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## The Way of Wilderness

STEVEN HARPER

MODERN PSYCHOTHERAPY IS almost universally practiced during a fifty-minute hour in an office, in a building, in a city or suburb. The pattern is all but automatic; opening a "practice" means opening an "office" that must usually be reached by driving a car along a congested freeway through a threatening city. Ecopsychology poses a powerful challenge to such therapeutic business as usual. It reminds us that the original environment in which teachers and healers sought to save people's souls was the natural environment, and the farther from "civilization," the better. Is it possible that certain unconscious assumptions about the world are built into the city? Do those assumptions prevent both therapist and client from finding the most effective kind of healing? Is urban culture itself concealing repressed contents that need to be reclaimed and returned to consciousness for analysis?

Wilderness therapy—or "practice," as Steven Harper prefers to call it, by way of making a vital distinction—is the boldest ecopsychological method so far developed for raising questions like these. It abandons the office, the city, the clock in favor of a setting that more closely corresponds to the natural habitat that has always been used by traditional cultures for healing the troubled soul. As Harper suggests, the authentic experience of wilderness undercuts all our suppositions about the "civilized" and the "primitive" in ways that can deliver a

“reality shock.” If we approach nature as he proposes, we may find ourselves asking where the “wilderness” really is. Is it perhaps within us, still waiting to be explored?

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*A culture that alienates itself from the very ground of its own being—from wilderness outside (that is to say, wild nature, the wild, self-contained, self-informing ecosystems) and from that other wilderness within—is doomed to a very destructive behavior, ultimately perhaps self-destructive behavior.* GARY SNYDER

Our hike had started the night before, when my friend had said, “The moon is out, let’s walk.” We met at three o’clock that morning and began hiking up through the redwood-covered canyon to the coast ridge of Big Sur. My young heart was hurting from the breakup of a long-term relationship. Even though I had spent a good amount of time working with the pain, I felt shut down and separate from everything in my life.

We struck a leisurely pace, following whatever seemed to arise in the moment. Sometimes I found myself in tears, other times stopping to drink water from the creek or investigate a new plant, sometimes talking, other times quiet. We followed exactly what was before us, and as the day wore on I found myself softening to and accepting whatever emerged inside. My heart and belly felt expansive, and gradually I was overcome by the strangest sensation of webs connecting me with all that was around. I could sense webs of light extending out of me to every living thing and from them to me. I was sustained by all that surrounded me. The experience slowly dissipated as we climbed to the summit of the ridge, where I stood smiling, sweat in my eyes. And although I still had more grieving to do, the experience stands out as a clear turning point in my healing process, as well as in my life.

People have always turned to wilderness to become whole again. We need only think of the many primary cultures that use intensified wilderness experience as a rite of passage to see these healing qualities at work. The “civilized” person, however, has approached wilderness from

a very different place. Our society is unique in the degree to which we have tried to split ourselves off from nature. We have lost touch with many basic, yet quite mature, ways of knowing nature that were commonplace to our ancestors. But we may also be unique in our potential for accessing far more modes of being and knowing than our ancestors could. These include a wider understanding of scientific and natural phenomena, and the shared wisdom of a worldwide array of psychological, cultural, and spiritual practices. When we embrace that which is most wholesome of both “old” and “new,” we may find that wilderness holds the potential for transformative experiences that were perhaps never possible before.

Since the 1960s there has been a growing interest in using the wilderness as an environment for many of the new humanistic and existential therapies. There are numerous programs that use wilderness as a setting for their specific tradition or technique. I am more interested in those transformations offered by wilderness directly. Wilderness is a way and a tradition in its own right. If we are willing to be still and open enough to listen, wilderness itself will teach us.

Though I approach wilderness as a psychologist seeking to bring wholeness to the lives of those I lead out, I do not consider what I do “therapy”; I prefer the word “practice.” Nature itself has shown me this crucial difference. Therapy, as it is commonly used, implies illness; it implies that there is a beginning and an end to treatment. Above all, it requires a “therapist,” someone who is the “expert” in dealing with somebody else’s life, and who gives analysis, interpretation, and advice. Therapy, in this sense, has been coopted by the mental-health industry, which I regard with some suspicion as perhaps having a vested interest in illness, in control of when and where therapy starts and stops, and in a hierarchical relationship between therapist and client. On the other hand, practice implies process; there is no beginning or end, but a lifetime of engagement and discovery. When we are truly willing to step into the looking glass of nature and contact wilderness, we uncover a wisdom much larger than our small everyday selves. Uninterrupted and undisturbed nature takes care of itself. One of my favorite guidelines for facilitators comes from Esalen Institute’s cofounder Richard Price, who used to make the same distinction I am making here between therapy and practice with respect to Gestalt. Price liked to say, “Trust process,

support process, and get out of the way." He frequently added, "If in doubt, do less." Personal evolution then becomes like nature; instead of being a struggle, our process, uninterrupted and undisturbed, becomes unfolding growth. Wilderness is a leaderless teacher; there is no one preaching change to us. The only personal transformations that occur arise from within ourselves.

My hope is that ecopsychology will opt for seeing the split between nature and human nature as needing a healing process rather than therapy as I have described it, recognizing that we are, in a sense, prefigured by nature. Our relationship with nature is more one of *being* than *having*. We *are* nature; we do not *have* nature. As Alan Watts once expressed it: "You didn't come *into* this world. You came *out* of it, like a wave from the ocean. You are not a stranger here."

Wilderness experience has many variables. How long should the work take? How many people should there be in the group? What combination of age and gender works best?

I have led wilderness experiences as brief and simple as a three-hour walking trip with one inexperienced person; I have also led three-month excursions into rugged terrain that involved several experienced mountaineers. There is a common misconception that the path of wilderness is only for those who have experience and expertise. I have found that experienced hikers and campers can be jaded and no longer willing to be students of nature, while people with less experience out of doors are often hungrier to learn and therefore more open to possibilities. Whether experienced or not, I most enjoy those who have the openness that Suzuki Roshi called "beginner's mind," perhaps because they help me experience wilderness anew. I prefer a group that is balanced in gender and race and that has a wide range of ages; but I have discovered that if the ranges are too great, the group will spend most of its time socializing and working to find common ground rather than experiencing wilderness. In my early years, I worked with many younger people, mainly of high school and college age; as the years go by, I find myself dealing with groups of older participants, some as old as seventy-five, with an average age of about forty.

How rugged should the work be? And how expert should the participants be? If a wilderness experience is too rugged for an individual or

the group, people almost without exception retreat to habitual ways of coping with stress, even if these are highly dysfunctional. If the trip is not rugged enough, groups stay with habitual styles of relating to self, others, and nature. I try to find the creatively rugged edge for each group and for each individual within the group. Some trips demand exceptional physical ability, while others are specifically designed for physically challenged people. Most programs require only average physical ability, but above-average psychological motivation.

The groups I lead now are between ten to sixteen in size, though respect for the selected wilderness ecosystem has a lot to do with determining numbers. Deserts, for example, generally require smaller groups and more low-impact camping skills than most temperate forests. The trips range between one and two weeks, though with high school and college students, five-week trips are best. The optimum length of the stay is that which allows people to achieve a certain feeling of belonging where we have come—a sense that we are not strangers here. For this to happen, there should be enough time for individuals to undergo the "midcourse blues," a period of boredom and depression in which our romanticized idea of being in nature is worn down. Once the group has gone through this transition, interesting things begin to happen. We find that we no longer feel like outsiders or visitors; we feel at *home* in wild nature.

This feeling has a lot to do with breaking down the emphasis on the Disneyland sense of "beauty." The *look* of the land often determines that response. Many tourists, for example, confronted by a scene that is "pretty as a picture," react to natural beauty by rushing for their cameras. But sight is only one of our senses. I try to encourage letting the wilderness in through all the senses: touch, hearing, smell, and taste. Above all, I try to make the experience whole and honest. It must include what happens and what you feel when night falls, when the weather turns hot or cold or rainy, when the bugs come out, or when the cute little rabbit you have been watching screams a death-call as it is whisked away in the talons of an eagle.

Wilderness is not always a carpet of flowers. Wilderness also includes gray rainy days, animal-fouled water, dark, perilous forests, and deathly dangers. For example, our culture constantly avoids mud and rain; va-

cation ads depict white, clean beaches and sunny skies. When it rains, everyone scampers about crouched over as though water will dissolve them like Oz's Wicked Witch of the West. Metaphorically, our willingness to be in the mud and rain can reflect our willingness to be in our internal mud and rain. To put oneself in mud and rain is more than a matter of tolerance; it is active participation in our own "raininess" or "muddiness." True contact with wilderness requires more than resignation to muddy times; it requires nothing less than attentiveness to all there is around us if we desire to know its secrets. This is not to advocate taking vacations in rainy places, although at times that may not be a bad idea. I do advocate a willingness to be *with* and at times to *become* our dark, sometimes muddy, sometimes painful wild nature.

Wilderness begins teaching as soon as we plan the adventure. We must decide what to take with us and what to leave behind. A critical aspect of experiencing wilderness is the willingness to simplify. But, paradoxically, simplicity is not as easy as it sounds. The tools and techniques we choose to take into wilderness can dilute and drastically alter our direct experience with nature. So, we begin by questioning each tool we bring. Wilderness work starts with a basic ecological question: what do we really need?

A computer programmer I once worked with came to the first-night meeting of a seven-day trip with a pack full of the latest technical camping gadgets. He looked as if he had stepped out of a camping-equipment catalog. After a long talk about simplicity I convinced Dan to leave behind a good number of things. Even though the rest of the group were carrying simple tarps, he clung steadfastly to his new high-tech, coonlike tent. As the trip progressed, most of our group took to sleeping under the stars and the expansive night sky. Dan, on the other hand, put up his tent first thing at each camp and crawled into its protective walls, to emerge only when necessary. Finally one full-moon night, the group gently urged him to try a night outside exposed to the elements. We slept that night in a circle with our heads to the center. Upon awakening the next morning, Dan proceeded to share his delight in watching the moon travel the night sky. He continued to tell us about his life at work, insulated from human contact by an array of the latest computer equipment. He saw that his life had become void of living things, to the point

where he was afraid of almost any human contact. From that morning on not only did he engage with other group members more, but he took it upon himself to see what in his pack he could do without. On the last night he stayed up much of the time feeding the fire and occasionally dozing off lying on the bare ground. Dan woke the group that morning with a howl of childish excitement. He talked the whole group into an early morning dip in the nearby ice-cold stream. We walked to the trailhead that day energized and feeling fully alive. Even though Dan clearly had the heaviest pack, he definitely had the lightest load.

Upon entering wilderness, one of the first things almost everyone experiences is an enlivening of the five senses. Suddenly, we are bathed in (and sometimes overloaded with) new sounds, awesome sights, interesting textures, different smells and tastes. This awakening of our senses, or perhaps better stated, "coming to our senses," is a subtly powerful and underrated experience. People learn how greatly some of our basic modes of perception have been dulled in order to survive in the urban world; many have been deadened unnecessarily. As long as we remain unaware of the richness of our senses, we have little choice about what we sense, and thus our perception is censored. I have seen this rebirth of sensory aliveness and keen alertness happen time and again in myself and others. Once this occurs, we can consciously choose, as well as expand, our modes of perception. When these fundamental senses are cultivated with practice and time they can be honed to a fine edge. They can be integrated into our everyday lives.

With practice and patience, sensory awareness can be cultivated to a more focused awareness I call "attentiveness." In wilderness, we begin to develop a sustained continuum of mindfulness. We are not necessarily focused on a single object, but rather on the stream of awareness itself. A journey through wilderness is in itself an awareness continuum. We are invited to observe with attentiveness what emerges around each bend of the trail, what unfolds before us over each hill. This does not mean that we have forgotten or lost the past (we can remember the trail out) or that we do not creatively drift into the future (we can speculate about the easiest, safest path to follow). We are instead attentively aware of wherever our awareness flows: the past, present, or future. In a sense,

the means becomes the end, and our journey becomes an unfolding process to which we become attentive.

Once, while visiting Kenya for four months, I had the opportunity to spend two weeks walking through the back country along the west rim of the Rift Valley. Previously, I had traveled in parts of the United States where grizzly bear are a mild threat. This, however, was the first time I had traveled in an environment where I was potentially threatened by numerous animals. We encountered deadly poisonous snakes, came upon hippos near a river, and saw lion prints outside our tents in the morning. These, however, were not the major threat. The cape buffalo, which will charge unpredictably when startled, is more fearsome. We spent days walking through thick brush clapping loudly, then quietly listening, to let any unsuspecting buffalo know we were approaching. On a few occasions we saw the brush in front of us shake as we heard the thrashing and heavy rumble of hooves. At first, we were all on edge. Eventually the fearfulness caused by danger dropped away, replaced by a relaxed but keen alertness that seemed to permeate the entire group. While much of this aliveness stayed with me, I have rarely since experienced such a quality of awareness.

Wilderness, precisely because it is inevitably physical, raises deep questions about matters of gender in ways that, in the office, therapy may easily avoid. Gender considerations are there from the very outset of the expedition. For example, early in a trip I frankly address women's menstrual cycle. I discuss how to deal with used sanitary napkins in an environmentally sound way. I note that a woman may, much to her surprise, find that her cycle changes in wilderness; on extended trips, women in the group, like women in tribal societies, may find their periods synchronizing. I am amazed at how often adults blush or make nervous jokes about this most basic and obvious biological difference between women and men. Typically, the tendency is to deal with this topic in a secretive way. The women whisper about it among themselves or it is ignored completely.

Whenever the subject of gender comes up, I remember Mark. During college he had played football. The rigors of medical school and the demands of being a doctor had taken the youthful health he had known.

When an older woman in our group caught up with and then passed Mark on a steep section of the trail, he grew angry. Even though I had cautioned everyone to find their own pace, Mark was used to being stronger than women. In a classic tortoise-and-hare way, he charged ahead and then rested, while her pace was slow and steady. Mark ate a big slice of humble pie later that day when my female coleader took some of the weight from his pack. It was especially difficult because he had boasted our first night that he was willing to help any of the weaker hikers in our group, not so subtly implying it might be the women. Mark went to bed early that night with hardly a word. The next morning as we went around the circle for check-in, Mark brought up his attitude about the roles of men and women and was clearly reevaluating them. Two of the women expressed their anger at Mark's behavior our first night. While we discovered no great solutions to the issues facing men and women, there was by the end of the trip a mutual appreciation of the differences between us.

Differences of physical size and stamina show up immediately and raise gender issues. If the women in the group are smaller and less physically fit than men, or if the men are smaller and less physically fit than the women, this brings up any number of age-old questions about the division of labor. For example, if I carry more weight, will you set up the tent and cook? Frequently wilderness evokes the unacknowledged feminine or masculine side of a woman or man. Then, discussions that compare masculine and feminine values and ways of being arise, as well as speculation about whether these are genetic or socially learned. I attempt to set a tone that acknowledges gender differences and at the same time challenges gender-bound roles. Because these differences between men and women show up so unavoidably in wilderness, I prefer to work with a woman coleader who can balance any gender biases I bring to the group.

In all the trips I lead, I see wilderness as our primary teacher. For this reason I consciously acknowledge the transitions of entering and leaving the wilderness with rituals. Over the years I have experimented with many forms borrowed from other traditions and cultures. For example, at the trailhead I have asked group members to make offerings, or kneel

and touch the ground, or to bathe in the water (a washing away of the old to be new again), or simply take a moment of silence together. On many trips I ask participants to drop their given names and find a "trail name" that comes from a dream or an aspiration or that better describes who they feel they really are. From that time on, I often discourage talk about our professions and the "outside" world. The ritual I most often use is borrowed from Shinto. Shinto offers a balance to the typical western view; it recognizes rocks, trees, mountains, streams, and other things of nature as having life or spirit. We do two big claps and one bow with palms together in front of our faces. I think of the claps as a simple announcement—first to nature, then to myself and the group—that I am here to be aware, to be alive, and to practice. The act of bowing is potent and speaks for itself. We do this again at the end of each trip to acknowledge and thank nature, ourselves, and our companions. I encourage people to find traditions or rituals that have meaning to them and then to find a way to incorporate this practice into their daily lives.

The moment we step across the threshold and outside our usual cultural environment, our boundaries, blinders, and bonds begin to loosen. It is called "culture shock" among travelers, although it is perhaps better termed "expanding-reality shock." It is the shock that reverberates through the whole body-mind system when we suddenly realize that reality may be larger than our familiar scope—and very different. This shift is made every time we enter an internal or external wilderness. Personally, I experience it as a feeling of strangeness: a dizzying nausea may cloud my head and stomach, and sometimes anxiety, fear, and restlessness run through my body-mind. Doubts may arise and I might find myself asking, "Why?"

Outside familiar cultural boundaries and within wilderness, there are noticeable and sometimes radical shifts in the perception of time and space. The technologically induced fast pace of life is slowed down to a more natural tempo. People commonly report a sense of "timelessness" when they are immersed in nature. Time becomes less linear and more cyclic. We experience simple things such as day and night, the seasons, and the tides as a spiraling cycle rather than a linear progression. Space, instead of being measured in linear distance, is measured in experienced distance. Our culture-bound perception of these basic categories is so

fundamental that it is difficult to move away from them and to trust our own immediate experience. Yet, when we are able to transcend our culturally defined experience of time and space, a new and different world opens up.

In wilderness practice, there can be moments of serious emotional stress. I do not seek to elicit strong emotions, but if they emerge I work with them. Marcie, a mother of three, offers a vivid example. Marcie was in transition after her last child had "left the nest," as she put it. After years of taking care of her family, she had come on this trip to do something for herself. Not long after we started up the trail I noticed that Marcie was not with us. I told the group to take a rest and walked back down, where I found her standing on a mildly steep section of the trail. She was shaking uncontrollably, gasping for shallow breaths, frozen in place. Overwhelmed with fear of falling off the trail, she was what rock climbers call "gripped." While the hillside we stood on was steep, it was far from dangerous.

Earlier in my career I would have tried to talk Marcie out of her fear logically—as if fear is ever logical—or I might have challenged her to be strong and overcome it. Instead I supported her state, saying simply, "You're OK, let this happen." She burst into tears and began to shake even more. I encouraged her to allow herself to feel the fear rather than push it away. After some minutes of deep sobbing, she began to relate to her larger fear of feeling as though she was falling from the trail of the life she had known for so many years. Who was she, if not a mother with children to take care of? Once again, I encouraged her to enter into those feelings. After some time and more tears, Marcie began to feel the ground beneath her feet. She realized that indeed she was being supported by the trail, that gravity was holding her to the Earth. Slowly she shifted to seeing and feeling what was there rather than what was not there. Gradually Marcie began hiking up the trail to join our well-rested group with a feeling of ease and trust in her body.

In the process of growth and transformation we must begin to reclaim and own the rejected parts of ourselves. The essence of wilderness practice is to be wilderness. The very idea that wilderness exists as something separate lets us know how much we have disowned of our internal as well as our external wildness. In wilderness, because of our close ex-

periential contact with nature, we gradually begin to reclaim whatever it is we have projected onto the natural world.

Primary cultures have always had ways for people to become "things" outside of themselves. In their rituals and rites of passage, people become the Other: the animals, the plants, or the rocks. They use dance, visualization, masks, and costumes to help them fully embody the Other. Some primary peoples were so fully immersed in wilderness that apparently wilderness did not exist as a separate entity. Jeannette Armstrong, an Okanagan Indian I met at a workshop, told me that in her language there is no word for "wilderness." She thought one root of our alienation lay in the very fact that we believed there was such a split in reality between the human world and wilderness. Thus, to step out of our limited definition of self, to *become* these wild, natural things and experience them, is to give life not only to them but to those parts of ourselves.

Wilderness, through the history of civilized society and possibly before, has been the object of projection for many a dark shadow. "The word wilderness," as René Dubos notes, "occurs approximately three hundred times in the Bible, and all its meanings are derogatory." Deeply seeded in the psyche is the image of evil darkness in wilderness.

Much of today's destructive behavior comes from having projected our disowned darkness onto wilderness. As every psychotherapist since Freud has noted, it requires a vast amount of energy to repress and/or project the shadow. To go into wilderness is to face the shadow of wild nature at its source. When we identify with our wilderness shadow, consume it, and assimilate it, we thereby reown this vital and powerful energy.

Jan, an urban business executive, came to a wilderness trip I was leading that entailed three days and nights out alone. Although Jan had little experience in the outer wilderness, she was quite skilled at working on inner exploration. On the final night out, just before dark, a king snake slithered through her lone camp. She had always been afraid of snakes and was not sure what to do, since this was the only snake she had encountered outside of a zoo. As night moved in around her, she found herself looking over her shoulder wondering if the snake might come

back to get her. For the first time in her peaceful solitude, she was beset by anxiety and fear. She tried to calm herself and think of other things; then she realized she was trying to push away the idea and feeling of the snake and possibly some part of herself.

"I decided I must become the snake," she told me later. "I fashioned a snake mask from bark and grass. I began, self-consciously at first, moving and making sounds as a snake. I spent what felt like hours lying on the ground undulating and hissing. I shifted from thought to raw feeling and felt alive, sensuous, and on fire, all at once. I spoke as the snake to Jan. I told her she had deadened herself to her passion, to her ability to move with strength and sensuality."

Jan returned to our group on the morning of the fourth day sleepy yet full of vitality. She recounted the story of her experience, and to the amazement of the group, she performed another snake dance for everyone to witness. When she finished, she jokingly promised to do a repeat performance on the table at her next board meeting. To this day the image brings a smile to my face.

The instinctual self, which has its roots deep in the history of evolution, is our culture's shadow. It was perhaps necessary to leave much of our instinctual self behind as we evolved further. Yet we did not need to deaden ourselves in giving up our instinctual self. It is crucial that we reclaim our wildness, because this is where vitality lives. Jung wrote of the need for elements of instinctive animal nature in the whole and healthy person. Calvin Hall and Vernon Nordby, in their *Primer of Jungian Psychology*, best summarize this:

The person who suppresses the animal side of his nature may become civilized, but he does so at the expense of decreasing the motive power for spontaneity, creativity, strong emotions, and deep insights. He cuts himself off from the wisdom of his instinctual nature, a wisdom that may be more profound than any learning or culture can provide.

There is, however, a vast difference between analyzing the instinctual self and experiencing it. Few psychologists, Jungians included, have been willing to step across this chasm into the realms of experiential becoming.

Wilderness calls forth the instinctive animal self. Using one's instinc-

tual sense more, living closer to the basic survival needs of food and shelter, sitting gazing into the coals of a fire late at night: all these experiences allow the repressed instinctual self to emerge. As this "wild" uncultured self emerges in its many shapes and forms, we have the opportunity to explore its realms. We can begin to discover where civilization and wilderness intermesh and integrate. Fritz Perls once said, "One of the most important responsibilities—this is a very important transition—is to take responsibility for our projections, re-identify with these projections, and become what we project." In an environment close to the one in which we evolved, we can recollect a time when we stalked others and were ourselves stalked and hunted. We can, like Jan when she became the snake, at least in part relive and regain the knowledge of our stages of evolution: as simple organisms in the ancient seas, as fish, as reptiles, as amphibians, as mammals, as primates, as prehistoric humans. As we reexperience our forgotten primordial self, we have the opportunity to catch experiential glimpses of the origin of the primordial images, the archetypes. The awareness of ourselves, our environment, and the relationship between them, or simply the awareness of our expanded self, is the experience of wholeness. We must even reown our *incompleteness* if we are to become whole again. The experience of wholeness, however brief, is perhaps the most healing experience available to us.

On a two-month canoe trip across the Northwest Territories of Canada, I was blessed with such an experience. Near the end of a long day of paddling the sun was low in the sky and my mind had long ceased its normal chatter. I had the sensation of becoming my paddling and all that was around me. Stroke after stroke I was called to merge with my experience until "I" was no more. Only perception existed, a perception that was more complete, more whole than any I have known in a usual state of consciousness.

Yet no matter how fully we experience the primordial self while in the wild, the real work begins when we return. Even the most potent wilderness journey can be lost in a few moments or days, brushed off by saying "I've got to go back to the *real* world now." The experience is suddenly discounted as though the untamed natural world were not real. Wilderness becomes objectified, a thrilling adventure vacation that is kept in photos in a shoe box and stored in a closet. For those who work

with wilderness, whether as therapy or as practice, the greatest challenge is bringing it all back home.

How can we find this same sense of sacredness in everyday life? Like any powerful personal transformation, the awesome (and many times overwhelming) experience of wilderness can be difficult to incorporate successfully into our daily life. We emerge from wilderness changed. At some core level we feel deeply touched. Still, in the peacefulness we so often feel, there is also confusion or profound sadness. For we have seen dynamic balance. We have felt the meaning of wholeness and holiness. We have experienced parts of ourselves and parts of the universe that have been long forgotten. Upon emergence from wilderness we are confronted with our inconsistencies and notice more than ever before how drastically out of balance we live. Many return to a great sense of loss or pain, realizing how cruelly we have divided our lives. This schism is felt deeply and can make living our "regular" life very difficult. We can feel as though we have fallen from grace.

Frequently people make changes in life-style to achieve more balance. Some engage in environmental activism in the political sense; others are inspired to engage with the whole environment they live in (relationship to self, others, and the world). Whenever possible I like to have a series of follow-up meetings, in which members of the group come together to support each other and tell their stories of joy and despair, of struggle and success in incorporating wild nature into who we are and how we live.

As we begin to practice what we have learned, we see that nature is everywhere and that we really may not need to go to physical wilderness to experience wild nature. There are many paths, both ancient and new. There are as many ways to reenter the experience as there are people. I recommend almost any practice that includes the body, that encourages awareness, that can be done out-of-doors occasionally. Among those I favor are some movement arts (aikido, ta'i chi, dance, yoga), many meditation styles (vipassana, Zen), some psychological practices, and many practices that come to us from traditional cultures (ceremony, chanting, drumming).

We must be willing to bring back from wilderness more than ideas and philosophies. It is in practice and in the embodiment of what we discover that we find integration. The *example* of nature is that life is to



be lived, to be experienced. Otherwise, if we are not able to incorporate what we have learned in a real and practical way, wilderness work becomes another faddish thrill. The poet and farmer Wendell Berry tells us it is not enough to ask, "What can I do with what I know?" without at the same time asking, "How can I be responsible for what I know?"

Over the years I have found myself, more often than not, recommending gardening to workshop participants who seek ways of staying connected outside of the wilderness environment. When practiced in a sustainable way, gardening and farming are activities in which people and wild nature intermesh and begin to coevolve. Gardening yields deep insights into how we can physically, mentally, and spiritually find creative balance between wild nature and human nature. Gardening immerses us in a basic natural cycle that directly sustains our life. We get our hands dirty and our bodies sweaty. Gardening can be the physical embodiment of symbiosis and coevolution, the "ground" in which we practice what we have learned in wilderness. We give to the Earth as well as receiving.

True giving arises naturally and without effort, not from a feeling of guilt or from environmental correctness. When we care for the Earth in this way we can begin to reinhabit the land on which we live; and we can reinhabit ourselves only when we have learned to reinhabit the Earth. We are part of a circular, spiraling dance in which every part feeds the others and the whole.

Like the tightrope walker who is never still but always in movement, we must find our stability in the balance of constant adaptive movements. We have learned that stable organisms are those able to adapt to the changing environment and still maintain enough consistency to benefit from their form. There is a balance between too much change and too little change. Individually and collectively, we also need to balance between rational and nonrational modes of knowing, between "technological" and "natural" modes of human life support, between simplicity and complexity. As we move toward this elusive balance and wholeness, sometimes gracefully but most times not, I find myself filled with hope, touched by the beauty of life. I remember the words of Charles Darwin, who first taught us our evolutionary continuity with the natural world. "From so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful

and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved." Perhaps through direct experience of nature we will continue this "most beautiful and most wonderful" evolution consciously, as nature aware of itself.

### *Notes on Wilderness Work*

To explore the path of wilderness, first consider whether you can get started or continue on your own or within the context of a group of friends. There is a good chance you may not need "professionals." The primary issue is safety, in two respects: (1) Do you or your group have enough wilderness skills to be physically and emotionally safe? (2) Do you have the necessary low-impact wilderness living skills to be safe to wilderness?

In undertaking an organized wilderness trip, you are probably seeking one or more of the following: physical wilderness travel and living skills; the support of a group of like-minded people; the facilitation of a leader experienced in the "inner" spectrum of wilderness. Regardless of whether you are doing your own trip or participating in an organized group, I recommend staying close to home and within your local bioregion. Establish an inner wilderness practice that can be done before and after the trip.

A growing number of groups and people now leading high-quality wilderness work are interested in ecopsychology. Many of the best groups are small and more difficult to find than the larger organizations that advertise. Word of mouth is one of the best ways to find a group that will reflect your interests.

Be clear about your own expectations and concerns. Ask questions before signing up. What is the organization's basic intentions? What do the leaders hope you will come away with? Is there a clear intention to connect with nature? Describe your personal intentions and ask leaders whether it is realistic to expect them to be met. What type of support do they offer after a trip? Do they teach and practice low-impact wilderness living skills? How long have they been leading trips, and how long have they led trips in the area to which they are going? What type of medical training and support is available? What structures and forms are used (rituals, practices, style of leadership)? Are you able to talk to the actual leaders of the trip you are planning?

The following groups and individuals have been long established and have made significant, unique connections between wilderness work and ecopsychology:

The School of Lost Borders  
Stephen Foster and Meredith Little  
Box 55  
Big Pine, CA 93513

Northstar Wilderness  
Robert Greenway  
Box 1407  
Port Townsend, WA 98368

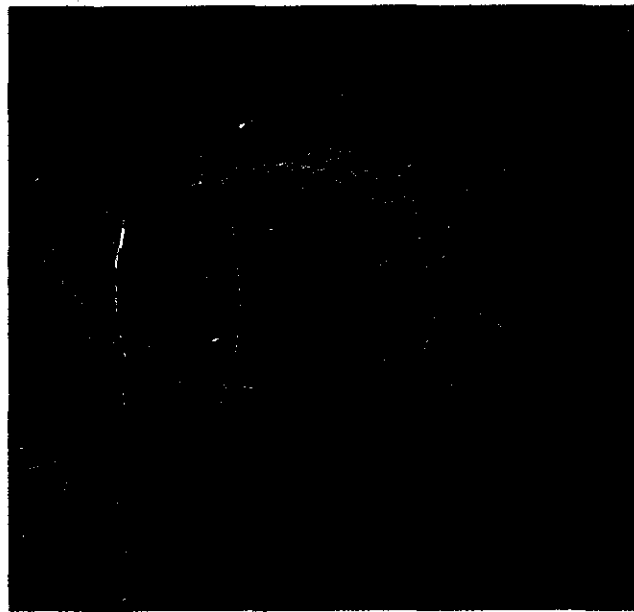
Breaking Through Adventures  
Rick Medrick (in particular the trip he leads with Dolores LaChapelle)  
Box 20281  
Denver, CO 80220

Earthways  
Steven Harper  
Box 303  
Big Sur, CA 93920

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# Ecopsychology

RESTORING THE EARTH  
.....  
HEALING THE MIND



Edited by THEODORE ROSZAK,  
MARY E. GOMES, and ALLEN D. KANNER

Forewords by LESTER R. BROWN  
and JAMES HILLMAN

The Sierra Club, founded in 1892 by John Muir, has devoted itself to the study and protection of the earth's scenic and ecological resources—mountains, wetlands, woodlands, wild shores and rivers, deserts and plains. The publishing program of the Sierra Club offers books to the public as a non-profit educational service in the hope that they may enlarge the public's understanding of the Club's basic concerns. The point of view expressed in each book, however, does not necessarily represent that of the Club. The Sierra Club has some sixty chapters coast to coast, in Canada, Hawaii, and Alaska. For information about how you may participate in its programs to preserve wilderness and the quality of life, please address inquiries to Sierra Club, 730 Polk Street, San Francisco, CA 94109.

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Ecopsychology : restoring the earth, healing the mind / edited by Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner ; forewords by James Hillman and Lester R. Brown.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-87156-499-8. — ISBN 0-87156-406-8 (paper)

1. Environmental psychology. 2. Nature—Psychological aspects.  
3. Environmentalism—Psychological aspects. I. Roszak, Theodore,  
1933-. II. Gomes, Mary E., 1962-. III. Kanner, Allen D.,  
1952-.

BF353.N37E26 1995

155.9—dc20

94-31179

Production by Janet Vail

Jacket design by Big Fish Books, San Francisco

Book design by Amy Evans

Composition by Wilsted & Taylor

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper containing 50% recovered waste paper, of which at least 10% of the fiber content is post-consumer waste

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cambridge Core - Biblical Studies - New Testament - The Way of the Wilderness - by G. I. Davies. A Geographical Study of the Wilderness Itineraries in the Old Testament. Get access. Buy the print book. Check if you have access via personal or institutional login. Log in Register. Cited by 4. Cited by.