

MINDFUL SENSORY WALK

Activity: Mindful Sensory Walk

This is an activity to begin to re-awaken your senses that I created in response to reading David Abrams book, "Spell of the Sensuous," from which I've quoted below.

"Caught up in a mass of abstractions, our attention hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies that only reflects us back to ourselves, it is all too easy for us to forget our carnal inheritance in a more-than-human matrix of sensation and sensibilities. Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds and shapes of an animate earth ... to shut ourselves off from these other voices ... is to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human, only in contact and conviviality of what is not human."

So I'm going to ask you to do something that might feel crazy! I want you to go on a walk in the woods or somewhere outside where you are surrounded by nature. It doesn't have to be long... but long enough that you can shake off all of your buzzing productivity, your to-do's, your busyness. I want you to actually imagine that you are an animal in this landscape. You may feel like you are new to this foreign underworld of natural life. I want you to walk through it, the way you might imagine an impala walks through the African Savanna... nose alert, sniffing the air for predatory scents or a possible meal, ears perked, listening with deep acuity to its surroundings. Perhaps notice the sun beaming its incredible warmth on the nape of your neck, or the gentle wind rustling the hairs on your arms. Maybe giving you goose bumps. Walk like you are part of this landscape, an animal that consorts with the birds, the chipmunks, the squirrels that are darting around you. And now for the crazy part.... I want you (in your mind or in actual spoken word) to speak **directly to** the natural world, not about it (that creates a separateness, that I am hoping will dissolve with this exercise). Maybe it's a tree that is offering you some much needed shade, or a trunk to sit upon. Thank you tree, you are supporting me just as I need right now. Perhaps it's a bird that is singing her beautiful soliloquy so it seems for your ears only. Thank you bird for your magnificent symphony, your tune speaks to me deeply. Or perhaps you just find a patch of sun and lie down, and tell the sun you are grateful

to be warmed and nurtured by his strong rays. Or you have a moment of eye contact with a chipmunk that comes over to look at you curiously. Hi Chippy. What are you up to? Getting ready for winter? If you stay out on your walk long enough, you may even realize you are lonely and grateful for the company of Chippy.

Think back through the billion year history of this earth of which humans are infant animals. Sink deeply into the basic realization of how inextricably interconnected we are to this earth and all the wild things upon and within her. It's foolish to think our nervous systems emerged in isolation from all this rich natural otherness. No, we evolved together in RECIPROCITY... "in relationship with hawks and waves and storm clouds and waterfalls with animate, living land that spoke to us in a multiplicity of voices." Imagine if we had relationship outside of humans. We'd have the ability to tap into such a more vast array of emotions and experiences? We may find meaning in these relationships in a way we didn't believe possible?

"Another human cannot possibly provide all of the outrageously diverse and vital nourishment that we once got from being in relationship with dragonflies and swallowtails and stones and lichen and wolves. It's just not possible! We used to carry on personal relationships with the sun and the moon and the stars. To try and get all that now from another person... continually blows apart our marriages, it explodes our human relationships."

Contemplate for a moment what does the chipmunk think of you? Or the bird who is providing you with your personal operatic symphony? What are you providing for the bird? How are you moving in space so that it is beautiful for all the earthen creatures around you? The way a leopard sways elegantly, regally, as she walks to find a spot of shade to lie down under. How can you make your voice, your language beautiful? Poem? Whisper? Song? What are you bringing that is expressing your femininity or masculinity? I think we forget that we can bring the gift of beauty and peace to this earth or we can bring destruction and arrogance just by virtue of the way we hold ourselves on a walk in nature.

"If we are not, in fact, disembodied minds hovering outside the world, but sensitive and sentient animals, bodies being palpably immersed in the breathing body of the world, then language is first and foremost an expressive thing, patterned wounds by which our body calls to other bodies- whether to the moon, or to the geese honking overhead, or to another person If we really wish to open our senses back up to the wonder and subtlety of the earth around us, we all have to be poets..."

Sleeping in the Forest

by Mary Oliver

*I thought the earth remembered me,
she took me back so tenderly,
arranging her dark skirts, her pockets
full of lichens and seeds.
I slept as never before, a stone on the river bed,
nothing between me and the white fire of the stars
but my thoughts, and they floated light as moths
among the branches of the perfect trees.
All night I heard the small kingdoms
breathing around me, the insects,
and the birds who do their work in the darkness.
All night I rose and fell, as if in water,
grappling with a luminous doom. By morning
I had vanished at least a dozen times
into something better.*

Enjoy your wild walk!

~Liz Strawbridge

