

The background of the cover is a vibrant marbled paper. It features intricate, swirling patterns in various shades of blue, from light sky blue to deep teal and navy. Interspersed throughout these swirls are fine, shimmering flecks of gold. The overall effect is organic and fluid, reminiscent of natural stone or watercolor. On the far left, there is a vertical strip of a different material, likely recycled paper, in a warm, tan or light brown color. This strip has a visible fibrous texture and some minor imperfections, giving it a rustic or handmade appearance. The title and author's name are printed in a gold-colored serif font, centered on the marbled background.

HANNAH HAKKENBERG

SACRED
EARTH

Hannah Hakkenberg

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Earth-Based Spirituality for Beginners

How to build a deeper connection to your body, the feminine principle, and the Earth — what those three have to do with each other, and why they matter.

Journal prompts, daily practices and simple rituals to go beyond being a visitor in nature.

“In the past I have been a cloud, a river, and the air. And I was a rock. I was the minerals in the water. This is not a question of belief in reincarnation. This is the history of life on Earth.”

— Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra*

“We do not ‘come into’ this world; we come out of it, as leaves from a tree.”

— Alan Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*

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INTRODUCTION

“Man is the most insane species. He worships an invisible God and destroys a visible Nature. Unaware that this Nature he’s destroying is this God he’s worshiping.”

— Hubert Reeves

Life on earth is pretty harsh. One moment you’re blissfully floating in amniotic fluid of the perfect temperature, and the next it’s cold and bright, and you have to do things basically all the time just to stay alive. If we put a foot in the wrong place, gravity pulls us down mercilessly and we hurt ourselves. People are violent with each other for no good reason. We’re all subject to the natural processes of aging and death. And to make matters worse, we retain a lingering awareness of a state before suffering as well as a desire to return to it, whether that’s coming from our experience in the womb, or from something even more fundamental. (More on that in chapter 1.)



This whole earthly plane is made up of contrasting qualities – night and day, hot and cold, pain and pleasure, and so forth – and half of them we experience as negative, ranging from unpleasant to horrific. And while we are good at controlling our circumstances, there are no certainties, and things could go wrong any second.

No wonder humans have constructed worldviews that include purely positive planes of existence. Buddhism calls it nirvana, Christianity, Judaism and Islam call it heaven, etc.



It's essentially philosophical escapism. We make sense of the tension-laden state of being human by asserting that we will move on to something better later and this world is a kind of test of character. But in

fact, there is no guarantee that there will be any followup to our time on earth...

Do I personally believe in an immortal soul? Yes. But it's impossible to know for certain, and also, why wait and suffer? We have all the tools we need to create heaven on earth. Maybe the test of character is something of a trick question, and heaven was here, all along.



The major religions claim there's something wrong with the material world – calling it sinful or an illusion – and prefer the eternal and pure spirit. At the same time, physical matter has been associated with the body and the feminine principle (as is spirit with the masculine principle) for millennia, so with the philosophy of matter versus spirit come free side dishes of misogyny and an aversion to our own physicality. The story of the fall from Eden takes important symbols of the great mother goddess (ie. planet Earth) — apples and snakes — and makes them stand for evil.

You could argue that the placing of women below men was connected to the advent of private property and the question of inheritance it raised (and that's probably true), but it might also be that we are subconsciously angry with our mothers for pushing us out into this world, and angry with the world for being the way it is. That is one way we can interpret the story of Adam and Eve. And given the plethora of both evident and creative solutions we have to end climate change, it certainly seems like we're destroying our planet out of anger, not necessity. The frustration is understandable – after all, life on Earth is scary and challenging, so why wouldn't we choose to transcend it as quickly as possible?

But think about it – could you experience anything without the existence of matter? Even if this place is only a test or an illusion, the only way we can understand that at all is through our sense perception. We read books or listen to teachers, we think with our brains and do yoga with our bodies – all made possible exactly because of this physical dimension.

Material existence is giving us an opportunity to get to know spirit. Doesn't that sound like actually, matter and spirit are working together to create a wonderful experience for us? We could choose to view this world as a delightful, if somewhat kinky, playground for our brave souls.

This notion also solves another issue, because as Carl Jung wrote “what you resist, persists.” When we deem spirit to be good and the material world to be bad, we create an extra layer of polarity, namely approval versus rejection. A heavy focus on transcendence paradoxically makes it harder for us to transcend duality. This is very visible in the atrocities

committed by followers and officials of traditional religions as well as New Age spirituality.

Conversely, the secret to actual transcendence is found in embracing both sides of polarity, beyond good and evil. The mechanism is most visible in children, who are quick to adapt to changes. If a child who's been misbehaving is met with (real, not manipulative) love and acceptance anyway, the behaviour dissolves almost immediately. If we keep scolding and punishing them, the unwanted behaviour will most likely persist, or even increase!

So, keep this paradox in mind – striving for transcendence just pushes the goal back further and further. Forgetting about transcendence and embracing the totality of existence brings actual transcendence. A subtle philosophical theme in this book is that many phenomena we consider to be opposites actually exist on a continuum.

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Right now, we run the very real risk of creating more suffering than ever, effectively a hell on earth. The belief in a better existence after the end of our lives here is the last thing we need. What we need is a conviction that life on earth can be good, that we can make it so by becoming passionate about the contrasts we experience here, excited about what it wants to show us, caring for our planet and all the creatures on it even though being here hurts sometimes.

Imagine living in connection and harmony with all other earthlings — beyond visiting, extracting or protecting — not because we moved on, but

because we moved *in*! For this to happen, we need more than science, activism and rational solutions. We need a new psychospiritual, mythic concept of what it means to be human. One that decenters humans and our perception of ourselves as important yet put-upon individuals fighting against a cruel, uncaring nature, and replaces it with the vision of a web of positive connections.



This book is an exploration of how we can interact with the rest of nature in a way that is mutually supportive and interconnected enough to finally fill the God-shaped hole in our souls. So we can care for the environment without feeling like we're depriving ourselves of the excessive, self-indulgent life that we believe is going to fix us. And instead we can lead lives that are actually fulfilling and truly luxurious. It's my contribution to the path forward. I hope you find it valuable.

1. WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

On Matter and Consciousness

“As much as we might dance around it, or seek to repress our core physicality, it is an essential and unavoidable part of the human experience. It's not that our animal selves lie in contradiction to our angel selves. Our animal selves are literally our stairway to heaven.”

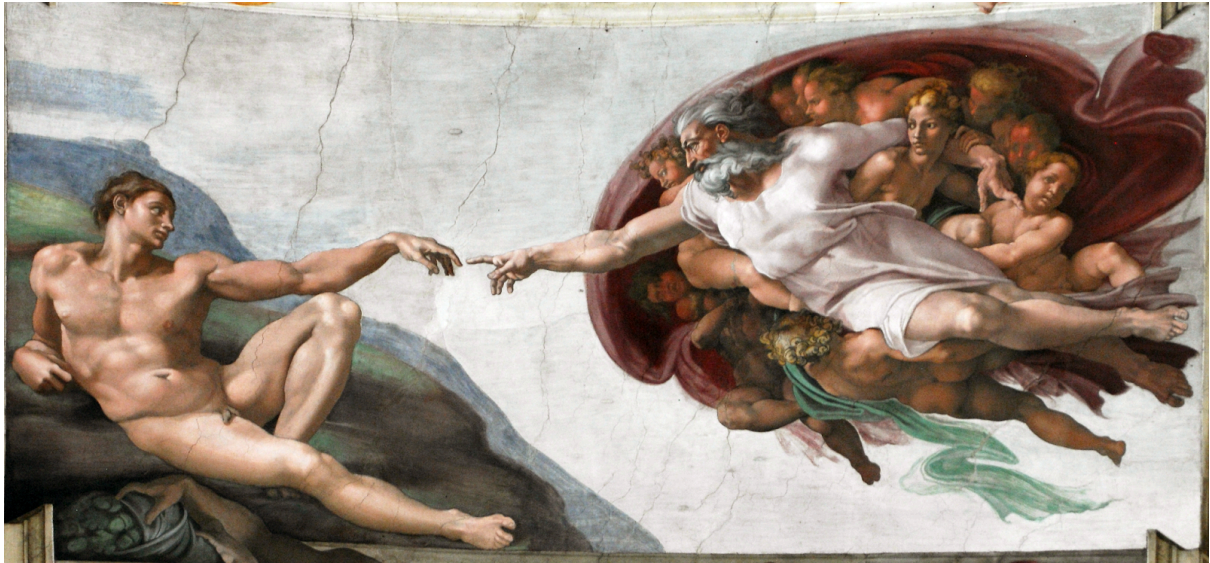
— Jamie Wheal, Recapture the Rapture



In tantric Hinduism (and Buddhism), reality is believed to be created through the loveplay (called Leela) of the gods Shiva and Shakti (or the original Bhudda and his consort), where Shiva stands for consciousness and Shakti for matter. Both are present everywhere, and both create *together as equals*. That may sound like nothing more

than a beautiful story, but in many ways modern science is now confirming what the great mystics have always known. And if you were raised in any of the major religions, it might be comforting to know that although the official, public version of your religion might deny this knowledge, the esoteric (ie. secret) version of your faith will probably hold the same, sometimes wildly erotic, much more women-friendly view. Think of the Sufi sect of Islam who speak of Allah as of a lover and whirl themselves into ecstasy, and the concept of the Shekhinah as the

feminine, indwelling aspect of God in Jewish mysticism, for example. They agree on the idea that consciousness (ie. spirit or divinity) is immanent in all matter, not just something that randomly exists in some places (like human brains or a distant father figure called God) but not others.



As humans, we tend to feel a deep longing for something undefinable. We might translate it into the desire for a mate, wealth, or fame, but often when we have them, we find that those accomplishments are actually not that fulfilling. What we are really longing for, according to the mystics of the world, is communion with the divine. On some level, we remember how it felt to be at one with everything — cosmic bliss — and we are looking to regain it in all the wrong places. Poets like Rumi and Rainer Maria Rilke have written about this beautifully.

Strangely, there is no factual basis for our perception of ourselves as separate from everything else. We think of ourselves as either a helpless victim of circumstance, someone who skillfully controls their environment, or most commonly a mixture of both, depending on how

our day is going. Either way, there's a clear division between self and not-self. But in reality we're more like a wave in the ocean — a shape that arises within a larger whole — than anything else. Oxygen and water continuously move in and out of our bodies. We eat food that has been created by the interaction of plants with the soil, rain, sunlight, bees and human labour. That food is then transformed into our various cells, while other cells are taken apart and removed from our bodies as waste. In about seven years, every cell in your body will be replaced. What is self and what is other is a mental construct, commonly called the ego.

Sidenote: from this awareness of deep interconnectedness also follows a totally different morality — not one based on punishment by a divine or earthly authority, not even one based on empathy, but a morality based on the knowledge that there is no separation between me and the rest of the world.

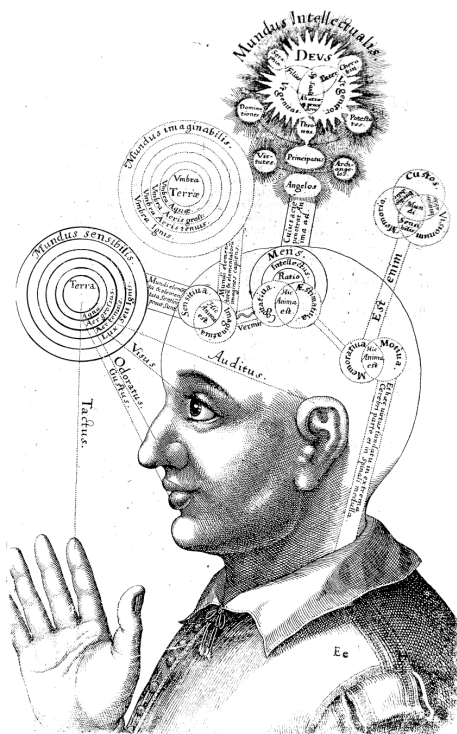


Modern science supports the notion that trees, mycelium and possibly even the sun have their own consciousness. Forest ecologist Suzanne Simard studies how trees communicate with and care for other trees. In her TED talk she says “underground there is this other world, a world of infinite biological pathways that connect trees and allow them to communicate and allow the

forest to behave as though it's a single organism. It might remind you of a sort of intelligence.” And according to biologist Nicholas P. Money,

“In recent years, a body of remarkable experiments have shown that fungi operate as individuals, engage in decision-making, are capable of learning, and possess short-term memory. These findings highlight the spectacular sensitivity of such ‘simple’ organisms, and situate the human version of the mind within a spectrum of consciousness that might well span the entire natural world.”

In the 1970s, chemist James Lovelock and microbiologist Lynn Margulis proposed Gaia theory, suggesting that living beings have co-evolved with their inorganic environment to create a self-regulating system. The hypothesis has often been criticised and is hard to prove, but with recent scientific findings in mind, maybe it isn't such a farfetched idea after all.



At the quantum level, matter could be the same as consciousness. Whether you believe 19th century models of reality (where solid objects are interacting with each other – our everyday perception of the world) or have kept up with the ideas of quantum physics, consciousness must arise *somewhere* on the ladder from the smallest building blocks to the complex structure of a human brain. Many people believe that humans are conscious, but animal brains are only a

stimulus-response system. Given what we now know about other living beings — rats being capable of altruism and trees passing on wisdom before they die, for example — that seems unlikely to be true. Maybe consciousness on our planet arose at the same time as the first life forms, or maybe a basic form of consciousness exists in all matter and becomes more complex in tandem with physical structures becoming more intricate — an idea called panprotopsyism.

All of the above builds a case for both pantheism as well as animism as useful and valuable belief systems. Pantheism is the idea that consciousness permeates the entire universe, while animism is the idea that all objects, living beings and places like mountains and rivers have their own unique kind of consciousness (or spirit). This is the worldview of many indigenous peoples today, and presumably the original spirituality of humanity. Maybe we will never be able to prove pantheism and animism as scientific facts, but that's actually not the point. The point is that if we take them as working hypotheses, they logically lead to a beneficial attitude (and hopefully someday policies) towards our planet, the living beings on it, and our own bodies.

“...along with the other animals, the stones, the trees, and the clouds, we ourselves are characters within a huge story that is visibly unfolding all around us, participants within the vast imagination, or Dreaming, of the world.”

— David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*

2. SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Some Assumptions To Examine

“Ego is a structure that is erected by a neurotic individual who is a member of a neurotic culture against the facts of the matter. And culture, which we put on like an overcoat, is the collectivized consensus about what sort of neurotic behaviors are acceptable.”

— Terence McKenna

What is true about the world? What does it mean to be human? What is good and what is evil? Different philosophies and religions as well as science have given us myriads of answers. Some increase our well-being and help us lead fulfilling lives, others seem to be mostly manipulation to serve a specific group of humans over anyone else.



Even if we're from modern, open-minded families, we still have so many basic assumptions that are either archeological remnants or planted there for commercial purposes. In this chapter I will discuss some that really bother me and give you the opportunity to examine them with journal prompts. But I also want to invite you to become a sharp observer of society and your own thoughts. How many more can you find?

If you love the earth, you're a weirdo

This prejudice makes me so mad! Have you ever noticed that when a movie or TV show has characters who eat vegetarian or vegan, lead an ecological lifestyle or are activists, they're almost always nutty and often even the bad guys? At best, they're the dorky sidekick. Meanwhile the protagonists are slurping iced coffee from single-use cups and buying pesticide-sprayed, plastic-wrapped tomatoes.

I believe it's an insidious form of indoctrination with the status quo. And considering product placement in entertainment is a real thing, it makes sense that the heroes always have to be good consumers, or there wouldn't be anything to sell. Meanwhile the environmentalist villains are out to disrupt the supposed harmony we're living in. Just take a look at the pictures of plastic in the oceans or read about climate refugees and you know this harmony is the real fiction.

1. Do you subconsciously believe anyone who cares about the environment is crazy or overly dramatic?
2. Is there any mental or emotional obstacle you have to overcome to start caring for the earth?

Humans are the superior species



That depends entirely on what criteria you pick. Are we incredibly adaptive? Yes, but trees can live thousands of years while rooted in one place. Bacteria need only a single cell to sustain life. Female dogs are so empathetic they can produce milk for the

babies of others (even from another species) without having been pregnant themselves. When it comes to living in balance inside an ecosystem, we are one of the worst species, more like a violent disease than anything else.

When we say something is inhumane, most of the time we are referring to something that only the human species has ever done.

The idea that the rest of the world only exists to serve us is from the Bible and is one of the reasons westerners don't take the wellbeing of other creatures very seriously. Hinduism and Buddhism also have the idea that plant and animal life are lower forms of incarnation before a spirit is evolved enough to become human. They (the mainstream version of these faiths anyway) also consider men more spiritually evolved than women, so that's another reason to take what they say with a grain of salt.

1. How do you habitually perceive and interact with animals and plants? Do you believe they have their own purposes and inner lives, or not?
2. What, according to *your* criteria, is the most evolved species on earth? What does that mean for the shape your spirituality might take?

Animals (let alone plants or fungi) don't have real emotions

The argument is that humans have 'real' emotions, and in the case of animals it's only hormones, or stimulus and response. We *know* that humans are also governed by neurotransmitters, hormones and how they are triggered by outside events, and that we are subject to the laws of physics, so there's a strange disconnect between what we know and what we feel.

1. Do you believe that animals are capable of real love?
2. If humans are subject to the laws of nature just like any other creature, then how can we have free will? I'm not saying we don't. It's just a complex dilemma that merits some consideration.

The body is like a car

We often perceive ourselves as a mind operating a body, but we know from biology, psychology and neuroscience that body and mind interact in intricate, not fully understood ways. Digestive issues cause mental diseases, or vice versa. There are parts of the brain that we call psychoid: we're not aware of the processes going on there, and they operate on the border of physical and mental, such as the electrical pulse that keeps your heart going or the way fear prepares your body to protect itself. It is

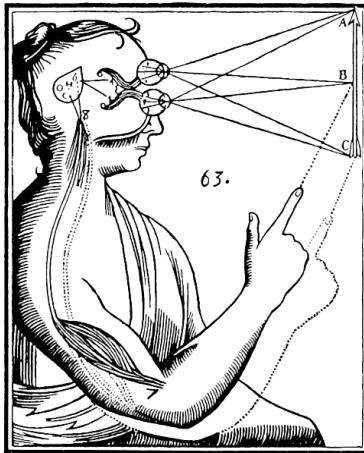
better to say that body and mind exist on a continuum from dense (material) to subtle (mental) vibrations.

It may feel like it's only your mind that is aware of where and how you are, but your body is registering your situation as much or even more, as we now know from research into the nature of trauma. Our experiences shape both our minds and bodies, in ways that are so interconnected that it doesn't make sense to speak of a separate body and mind. I have proof of this in my own life when I saw how much happier my grandmother with Alzheimer's was than the other people in the home who only got visitors infrequently. Her deteriorating nervous system couldn't, but her hormonal system *did* remember that my grandfather was there every day, holding her hands and smiling at her. Physical touch is known to raise oxytocin and lower cortisol, leading to an increased feeling of wellbeing that can last for hours or even days.

A result of the belief that body and mind are separate is that sometimes when we are sick, we believe we can just take a painkiller and go about our day, with the body healing itself while we are ignoring and suppressing its symptoms. As if we take it to a garage to be fixed by a mechanic while we go to our own job. But since the mindbody only has a finite amount of energy that needs to be shared between *all* of its processes, this is impossible. Without allotting as much energy as possible to healing (ie. lying down and resting), we slow the healing process or even make it impossible.

My sister once wisely remarked that people tend to say "my body has abandoned me" when they face serious health issues. But who has abandoned who: a body that can only ever speak the truth, or a

perception of the self as a ghost in a machine with a sometimes destructive agenda? When we say this, what we really mean is that we haven't listened to and cared for our body.



The perception of our selves as residing behind the eyes is not universal. Aristotle believed the self is located in the heart. In Chinese medicine, the heart is the organ that possesses true intelligence and knowledge. Symbolically, poetically, we all understand this, and it might also actually be true.

1. Do you have evidence in your own life that body and mind aren't as separate as we perceive them? Hint: the menstrual cycle!
2. Knowing that your body is acutely aware of and sensitive to how you treat it, is there anything you want to change about that? If so, what?

Women are less than men

Even if you intellectually know this to be false, it's an idea very ingrained in our emotions. Just think about a man in a dress and see what I mean. Do you think he's effeminate — and why is that even a negative word? — weak, mentally ill, perverse, a freak? A dress is just a piece of fabric. (And by the way, in many cultures, men wear dresses too.)

The perception of women as too emotional, too talkative, not as smart, creative, funny etc. etc. certainly seems at odds with reality. I think most people actually know this, and there's no war going on between men and

women. It's mostly a handful of frustrated men against everyone else. Still, there's a lot of both micro and macro violence against women in the world, and I believe this cannot be seen separately from violence against nature.

My theory is that before DNA testing, it was biologically important for most men to make sure they were taking care of their own offspring, not someone else's. So they made up all kinds of stories about the inferiority of women, to be able to control the mothers of their children.

I will add here that a lot of what I write about women is true for BIPOC too. They also are associated with the earth, and called primitive, soulless and less-than-human. It's not for me (a very white person from a European country) to speak more about that, but consider the links between monotheism, patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism while you explore your relation to earth and spirituality.

1. Think about a man wearing a dress. What does that say about this man, according to you?
2. Do you hold the (unconscious) belief that women are less than men and if so, why?

Gender is binary

There are fungi with thousands of different genders, fish who change from male to female in midlife, and human tribes who recognise five genders instead of two. I imagine the people advocating for traditionally masculine and feminine roles right now simply feel threatened in their identities. It's time we find out who we are without referring to roles and

functions, because we are really so much more colourful and glorious than that.



1. Has the traditional gender role ascribed to you been oppressive to you in any way? If so, how? How could you change that?
2. How would you describe yourself if you cannot use your gender, or any of your social roles (like profession, position in your family, ethnicity etc.)? Describe yourself as a color, a sound, a scent, a plant, animal or natural phenomenon you resemble, or anything else you can think of. Start with “I am...” and let it grow into a poem that describes your soul.

Sex is dirty

Even if you're sex-positive yourself, popular culture is full of allusions to the idea that having intercourse somehow devalues a woman (or the

person supplying the hole). Apparently you don't gain experience; you lose your virginity. This is most visible in how we use the word 'pure' as it relates to sex. We need to seriously contemplate what we believe a penis does to the person it touches, and stop doing it if we really believe that it's so filthy. And I propose that we repurpose the notion of sexual purity to mean that you've never done something to someone without their consent.



The path from feeling attraction to having sex to birthing a child is obviously a continuum, but weirdly, being a mother isn't considered very sexy. A childlike body is eroticized, while the often softer bodies of people who have given birth are called unattractive or even disgusting. We separate women into virgins (someone to conquer), whores (someone to fuck) and mothers (someone to take care of a man and his progeny). A

natural and beautiful process is thus made into a minefield of judgement, power plays and anxiety.

Included in this distorted version of sex is the idea that nudity immediately equates to sex. It doesn't. Babies love to be held against their parents' naked skin because it's comforting. Nudity is a natural and free state — bodies are not inherently sinful. We all have genitals, and we all know that, so there's no sense in feeling shameful about it. If you believe that this will somehow upset or corrupt children, then that speaks only to your own relationship to physicality and sex.



There's no actual reason for sexual experience to become a stigma. Let's not forget planet Earth is the greatest slut of all! How many humans and animals are having sex as you're reading this? How many flowers are opening, how many trees are releasing their seeds and how many mushrooms their spores? How many babies are being born this very moment?

This is not to say you shouldn't be careful about sharing your sexual energy. It's for you, and only you, to decide. In my opinion wild experimentation as well as mindful chastity both have their place.

1. Do you feel bad for feeling and being sexual? If so, why?
2. What would you allow yourself to feel and experience if you thought of sex as beautiful and holy?

We can thrive in entirely human-made spaces



Sure, some people really love the city and despise spending time in nature, especially when it involves sleeping in tents or the presence of insects. But research has shown that the symptoms of disorders such as ADHD decrease in green environments, and overall wellbeing increases. The calm and natural way we look from side to side while we walk helps to process emotions (because eye movement and memory recall are connected), and forms the basis for EMDR, an effective form of trauma therapy. Some of the essential nutrients we need come from direct contact with the soil, not from the food we eat.

The obvious conclusion is that we evolved in green, organic environments and that's where our mindbody functions optimally. If we choose to live in a city, we need to counteract the lack of nature by making an effort to go outside, or possibly starting a community garden.

1. How can you spend more time in nature? What natural spaces are there where you live?
2. If you are struggling with neurodivergence or depression, do some (online) research on if and how being in nature can help you. Then write yourself a prescription.

If your life is a struggle, this is a judgement on your character



While it may be true that with increased awareness and wisdom we can create a heaven on earth, it's easy to fall into the trap of making our ability or inability to do so *mean* something about us. We take our pain to be a sign that we did something wrong. This view is especially popular with New Age thinkers who claim that we create our own reality. I don't disagree entirely with this opinion, but I do think we are all co-creating a consensus reality as well, that cannot be changed easily by one person. If you're from a dominant

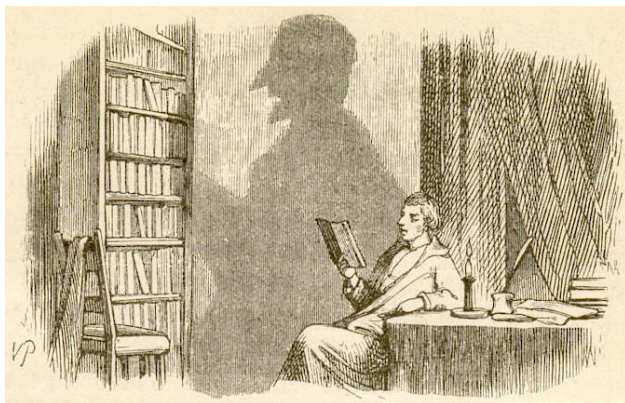
demographic in a rich country, then the base from which you start is

stable and nurturing and you have the opportunity to ‘manifest’ the details of your life exactly as you would like to see them. Someone born into violence, poverty or as a member of a marginalised group has a very different starting point.

As I pointed out in the introduction, the search for transcendence is paradoxical. Embrace your struggle and pain, and your suffering will dissolve.

1. What do you believe your failures and shortcomings mean about you? Why?
2. Do you feel shame around any of your failures or shortcomings? If so, how can you allow yourself to feel the pain and sadness without resisting those feelings? (This is more than just a journal prompt. It can turn into a somatic meditation that can release mental and physical blocks from your system. Research RAIN meditation by Tara Brach or Existential Kink meditation by Carolyn Elliott if you want to learn more.)

Evil exists



Theology has trouble coming to terms with this one. If God is good, and God created everything, then why do people do bad things? There are many stories that try to answer this question. I believe evil is the absence of good, just like dark

is the absence of light. This is not just a philosophical game with words:

there are no dark particles (or waves) like there are light particles (or waves). Darkness is created when something blocks the light — hence the existence of shadows and night.

Most people (if not all) we call bad have become that way because their natural goodness has been blocked by their life's circumstances. Abusers have themselves been abused. The flow of life energy towards harmony and peace has become diverted into hurting others, which they mistakenly believe will make them feel better. They're not malevolent, just unskillful in reaching the goal of wellbeing.

1. Think of a person in your life or a public figure who is causing harm. Describe how they are showing their wounded inner child through their behaviour. What do you think happened to them?
2. How have you yourself hurt others under the mistaken assumption it would make you feel better?

What you don't see, doesn't exist

This is called scientism and it's actually extremely unscientific. Many people nowadays discount anything that cannot be measured by scientific instruments, including the many accounts of experiences of other dimensions, interactions with entities such as fairies, different states of consciousness etc. that we have from throughout history. True science always says "we cannot verify that yet, but we also cannot rule it out."

1. Have you had experiences that science cannot explain yet? If so, what were they and what do you think they mean about reality?

2. What other planes of existence, encounters with mythological beings and other spiritual experiences are you most interested in, and why?

Physical objects, governed by the laws of physics, are the only reality

This is called fundamentalist materialism and has been debunked by quantum physics, which teaches us that without an observer reality is nothing more than a field of probabilities. This is hard to wrap our heads around, but there is a nice analogy on the level of sensory perception. If a tree falls in the forest but there is no one there to hear it, does it still make a sound? The answer is no, because without ears and a brain to process them, it's only air moving in waves. A sound as such only exists within our minds. This is true of everything! There is *something* out there, but we literally have no idea what it is. We only know how it reflects in our consciousness as it passes through the sense organs. So, use this mirror of inside and outside to create ever more beautiful realities both in your mind and in the world.

1. What do you believe is really out there?
2. Do you believe it's possible to encounter delightful synchronicities wherever you go, that show you the world isn't just a depressing domino chain of cause and effect, but something magical and poetic? What would you have to do to experience this?

3. THE FIVE CLASSICAL ELEMENTS

“Look for the wind. Let it caress your skin. Place your feet in the water and allow its energy to wash through you. Warm your hands at the fire and dance with its flickering flames. Lay your body on the earth and feel the strong reliability of its embrace. The elements are living energies.”

— Ahriana Platten



Ancient Indian and Greek philosophers believed the smallest building blocks that make up reality — the Greeks already called them atoms — consisted of four essential elements: earth, water, fire, and air. The fifth has a separate status as being the space in which everything else exists. Nowadays, we know that there are many more different elements — 118, according to the periodic table — but the symbolic value of the classical elements remains.

Everyone understands when you call someone an earthy or fiery type, or when someone tells them they have their head in the clouds. Or think about what a plant needs to grow. Although we can break them down into more specific chemical constituents, what it comes down to is that a plant needs soil (earth), water, the sun (fire), carbon dioxide (air), and a place (space) to grow.

The five elements are a system to relate holistically to the world, by understanding the aspects of a being, place or situation in an interconnected way, not focusing on one specific constituent. Sometimes, when you break an arm for example, it makes perfect sense to focus on one detail only. We don't need to diagnose the entire person to be able to set the bone and let it heal. But for many imbalances that might eventually cause problems, we would do well to consider the big picture.

Personally, I also see a correspondence between the classical elements and the different states of matter. So without advanced measuring instruments, maybe they weren't that far off after all.

<i>Earth</i>	<i>Solids</i>
<i>Water</i>	<i>Liquids</i>
<i>Fire</i>	<i>Chemical reactions (and maybe plasma)</i>
<i>Air</i>	<i>Gases</i>



Chinese philosophy has another system of five elements, namely earth, metal, water, wood, and fire. The correspondence to emotions and organs is quite different from the western system, so I won't discuss it here, but you could learn about it yourself if it speaks to you.

Below I describe symptoms of imbalances in the elements as well as ways to strengthen the elements. Note that the elements interact with each other, so you might need to strengthen one to balance another.

<i>If there's an imbalance in...</i>	<i>... then strengthen...</i>
<i>Earth</i>	<i>Earth, Fire</i>
<i>Water</i>	<i>Water, Air, Space</i>
<i>Fire</i>	<i>Earth, Air</i>
<i>Air</i>	<i>Earth, Fire, Air, Space</i>
<i>Space</i>	<i>Earth, Water, Air, Space</i>

⚡ **Earth**

This is your basis. Earth is about survival, material things, building and creating, and money.

<i>Season</i>	<i>Winter</i>
<i>Direction</i>	<i>North</i>
<i>Tarot</i>	<i>Pentacles</i>
<i>Astrology</i>	<i>Taurus, Virgo & Capricorn</i>
<i>Elementals</i>	<i>Dwarves and gnomes</i>
<i>Sense</i>	<i>Smell (nose)</i>
<i>Organ</i>	<i>Large intestine</i>
<i>Level of consciousness</i>	<i>Survival, fear of death</i>

What are some symptoms if the element of earth is unbalanced?

- Insecurity (a feeling of not being and having enough)
- Greed
- Constipation

How to strengthen this element?¹

- Eat root vegetables
- Walk barefoot on grass, soil or rocks
- Stomping and running
- Drumming

▽ Water

Water is about creativity, sexuality and emotions. It moves indirectly (in circles) and can be both pleasurable and destructive.

<i>Season</i>	<i>Autumn</i>
<i>Direction</i>	<i>West</i>
<i>Tarot</i>	<i>Cups</i>
<i>Astrology</i>	<i>Cancer, Scorpio & Pisces</i>
<i>Elementals</i>	<i>Mermaids and sirens</i>
<i>Sense</i>	<i>Taste (tongue)</i>
<i>Organ</i>	<i>Sex organs</i>
<i>Level of consciousness</i>	<i>Conditional love, sexual desire, creativity</i>

What are some symptoms if the element of water is unbalanced?

- Not being able to enjoy life (out of fear)
- Lack of creativity
- Lack of libido

How to strengthen this element?

- Swimming and bathing

¹ It should go without saying, but this is not advice that can replace going to a medical professional. These actions are complementary and cannot replace health treatments.

- Drink more water
- Eat more (or less) food with a sweet flavour
- Dance and sensual movement
- Play!

△ Fire

This element is seen in both our digestive fire as well as in our willpower. It transforms and alchemises.

<i>Season</i>	<i>Summer</i>
<i>Direction</i>	<i>South</i>
<i>Tarot</i>	<i>Wands</i>
<i>Astrology</i>	<i>Aries, Leo & Sagittarius</i>
<i>Elementals</i>	<i>Dragons and salamanders</i>
<i>Sense</i>	<i>Sight (eyes)</i>
<i>Organ</i>	<i>Stomach, liver and small intestine</i>
<i>Level of consciousness</i>	<i>Willpower, pride, intelligence</i>

What are some symptoms if the element of fire is unbalanced?

- Anger
- Perfectionism and dissatisfaction
- Digestive issues

How to strengthen this element?

- Eat spicy food
- Break a sweat with vigorous activity
- Build a campfire
- Finish projects that have been lying around forever

△ Air

In the western world, air is associated with mental processes, while in the Indian chakra system it has more to do with love. In both, it's also connected to sadness.

<i>Season</i>	<i>Spring</i>
<i>Direction</i>	<i>East</i>
<i>Tarot</i>	<i>Swords</i>
<i>Astrology</i>	<i>Gemini, Libra & Aquarius</i>
<i>Elementals</i>	<i>Elves and fairies</i>
<i>Sense</i>	<i>Touch (skin, especially the fingertips)</i>
<i>Organ</i>	<i>Heart and lungs</i>
<i>Level of consciousness</i>	<i>Unconditional love, connection, sorrow</i>

What are some symptoms if the element of air is unbalanced?

- Selfishness
- Worrying and sadness

How to strengthen this element?

- Spend time in a forest, park or anywhere there are trees
- Donate money or time without making it into food for your ego (for example by not talking about it)
- Care for other living beings, whether it's children, the elderly, animals or something else
- Practice deep breathing, opening the chest

○ **Space**

Space is the emptiness in which everything else exists.

<i>Season</i>	-
<i>Direction</i>	<i>Up (spirit)</i>
<i>Tarot</i>	<i>Major Arcana</i>
<i>Astrology</i>	-
<i>Elementals</i>	-
<i>Sense</i>	<i>Sound (ears)</i>
<i>Organ</i>	<i>Vocal cords</i>
<i>Level of consciousness</i>	<i>Detachment</i>

What are some symptoms if the element of space is unbalanced?

- Trouble letting go
- Trouble authentically expressing
- Talking just to talk

How to strengthen this element?

- Learn to sit in silence
- Find out what you need to be able to let go of the past (bad or good)
- Humming

4. ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

“I don’t presume to grasp Aboriginal knowledge fully. It comes from a way of knowing the earth—an epistemology—different from that of my own culture. It speaks of being attuned to the blooming of the bitterroot, the running of the salmon, the cycles of the moon. Of knowing that we are tied to the land—the trees and animals and soil and water—and to one another, and that we have a responsibility to care for these connections and resources, ensuring the sustainability of these ecosystems for future generations and to honor those who came before. Of treading lightly, taking only what gifts we need, and giving back. Of showing humility toward and tolerance for all we are connected to in this circle of life.”

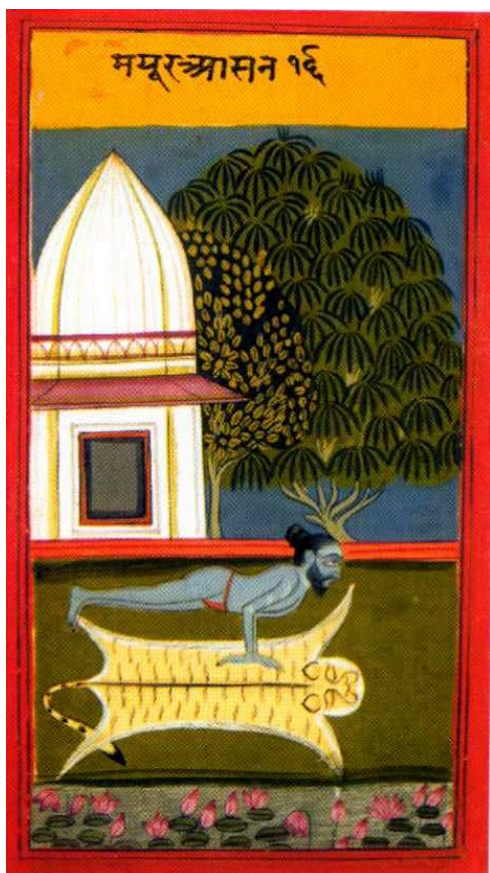
— Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*

Some of these practices are quite basic. You might roll your eyes at a few because they are the stuff adults tell children. Fair enough. However, this chapter offers a different perspective on what you probably already know to be important, a deeper *why* if you will. And some of them you might have never heard of or thought about, but they do make a difference in your personal wellbeing, your connection to everything around you, and the depth of your experience of life.

Indigenous cultures often honor the central concept of ‘right relationship,’ which means doing your best to live in harmony with the rest of the world, including all living beings as well as inorganic matter. The practices below are a start to creating this right relationship; they

are how we show that we care about the earth and that we see our physical existence as sacred.

Tend to the temple of the indwelling god



Take care of your body, not because being healthy and fit (ie. thin) is a sign of spiritual or moral superiority (that's a marketing scam) but because this body is your *home*. Acknowledge that *at the very least* your body is a vehicle for your consciousness — if not a dimension of the divine itself — so if you want your consciousness to be able to roam free, or even just to lose itself in a book in comfort, it's wise to treat your body well. You know what to do: water, fruits and veggies, sleep, movement, sunlight. That's it! You can make this as refined and involved as you want, but the basics are simple.

Whatever else you choose to do for yourself, I recommend you start walking if you aren't doing that already. It's a gentle workout that most people will be able to do, but still has amazing benefits for your heart and blood circulation, your musculoskeletal system, your digestion, your hormones, as well as your mood and mind. It's also free and gets you to go outside.

If you've been seriously neglecting yourself, start by changing one unhelpful habit at the time, and give it a few weeks to become effortless before you move on to the next item.



Many people are in an exploitative relationship with their own bodies. They run on fast food, caffeine and lack of sleep, even those who deeply care about nature preservation and women's liberation. If this is you, my suggestion for you is to start caring for your body like it's a beloved pet. This shadow of self-hate and self-abuse isn't making the world any better. In fact, You're unconsciously feeding systems that don't have your wellbeing in mind.

Extraction from the earth, extraction from women and BIPOC, and extraction from your own body are all intimately connected.

Pay attention to what your body needs in the moment (water, food, a bathroom break, rest, movement, to go outside etc.) and take care of it as soon as possible!

If you really struggle with healthy habits, if it doesn't feel good to move your body, your body doesn't react much to training, or you lack motivation and energy, please take this as a sign that something is not right. Our natural state is joyful and vibrant and if you haven't felt that way in more than a few weeks, please consider that you might be too stressed, lack essential nutrients, have unprocessed trauma or your

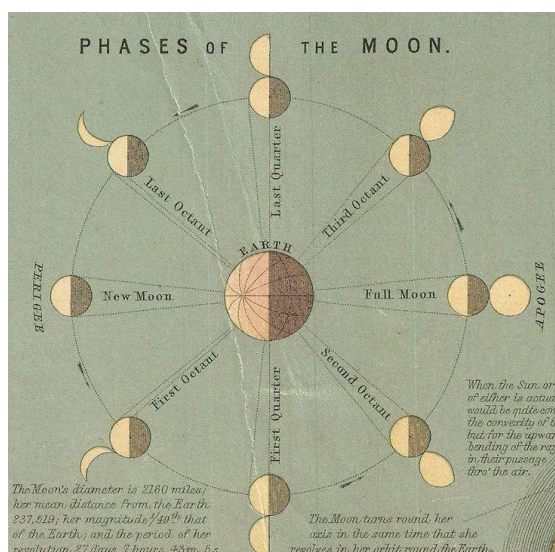
hormones are out of balance. These all interact with each other, and might be interrelated with other mental or physical health issues as well. Usually solving this requires committed investigation and professional help. Lack of vitality and inspiration have been so normalised in our society (especially if you're over thirty) that we don't take it very seriously, but I'm here to tell you *it is not normal and is, in fact, very serious*.

Please, if you suspect that you're in a permanent trauma state (fight, flight, freeze or fawn), just forget about this book and find out how you can help yourself. Lots of things I mention might take care of themselves effortlessly, even magically, once you free yourself from stuck trauma. I'm not a health professional, but I do know some things about how emotions are stored in the body, and in my experience it's almost impossible to heal trauma or other mental health issues without addressing the body. I have had great results with bodywork, breathwork, somatic exercises and EMDR.

1. What are you currently not doing to take proper care of yourself?
How can you change that?
2. Are there any practical, psychological or energetic blocks that keep you from taking care of yourself? If so, what can you do to remove them?

The moon and menstruation

The oldest calendar in the world is a 37,000 year old bone with 29 incisions. The logical conclusion would be that it was used by a woman to track her menstrual cycle. And how magical! The average menstrual cycle of humans corresponds exactly with the cycle of the moon.



If you menstruate, it's interesting to see how your cycle and the moon cycle line up, or not. Keep track of the phases of the moon and note if there's any connection with your mood. For me, about two or three times a year the time of the dark moon is extremely difficult for me, even though it's not connected to my menstrual cycle.

Track and honor your cycle. Treat ovulation as your personal summer — a great time for going outside, celebrations and connecting with others — and menstruation as your personal winter — more of an introverted time with space for reflection and relaxation. Learn about cycle syncing if you want to take it further.

1. Does the moon cycle influence your mood, and if so, how?
2. If you menstruate, how do you feel in the different phases (menstrual, follicular, ovulation, luteal) of your cycle?

Take beauty seriously

Most people go one of two routes with this: either they obsess over health, fitness and beauty, or they disregard it as frivolous and focus entirely on intellectual pursuits. The third option is to decorate yourself not to meet some arbitrary standard that will gain you approval, but to show that you honor the material world and care about making it a

delightful place. You can choose to adorn yourself to celebrate the fact that you have a body.



Beauty isn't the glossed up vision of fifteen-year-olds dressed as grown ups or hamburger buns made shiny with hairspray that advertising agencies try to sell us. When done right, it's the outer reflection of an inner righteousness. If we tried to make the whole world beautiful, there wouldn't be space for people slaving away in hellish mines, children sewing cheap sneakers, or cities without flowers.

The last decades minimalism has been trending, and sometimes it's true that minimalism is calm and zen-like, but it can also be soulless, uninspired and uninspiring. Note that the trend has a lot to do with mass appeal and cost-efficiency, and less with an appreciation of uniqueness and meaning. It's also influenced by white nationalist views of ancient Greece — not so appealing. If you truly prefer minimalism, study Japanese philosophy to learn about the spiritual dimensions and to give it soul.



I don't have to tell you about fast fashion, and when you start to think about your outfit as telling a story, you will probably gravitate towards DIY, wellmade classics, hand-me-downs with a history, and interesting vintage pieces automatically.

1. Do you dress for social approval, convenience, or for self-expression, and why? It could be all three, of course. Some professions have a very strict dress code, and comfortable clothes are important. I just want to invite you to become more conscious of and joyful in how you present to the world.
2. Describe how you can give expression to your inner life with clothing, and jewelry or makeup, if you wear any. Think about gender expression and how you'd like to play with that, how your outfits can support you in your life and the goals you want to achieve, how you can use color to weave spells, materials that make you feel good, styles that reference ancient cultures, etc. Make a moodboard if you feel like it.

Tidy your home



Keep your house clean(-ish) and tidy. Apart from making life feel more

like a celebration (see above), have you ever noticed that there's one room, closet or drawer that's full of stuff you'd rather not think about? You don't really want or need it, but for some reason it's hard to clean it out. I believe that this is a mirror reflection of what's going on in the psyche. If you've ever watched one of those reality shows about hoarders, you know what I'm talking about.

Also, it's better to process the guilt of unused purchases and gifts, and let them go (passed down or donated if at all possible) to not keep any 'skeletons' in the closet. Your mind and house will feel so much lighter.

1. If you have a cluttered and neglected area of your house, why do you think it's there and what does it mean?
2. What small action can you do to make your home a more welcoming place? Think of rearranging the furniture, painting a particular item, getting rid of clutter etc.

Honor your physical reality

Sure, sometimes we have a project that needs to be finished, and it's okay to neglect our body and surroundings a bit for one or two weeks. But in modern life our health, taking care of our home, and the enjoyment of our habitat (both natural and social) can be ignored for years, with disastrous results. Realise that no matter how important your purpose or how big your ambitions, your body and physical environment need and deserve your attention. There are a certain lightness and pleasure we experience only when we care for the physical, not from reaching any other goals.

This is a lesson I learned recently myself. As I was writing this book, I noticed I was so caught up in working on it that I didn't move my body as much as I usually do, I would get pizza from the bakery instead of cooking myself, and couldn't justify spending time cleaning my house. After one week I still felt energetic and good, but after a few more days a heaviness and darkness started to come over me. Thankfully this wasn't a years-long project and I realised in time what was happening, but the effect of neglecting the physical in favour of intellectual work was huge.



If in the future humans are increasingly going to spend their lives inside a virtual reality, it will require ever more artificial interventions — supplements, mood enhancers, heart and blood sugar medication, “uppers, downers, screamers, laughs”² — to keep them functioning at all, let alone feeling good. Remember that the separation of body and mind is an illusion, so the idea of a weak, inactive body floating in an aquarium while your mind is away on epic adventures is unrealistic, if not delusional. It's doubtful that we can ever create a holistic balance like the one that comes with a natural lifestyle. We're quite far away still from fully understanding the functioning of the mindbody.

Mending your clothes, doing repairs on your house etc. are also acts to show your gratitude and love for what you have been given.

² Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*

“Keeping yourself clean, preparing the food you are going to eat, clearing it away afterward — that's what life's about, Wise Child. When people forget that, or lose touch with it, then they lose touch with other important things as well. [...] As you clean the house up, it gives you time to tidy yourself up inside — you'll see.”

— Monica Furlong, Wise Child

1. Do you secretly believe that things like cooking and cleaning are lowly tasks that you are too good for and shouldn't be bothered with, and if so, why? Do you think an architect is a more worthy profession than a builder, and if so, why?
2. Where have you been neglecting the physical aspects of your life, and how can you change that?

Prioritise connection

In a 1978 study called Rat Park, researchers found that if rats were kept by themselves and offered a choice of plain water or water spiked with morphine, they would quickly become addicted. If, however, they were in a playground with other rats, they wouldn't. The reason they did this experiment in the first place was that we had no answer to the question why some patients become addicted to pain medication, while others don't. The conclusion was that addictions can fulfill the same emotional need that connection to others usually does. After traumatic events or in stressful situations, it's normal to shut down with pain or shame, and find relief in drugs or other addictive behaviours, instead of engaging in satisfying emotional connection.



Now, you're probably not addicted to morphine, but there are a few addictions that are normalised and encouraged by the capitalist system, think shopping, eating, entertainment, and social media. And how about what a friend called "the diabolical cycle" of drinking coffee in the morning to wake up and then having a drink in the evening to relax? It sounds normal, but without the coffee, maybe we wouldn't be so jittery the whole day that we need something to calm us down at the end. And without the alcohol, we wouldn't wake up so unrefreshed that we need a pick-me-up. We are taught to think of all of this as pleasure, but is it, really? Companies have a vested interest in disconnecting you from your true nature and from your community. Before you buy something, keep in mind that those people are actively trying to harm you so they can continue to get your money.

You don't need to be an extraverted, outgoing person. If you're a hermit like me, you can still find connection. Pets, being out in nature, deep breathing (connection to self), and humanity in small doses work just as well, in my experience. And of course, if you feel like you're going insane, talk to someone or ask for a hug! Whatever you do, make sure you don't fall into the trap of working until you're exhausted and then spending money to indulge in addictive behaviour and call it relaxation. What we need is to sit by campfires, to talk and laugh, sing and dance with others.

1. What have you been using as an emotional band aid that's not actually good for you? Why?
2. How can you fulfill that emotional need in a healthy and happy way?

Practice gratitude



The fact that you live on earth provides you with myriads of both beautiful and challenging experiences. Be glad that your soul gets to learn and grow so much through it all. Laughing babies and juicy peaches as well as disease and violence are all here to teach us something. The best way to make your life worth living is to be excited about all of it.

“The unconscious divine Self that we all are wants to experience everything; it deeply wants to experience it all. Otherwise, why would the Self that we are have bothered to incarnate into duality?”

— Carolyn Elliott, *Existential Kink: Unmask Your Shadow and Embrace Your Power*

1. What are you resenting or resisting about the reality of your life, and what could you do about that?
2. What can you do to become more excited about what you are experiencing right now?

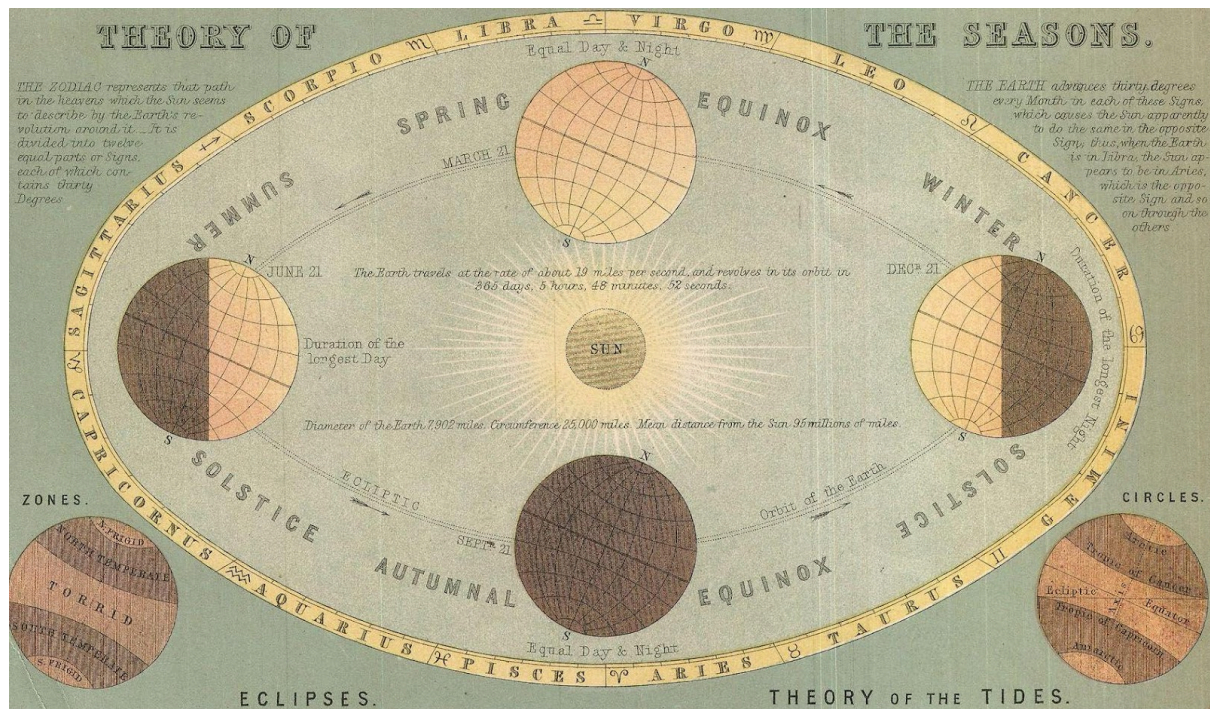
Situating yourself

Learn where east, west, north and south are relative to your home. What altitude are you at? You can take this further and learn about local soil types, water flow, the climate, weather systems etc. Start noticing where and when the sun comes up and set, and do the same for the moon. For better sleep, move your bed so your head points to the east (or north), and avoid the south.

Notice the seasons

Life on earth is intensely influenced by the seasons. The reason we have seasons is because the axis of the earth is tilted slightly to the side, so either the north or the south pole is farther away from the sun. As the earth makes her journey around the sun each year, the days lengthen and shorten.

In the northern hemisphere, the days are shortest around the 21st of December, when the north pole is tilted farthest away from the sun. The days are the longest around the 21st of June, when the north pole is tilted towards the sun the most. In the southern hemisphere the opposite is happening; that's why the seasons are reversed there. At each middle point (around 21st of March and 21st of September) day and night are of equal length, ie. twelve hours each.



Especially if you live in a city, it's easy to ignore the seasons. Central heating and air conditioning keep houses a similar temperature all the time. We have supermarkets that have all kinds of fruits and vegetables all year round. It's very convenient, but not very *real*. Make it a point to observe how your energy is in the different seasons, to go outside in different kinds of weather to see how animals and plants are doing, and learn about seasonal food in your area.

The flow of life

Learn where your tap water comes from, and where the sewer water and garbage go. This is important knowledge to be able to relate to your immediate environment and to wake up to the reality that you are part of an ecosystem. Do you compost?

Small act, big difference

Pick up garbage if you're out in nature and find any. Or if your neighbourhood has a littering problem, spend some time cleaning. Join or organise a group if you can!

Grounding

Put your bare feet on the grass, rocks, sand or in the water. You can discharge any negative emotions and recharge with positive energy straight from nature this way. There's no evidence that there's an electrical discharge like some people claim, but it works anyway!

Connecting to wild plants



Learn about a wild plant that speaks to you and grows in your area. What is its life cycle? What type of soil and climate does it prefer? What amounts of water and sunshine? Does it need bees or other insects to be

pollinated? What are its medical properties or main nutrients? What are the astrological correspondences and magical properties? Is it mentioned in any myths? If you like, you can collect images and text into a monograph, which is a compilation of information herbalists make for a single plant.

Caring for living beings

If you have a garden, a pet or house plants, don't just care for them, but observe what you can learn from them. What do they know about living and loving? If you don't have any living beings that you are responsible for, consider getting a plant!

Spend time in the sun

Especially when we get sunlight in the morning, this will help us with our day and night rhythm of waking and sleeping. It's important for vitamin D production, but also for our spiritual health. The sun and the earth together create life, and if the earth is our loving mother, then the sun is our kind and supportive father. In western mysticism, the sun is associated with the heart, that once it's freed from lower impulses can shine like a sun.

Celebrate your sensuality

How amazing is it that the mindbody can experience such pleasure? This is a gift that especially women have been given; an organ that's just there to make you feel good! You could learn about tantric sex and invest in candles and flowers. But more essentially, internalise an awareness that your sensuality and your orgasm are sacred. They are divine gifts to make life on earth beautiful and magical. Refer back to chapter 2 if you experience shame around sex. Deprogramming yourself from the idea

that sex is dirty is essential if you want to learn to honor the material world. Also indulge in sensually doing nothing!



Embodied activities

Engage with your own physicality. Especially if you work or study behind a computer, then go home to consume books or movies, play board or video games, the tendency is to become a disembodied mind, hardly aware of your posture or physical needs. Take up a hobby that uses your body (and optionally natural materials) such as a sport, yoga, dancing, singing, playing an instrument, sewing, knitting, ceramics, etc.

Tithing

A tithe is a one-tenth part (ie. 10%) of one's income, given to a religious organisation. It's an old practice in Judaism. In ancient Babylon it was essentially a tax. Why am I mentioning this practice here, if it's rooted in monotheism and economy? Well, because that money was (presumably, hopefully) paid to a government or church because they took care of their people. And right now, we're hardly in reciprocity with nature. We

extract without investing a lot. With temperatures rising, bee populations diminishing and fertile soil being depleted or washed away, this cannot continue for much longer. Since we haven't many options to give back directly (unless you're a farmer) I would suggest making donations to an organisation that protects nature or the planet in some capacity. If you cannot spare 10% of your income (which is arguably a lot), just give however much you can miss.

If you still think this is a lot to ask, consider it part of your retirement fund. For you to be able to eat, you don't only need money to buy the food. We also need the proper temperature, soil, and bees to grow it.

Many people also claim that giving in this way ensures that more money finds its way back to them easily. I can imagine that showing love to the earth in this tangible way starts up a powerful flow of abundance between the earth and you. To increase the magical power, don't mention your donations to anyone.

5. CONVERSATION & COMMUNION WITH NATURE

“Every individual is an expression of the whole realm of nature, a unique action of the total universe. This fact is rarely, if ever, experienced by most individuals. Even those who know it to be true in theory do not sense or feel it, but continue to be aware of themselves as isolated ‘egos’ inside bags of skin.”

— Alan Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*

“I feel an indescribable ecstasy and delirium in melting, as it were, into the system of being, in identifying myself with the whole of nature...”

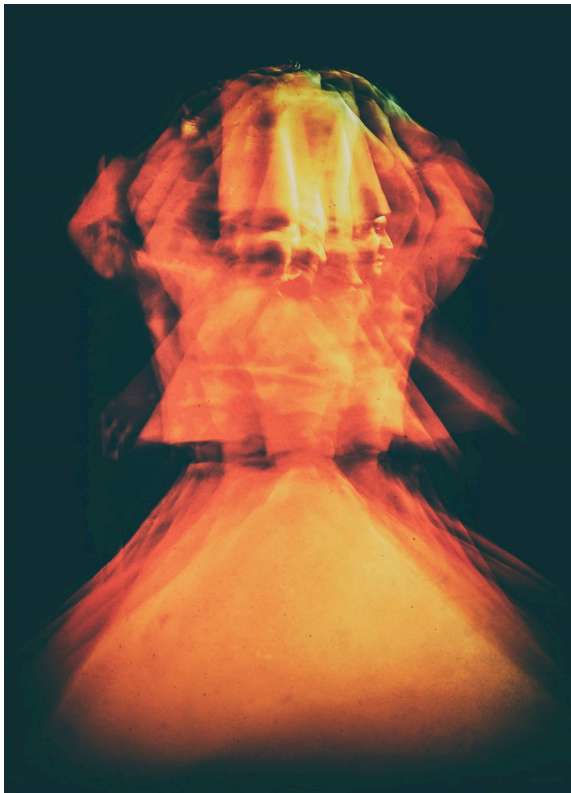
— Jean Jacques Rousseau

So now we have created a philosophical framework and have worked on coming into right relationship, let's go deeper. A lot of what I've written before is rational and meant to appeal to your intelligence. But our relationship to the Earth isn't created through the mind. Instead it comes to us via the body; through the physical senses, through our emotions and through our intuition.

Because of the way many of us have been raised, we've never developed the skills to commune with nature. About 5,000 years ago, a portion of humanity chose technological control over soulful cooperation. It's understandable, because life was very uncertain until the advent of agriculture. But with this choice we've been cut off from our natural wisdom and natural allies, and made dependent on systems that are ultimately unsustainable.

At this point in time, we have astonishing technology. Imagine what we could do with it if we decided to simultaneously make an effort to return to our original, deep connection to the land. Imagine how beautiful it would be if you didn't only *know* that there's a consciousness in everything, but you could feel it, communicate with it, and learn from it. Your life wouldn't only be easier, it would be so much more magical and glorious.

Altered states of consciousness



One of the beautiful things about humans is that we can change the state of our consciousness at will. It's a bit of a dirty secret, frowned upon by the establishment and vilified because of the danger of addiction or mental illness, but done with care it can bring much healing and depth to our lives.

Once we've entered these other levels of consciousness, we can receive insights and information, as well as experience feelings of profound connection. We might experience what it feels like to be an animal or plant, or understand our own psychological workings better. When we return to a normal awareness, we can take the wisdom we gained to lead a more aligned life.

Exercise caution while using these without an experienced guide present. It can be done of course, because at one point in our history no one had any experience with these practices. But be careful, especially if you or your family have a history of trauma or mental illness.

The main pathways to an altered consciousness are

- *Breath*

By changing our breathing patterns we can play with the ratios of oxygen and carbon dioxide that reach the brain. Modalities like pranayama, holotropic breathwork, rebirthing etc. use this for deep insights and emotional as well as physical healing.

- *Music*

We've all experienced how music can instantly change your mood, more than any other artform perhaps. Moving to music can help us express challenging emotions in a non-destructive way, such as in the practice of 5Rhythms created by Gabrielle Roth. And rhythm can synchronise our brain waves with those around us, facilitating collective healing.

Music by itself might not be enough to cause a full-on spiritual awakening (although it is possible) but it can be a powerful amplifier of the other techniques, and can be used to guide us in a particular direction.

- *Sex*

During an orgasm it's almost impossible to think about anything else but the blissful feeling of oneness you're experiencing. But the

whole process from arousal to orgasm can be mind-altering when done with mindfulness and deep breaths. With a partner it obviously also increases the feeling of connection and intimacy within the relationship.

- *Substances*

From the subtle effects of bayleaf smoke to the intensity of an ayahuasca journey, from kitchen herb to illegal or dangerous, we have a large range of substances that can change how we experience reality. Use at your own discretion!

An interesting fact is that the ancient Greeks used to only drink their wine undiluted within the context of religious rites, indicating that when not diluted with water, it has ritualistic, mind-altering qualities. Since wine is still accessible, legal and fairly safe, it might be worth it to share a cup of wine with a tree.

- *Movement (or embodiment)*

This encompasses many different practices. Dance, as already discussed, but also specific ancient postures as described in the book 'Ecstatic Trance' by Felicitas D. Goodman and Nana Nauwald. In yoga there are postures (asana) and hand shapes (mudras) that release or increase certain qualities. Pain and restriction are also powerful changers of consciousness, as we know from BDSM.

- *Meditation*

Listening to guided meditations can bring you quite deep into other dimensions, help you meet your spirit guides, and more.

Below you will find a tree meditation. Another practice is called pathworking, in which you focus your eyes on a tarot card or yantra (a mystical geometric painting from India) to enter a specific type of consciousness or dimension represented by that image. Dreaming also falls into this category, and can be utilised by analysing your dreams or practicing becoming lucid (ie. becoming aware that you are in a dream).

In his book ‘Recapture the Rapture,’ Jamie Wheal encourages us to find meaning and connection by creating a personal cocktail out of these pathways to drink from regularly. To specifically improve connection to and communication with nature, I simply suggest taking it outside, and favoring natural sounds and substances over synthetic ones.

The Circle Ritual

This short ritual helps to create a sense of mindful presence in yourself when you enter a natural environment. Begin by facing north and connect to the element of earth. You can say “I connect to the element of earth in the north” out loud, or simply think it, while you feel the quality of the ground or rocks beneath you. Face south and connect to the element of fire in the same way. Then face east to connect to air, and west to connect to water. Finally face north again, and either think to yourself or speak out loud “I connect to the earth below me. I connect to spirit above me.” Notice how your consciousness has subtly shifted to be more perceptive to the earth and the beings around you.

An offering to nature

If you would like to receive help or information from the land spirits, an easy way to do that is to bring them an offering — liquor is traditional,

but it can also be incense, water, food, a song, or simply rubbing your hands together until energy is built and then sending it into the ground. Whatever it is, make sure it's biodegradable. Take your offering with you to a pleasant natural place, and pour or place it on the ground while stating your need. To create a deeper connection, do the Circle Ritual before you give the offering.



If you come to a place regularly, you can build a relationship with the spirits there before you ever need their help. In that case, just thank them for being there. And if the place is private enough, you could even consider setting up a small altar by collecting a few beautiful objects that represent the spirit of the place to you.

Divination

Divination is the practice of reading signs. The signs can basically be anything: tarot cards, the stars and planets (ie. astrology) or, like in ancient Greek culture, the entrails of sacrificed animals. Yum!



After you've given your offering and asked your question, go on a walk and see if you notice anything remarkable. Maybe there's an animal in your way, or a feather lying on the path. Look for signs and messages; if something catches your eye, that's it! If you don't know what the appearance of a certain plant or animal means, look it up later. In this way, you will slowly build a language of signs and symbols that's unique to you and your location.

Tree meditation

There are different styles of tree meditation that I encourage you to look into — the Taoist version that circulates energy between tree and human is beautiful — but here is a simple version. After you find a tree that you would like to meditate with, do the Circle Ritual. Then, ask the tree for permission to touch it. If you don't feel an answer or get a no, maybe it's better to move on and practice becoming more sensitive to your environment first. If the answer is yes, you can simply sit with your back against the trunk, close your eyes, and gently tune into the essence of this particular tree. How deep do the roots go? How does its energy flow and what does it feel like? Does this tree have a message for you?

Creating poems of synchrony

A beautiful side effect of opening your mind in this way is that you will start to experience synchronicities. A synchronicity is when two or more events are related in meaning, but lack a causal connection. For example, maybe I dream about a fox one night, and when I go out into the forest the next day, I see a fox. My dream didn't cause me to see a fox in real life, but the events have a message for me; maybe I need fox energy in my life.



If you start to work with offerings to the spirits of the lands, and receive messages back from specific trees, plants and animals (either individuals or species) you can build on that by learning and reading about them, creating or buying art or divination cards that feature them, etc. By surrounding yourself with their energy and wisdom and using that to grow as a person, you start to create webs of meaning that will resonate deeper and deeper into your soul. As a reflection of your inner life, your outer world will start to mirror this energy and wisdom back to you through giving you ever more magical synchronicities. Maybe the synchronicities will even start to take care of you in practical, tangible ways. You have successfully re-enchanted your world. More on that in the next chapter.

6. NATURE GODS & SPIRITS

*“Faeries, come take me out of this dull world,
For I would ride with you upon the wind,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame.”*

— William Butler Yeats, *The Land of Heart's Desire*

It might seem strange or irrational to you to believe in gods and spirits. And maybe they don't exist in the same tangible way that you or I exist on the earthly plane. But these energies might be just as real, only in different dimensions (or frequencies). Certain cultures seem to be more attuned to those, as for example in Ireland, where it's very normal to have encounters with fairies.



I consider gods and goddesses to be powerful archetypal energies that are connected to large scale phenomena such as the moon or the element of fire. Working with them, you can learn from and win their powers for yourself, like the hero in a myth who, after gaining the goddess's favour, is given certain boons. Our relationship to the gods is reciprocal only symbolically, because we cannot really give these entities anything that would be significant to them. They just know that our offerings are significant to us.

Spirits are more local or bound to specific plants, animals or minerals. From them, we can learn the proper etiquette to live in harmony with nature. With spirits we can have a mutually beneficial relationship. They might let you know if they need anything (most often protection) and they can also make our lives easier the more we align with them.

There are many ways to meet with and learn from these beings. You can read their mythology, visit the places that are considered their realm, make or buy art featuring them, bring them offerings, create an altar to them, write poetry or music to them (or make a playlist if you're not a musician), study traditional rituals or create new ones, etc.

Anything that humans do — from cooking food to working out — can be dedicated to something bigger than yourself. Use the associated colors, smells, plants, ingredients, gemstones of a god or goddess to create webs of meaning. Like I mentioned in chapter 5, this will make synchronicities start to happen in your life, bringing meaning and a sense of enchantment. You will experience for yourself that everything is connected and the world is so much deeper than a collection of objects.

This is a tiny preview to inspire you to investigate your local and / or ancestral nature faiths, or learn more about a culture that speaks to you. There's no particular reason that I included those below, other than that their stories and attributes felt meaningful and powerful to me. Many if not all of the pagan gods and goddesses are actually associated with natural phenomena, so the list is virtually endless.

As always, be careful with cultural appropriation. Don't only take what is beautiful and nice, but really listen to the teachers, learn about the struggles that this culture faces, and how you can help. But remember, if you're tall, blond and live in northern Europe, you're indigenous too! You might live in a big city and don't know anything about the spirits of the land, but your ancestors originated in the place you still live.

Celtic

- *Aos Sí*

A supernatural race of fairies, elves, descendants of the Irish gods (Thuatha Dé Dannan) or fallen angels. They are so respected and fearsome they aren't usually called by name but by pseudonyms like "The Fair Folk" or "The Good Neighbours" instead. They protect natural spaces by playing tricks on people. As late as 2017, stories of sightings have been collected, proving that the Irish are still connected to the fairy realms.

- *Cernunnos*

A male god with antlers, who's associated with wild animals, the forest and fertility. He is the lover of the Great Mother and possesses similar qualities to the Greek god Pan. Also known as

Herne, he has connections to the concept of the Green Man as well as Robin Hood.



Slavic

- *Baba Yaga*

A witchy figure from Slavic folklore, she's an old woman who lives in a hut on chicken legs in the forest and either helps or hinders the protagonists from various fairy tales. She represents both the dispassionateness as well as the wisdom of wild nature. Those who listen to and respect her usually do well.



Greece

- *Demeter & Persephone*

Demeter is the goddess of grain and the harvest, and Persephone is her daughter, a personification of spring. When Persephone is kidnapped by the god of the underworld Hades, Demeter goes into mourning, bringing about winter. Eventually it's determined that Persephone will spend six months in the underworld and six months with her mother, giving rise to the seasons.

The ancient Greek pantheon has many earth, nature and vegetation gods and goddesses. There's Gaia of course, and Artemis, Pan and Dionysus. This mother and daughter duo is especially interesting not only because their myth explains the seasons, but deeper than that, Persephone's abduction by Hades

gives us clues about the mystery of the cyclical nature of life and the human psyche.



- *Naiades, Nereides, Dryads etc.*

Nymphs of fresh water, the sea, and trees, respectively. Others include the Oreads (mountain nymphs) and those for specific trees. They are personifications of nature, mostly depicted as beautiful women, who are divine but not immortal and have certain powers like healing skills or shapeshifting. Individual nymphs such as Echo, Daphne and Calypso play important roles in Greek mythology.

Yoruba

- *Yemaya*

This West-African river spirit or goddess is the mother of all the Orishas (divine spirits) as well as of humanity. She is associated with the feminine mysteries as well as love and healing. She came to the Americas with the people captured as slaves, and became blended with the Virgin Mary when they converted to Catholicism.

Interestingly, it is also said that certain Madonna figures in Italy are actually holding a female instead of a male baby, indicating they are Demeter and Persephone (or Ceres and Proserpina as they were known in Roman culture) and not Mary and Jesus. Like in Marion Zimmer-Bradley's fictional account 'The Mists of Avalon,' the Great Goddess goes into hiding in plain sight as the mother of Christ.



Japan

- *Kitsune*

These fox spirits can shapeshift, turning into beautiful women, and have magical powers. They are known to trick people, lead them

astray, and on occasion marry humans and have children with them.

Hawai'i

- *Pele*

Pele is the goddess of volcanoes and fire, the one who made the Hawaiian islands. She is passionate, jealous and capricious, and exemplifies both the creative and destructive power of nature.

Mexico

- *La Llorona*

This story of a woman's ghost weeping near a body of water after drowning her children in revenge might have its origins in Aztec mythology. Clarissa Pinkola Estés speaks of many versions in her book 'Women Who Run With the Wolves,' one of which features polluted rivers that deformed her babies, so her rich industrialist lover rejected both her and them. This heartbreaking tale is a powerful symbol for both creative and ecological death.

"Now La Llorona looks and looks through the polluted river for her children, but she can hardly see, for the water is so dirty and dark. Now her ghost drags the river bottom with her long fingers. Now she wanders the riverbanks calling for her children all the time."

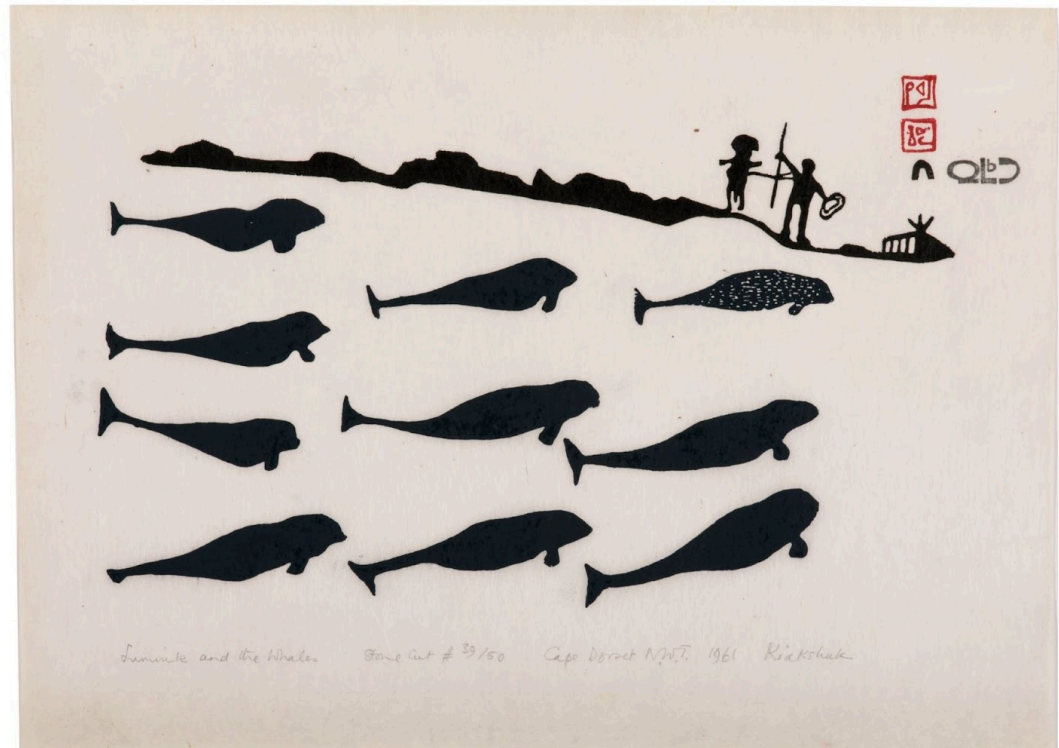
— Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves*

Inuit

- *Sedna*

This goddess is thrown overboard by her father, and when she tried to climb back in, he chopped off her fingers. So she sank to

the bottom of the sea, becoming the ruler of the deep, and her fingers turned into the seals, whales and walruses.



THE SACRED EARTH MANIFESTO

I hereby declare that...

1. Humankind is part of nature.
2. The lives of all beings as well as water, air, and mineral forms are intimately interconnected (both on the macro and the quantum level). This was already obvious to many, especially indigenous and pagan tribes as well as mystics of all religions, and now science is catching up.
3. High vibe isn't better than low vibe. On Earth we have all the vibes; that's the point. Even the heaviest material and darkest depression are part of Oneness. This is the deep secret paradox of non-duality.
4. The imperfections and challenges of life on Earth are a sacred pathway for the soul to evolve, and it includes a flawed, aging body. Denying the holiness of the material world (including the body) is patriarchal, recycled exoteric Christianity.
5. Respect for women and respect for the Earth are deeply interrelated. We cannot have one without the other.
6. Waking up the senses by moving out of trauma states and relaxing into sensuality is the key to experiencing abundance. Otherwise nothing can ever be enough.

7. We need a spirituality that includes compassion for the suffering of other beings (ie. an open heart chakra), not bypassing the reality of pain by focusing exclusively on the spiritual.
8. It's possible that reality is just a dream, which means that with enough dreamers becoming lucid, we can change it to something more satisfying.
9. Humans are allowed to just exist, like cats and flowers. Or you can go on an epic quest, fuelled by your soul's longing for transcendence. It's up to you!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hannah is a yoga teacher, creative and nature lover with a passion for creating beauty and magic. She's here to help people reconnect with the thrill of being alive, and reclaim the wonder that often gets buried under the weight of the daily grind.

Through movement and music, she supports those seeking to release obstacles like trauma, stress, and limiting beliefs, creating room for miracles to happen. To her, healing is a return to aliveness in the moment. She believes that when we follow this path, a glorious, abundant life is possible for everyone, without harming our magnificent planet.

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