

The Sky and Earth Touched Me

Prairie grasses swaying in the wind... clouds drifting in the sky...
songbirds singing joyfully in a tree ... all make the heart sing. We aren't
merely observers of nature's beauties. The soul is omnipresent, and
everything happens *within* us.

The ego is the soul identified with the body. Egoic consciousness makes
one self-absorbed and oblivious of other realities. When one is immersed
in nature, the "body vanishes and the freed soul goes abroad." (John Muir)
Only by expanding beyond the physical body can one commune with God.

People enjoy being in nature because there they see ennobling qualities
they want for themselves. In its myriad forms, nature helps enrich and
expand the soul. Sri Ramakrishna asked his disciple Master Mahasaya to
meditate whenever he saw an expanse of water, because the placidity of
water reminds one of the vastness of God.

Richard Jefferies, the English poet, spoke of everything in nature—
a flower, a lake—as "touching him and giving him something of itself."

He “spoke to the sea... and desired its strength.” He addressed the sun, and consciously drew upon the soul equivalent of its light. He looked at the sky, gazed into its depths, and felt the “blue sky drawing his soul toward it, and there it rested.”

Feeling nature’s essence within your body and all around you helps you feel God’s body. The best way to feel nature within you, Swami Kriyananda says, is to relate from your center (the spine) to the center of everything you observe. When you see a striking rock or tree, commune with its spiritual essence; feel it becoming alive in you.

In India there was a hermit who had an unusual way of praying. While the other hermits recited the scriptures, repeated mantras, or practiced breathing exercises, the “atypical” hermit expressed his devotion differently. After coming out of his cave, he’d greet the morning sun, enjoy the sunlight on the Ganges, and listen to the birds. Every time he saw something that delighted him, he’d joyfully clap his hands in approval and exclaim, “Well done, God, well done!”

“All life leaps like a dancer when gazing I see only Thee.” (Swami Kriyananda) When the consciousness expands, and all of nature becomes one’s body, one moves and delights in everything.

May you, like the hermit, see and delight in God everywhere.

To Practice

The Sky and Earth Touched Me

Go to a beautiful natural area that feels vibrantly alive, such as a small stream lined with maple trees, a flowery mountain meadow, or an aspen forest. (One can also do this exercise indoors by looking out a window.)

Ask Divine Mother to reveal Herself to you through all Her forms and appearances: the flying birds... flowering trees... and distant ridges.

1. When something captivates you, relate to it from your center to its center. Commune with its spiritual essence, feel it becoming alive in you.

2. Feel that aspect of nature awakening equivalent soul qualities inside of you. For example, a towering mountain may inspire feelings of soul aspiration.

3. Lovingly look at what has captivated you, and mentally include its name in the following sentence: *The _____ touched me... and gave me part of itself.* For example, if you observe a raven soaring high in the sky, say, "The raven touched me... and gave me part of itself."

Continue to practice as you sit or walk, saying, "the _____ touched me," or "Divine Mother touched me."

Be aware of the inner lift of pleasure the sight gives you, and share that feeling with God.

One day, Jesus was surrounded by a jostling crowd when a sick woman of great faith quietly and lovingly reached out and touched his robe. Because of her devotion, she was instantly healed. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who

touched me?" Though many people were touching Jesus, only the woman touched him with the kind of love that drew his spiritual blessings.

Most people, John Muir said, are like little marbles, rigidly alone, "having no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything." God, however, has surrounded each soul with other people and with nature's beauties to help him expand his consciousness and self-identity. The more you commune with the divine in nature, the more you'll feel the joy of the universe passing through you.