

**La Vita Bella:**  
**Answering Nature's Invitation**

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When I was approached by Intrazine to write an article on the transformational power of nature, I felt joy and excitement, having been offered the opportunity to express my love of nature, outdoor re-creation, personal spirituality and deep fascination with society's present spiritual landscape.

Let me start by saying that I no longer look to scientific data for proof that nature heals, having witnessed and heard enough experiences and testimonies confirming the healing properties of nature. Re-connecting with nature activates a spiritual alchemy in one's life, re-awakening one's appreciation of the interconnection between all living things. The popularity of such things as naturopathy, feng shui principles of design, organic food and outdoor recreation is truly enough evidence that nature is power!

George Washington Carver said: "I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we only listen". The beauty, harmony and balance in nature mirror our own human potential to grow beyond the limits imposed by our minds and social conditioning. Nature constantly reminds us of our own ephemeral qualities and mortality with her constant display of the cycle of life-death-rebirth. Conscious living, loving and dying is fascinating work if one is fully open and receptive to the experience. We cannot escape life's difficult moments, but we can transform anger into love, the most powerful form of creative energy. French theologian and philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) wrote: "Some day, when we have mastered the winds, the tides, and gravity, we will harness the energies of love. Then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."

I was taught these important lessons of life early in my life while my mother struggled with cancer. Her passage into death lasted one year. Humans close to me offered me much consolation during this difficult period of my life. However, I remember no better comfort than my pets, my outdoor escapes into the woods and a specific cedar tree that invited me to sit on its nurturing branch. To this very day, every time I visit my parent's homestead, I sit on that same cedar branch to contemplate and give thanks to nature for everything that I have become today. Mother Nature still remains my surrogate mother, my confidante, and my counsel. Without realizing it at the time, that search for answers to my pain and suffering was actually my first baby step on the shamanic path; a spiritual path where one opens his/her self in receiving guidance, healing and empowerment by connecting to an "inner power" that is inherent within all natural things. By exercising outdoors, one cannot but feel inspired and a deep connection with the Force, the Cosmos.

My love of nature followed me through university. Once graduated, I worked extensively with seniors and intellectually challenged adults. I would spend a lot of time with my clients conversing about life, death and matters of the soul. I often sought answers to their questions through my personal dialogue with nature while exercising and reported back to them. It was also the best way for me to recharge my battery from the emotional demands of the work. In a way, I was prescribing my own medicine. I remember seeing miracles in my patient's well-being by offering them non-judgmental love, exercise and daily contact with nature's beauty, be it in the form of a sunny day or the blooming of a flower. We would then be, client and I, transported in silence, to a wonderful, magical, healing place, where words did not exist. I would even encourage them to dialogue openly with a spiritual entity, one they felt close to: a dead relative, a dead pet, a favourite tree, a favourite saint or God himself.

It was much later, 28 years to be exact, that a psychiatrist gave the shamanic map to me. He was a regular patron to the little café I then owned and one afternoon, we both got carried away talking about spirituality. After sharing with him my deep spiritual connection with nature and the healing miracles I had witnessed as a caregiver, he made me realize that my past and present

work embraced many shamanic healing principles. This powerful medicine I now consciously incorporate in my counselling and teachings through Creative Wheel.

The first step on the shamanic path is so simple that individuals often wave it off because of its simplicity. One only needs to step out/away from "the box", (house, car, office, gym, shopping centre, television set, computer terminal) and into nature's healing field of healing vibrations. Well-renowned eco-psychologist Michael Cohen has identified 54 human senses that we can activate by reconnecting with nature. Re-owning your "animal instincts" is the first step in feeling your spontaneity, authenticity and genuineness.

As society has become more industrialized, we have become more building-bound, and have less and less naturally occurring opportunities to follow our natural instincts which connect us so directly with our creative spirits. For me, those natural instincts demand the sensuous contacts with nature through my outdoor pursuits and sports - running, cycling, skating, skiing, hiking, swimming... I am definitely addicted to oxygen and movement! It is during these close encounters with nature that I feel the total love and protection from forces invisible to my human eye, yet so real and vibrant. It is during these outdoor moments that I most feel my personal power. It is during these outdoor moments that I realise how fortunate I am for the gift of awareness that inspires me to write and teach to the citizens of the world to experience and engage with the wonders of life. La Vita Bella indeed! Our individual and collective sense of balance, direction and wisdom, our personal voice - these are not lost to us. They are all ready and waiting to be reclaimed.

Have we allowed the comforts of the industrial and technological age to dull our senses to the point that we no longer have the need or the desire to connect with nature? When we choose indoor recreation instead of risking the elements - wind, air, earth, fire - we lose out on the incredible wisdom they have to offer.

Being tied to the rapid pace of work and the day to day challenges of achieving, accumulating and accomplishing can create a feeling amongst all of us of being a ghost or a dinosaur: the natural world is all around us, but we do not inhabit it. The laws and rules we have made and have grown to habitually live with carry with them a false sense of sanctuary. Things that hum and whirr, that do our work for us, help us to feel peaceful and reduce our anxiety, an anxiety which ironically has much of its basis in the very structure of our lives: their speed, complexity and dependency upon technology.

A simple yet profound way to expand these boundaries is to head outdoors. Being outdoors, connecting to the potency of Mother Earth and Father Sky, is an easy and exhilarating way to rejuvenate and empower ourselves, restoring a sense of freedom and a sense of our interdependence, both of which are our birthright.

Many people are finding the courage to create a way of life that is "outwardly simple and inwardly rich" as defined by Duane Elgin in his little book called Voluntary Simplicity. By simplifying our lifestyle, we find more time to explore, cultivate and share and choose activities to sustain us, which come mainly from the qualities of being human: creativity, communication, movement, appreciation, and spiritual and intellectual development.

Each of us has a shaman inside of us who understands that life is in everything and that that there are many ways of experiencing it. Being human is only one of them. There is a magnificent gift awaiting us in this millennium: the discovery of our own selves and our interdependence. The World Wide Web is a great avenue for inspiration as we witness a proliferation of eco-entrepreneurs taking the centre stage.

The magic in healing, personally and collectively, is available to us outdoors. Take some time off to truly experience an adventure of self, in nature. Ask yourself the wise questions that philosophers have been asking since the dawn of time: "Who am I? Why am I here? What is my

purpose on the planet? What will I create during your short visit?" These questions will most likely culminate in the call to life: "How ought I live?" Create a clear image in your mind of a healthy, empowered, environmentally aware individual and seek to bring reality to this vision.

Ecopsychologist Michael Cohen wrote: "the only way out of the woods is to go into the woods". If each of us made time and space for the self-nurturing which can be found through regular visits to and with nature, we would each be tuned into its power and interconnectedness. Making time to be in nature, allowing ourselves to be rejuvenated, will refresh and invigorate us. By itself, this is a powerful way to maintain and enhance our personal well-being. Beyond that, as a society, with a collective connection to nature, we could quite naturally and effortlessly shift our role from owners of the earth to stewards of the earth. There is another version of the 3 Rs: Respect for self, Respect for others and Responsibility for all your actions. As we befriend the wonderful community of plants and animals, we can also give the gift of this connection to our children, who will most certainly face many challenges in their adult lives as they deal with the consequences of our generation's environmental choices.

Head outdoors. Bring a friend along. Do this on a regular basis. Remember that action brings reaction. See what reaction is in store for you. Get hooked on fresh air and movement!

#### Awakening the Shaman Inside You

1. Nature is a wonderful friend that teaches you how to live. Simply listen to her. Start a serious love affair with nature's four elements: fire, wind, earth, water. Read on the subject. Bring nature indoors: rocks, a fountain, plants, nature photographs.
2. Don't repress your own nature. Listen to your intuition, gut feelings, sixth sense. Feel and Act. Risk yourself. Your inner self requires more than wellness. It craves challenges, personal power, and freedom.
3. Develop self-confidence by learning new things. Risk your pride and insecurities by trying a new sport like rock climbing, mountain biking, in-line skating. Take time for a close encounter with your mortality. Take that one step in the magical world of the shaman where matter can be transformed. Lose the "I can't, I should work, this is too hard, I am not strong enough, I will never get good at this..."
4. Taking responsibility means that if you are sick or have life difficulties, accidents or problems, you must focus not only on these events but also focus your awareness on the events that you don't want to look into or own. What is happening to you is potentially valuable only if you find the courage to see and accept what it is trying to teach you.
5. Jump, laugh, kick, dance, scream, stretch, lick your fingers, walk barefoot, love the whole world. See the world in yourself instead of seeing yourself in the world.
6. Forget the dishes. Go for a walk and meet your neighbours. Talk and share. Notice if you talk about people/events or do you talk about dreams, concepts, ideas, visions. Organise a walking group in your neighbourhood. Lead the way!
7. Imagine, imagine, imagine. Don't think in a linear way. Forget time. Get off the treadmill of life. Smell the flowers and climb a tree. Use the stairs, drive a different route to work or even better, walk to work, cycle to work, car pool to work. Get close and personal. Experience a different reality by opening your 54 senses to the world.
8. Pay attention to your dreams and learn from them. See your dreams as messages trying to surface from your personal pool of wisdom.
9. As you exercise outdoors, turn the inner critic in your mind completely off to allow an empty

space where your creative spirit is free to dance. Feel the beat of the earth. Feel the beat of your heart. Find symbols in nature that speak to you. Let the outdoors become your spiritual classroom.

10. Learn and practice the teaching of the medicine wheel. Become the creator of your wheel of life!

#### Suggested Reading

Dancing with the Wheel by Sun Bear, Wabund Wind and Crysalis Mulligan  
Animal-Speak by Ted Andrews  
The Way of the Shaman by Michael Harner

#### Pertinent website

<http://www.ecopsych.com>  
<http://www.geocities.com/~animalspirits/>  
<http://ecopsychology.athabascau.ca/>  
<http://www.opencenter.org/>

Source: Shamanic Experience by Kenneth Meadows

"Air is freedom and movement. Air uplifts our spirits, air is exhilarating. Air is lightness and expansion. Air is mind power.

Fire is light and illumination, radiance and energy. Fire is transmutation, it is the spirit power.

Water is fluidity and sustenance. Water is soothing and protecting. Water is diluting and healing.

Water is emotional power. Earth is inertia and solidity. Earth is fertility and abundance Earth is attainment and achievement. Earth is physical power."