relaxation and acceptance within ourselves.

When we share this kind of experiences, all cultural, social, and political differences dissolve. Nature returns us to our origins, heals the wounds that come from our loneliness, our isolation, from the constant demand to discriminate and divide, and reminds us that we are one, and that everything is interconnected in such a way and with such complexity that we may never fully understand it.

Heike Rodríguez