

Listen To The Earth

As given to Nan Bowles

*Touch the Earth, Touch the Spirit, Touch the Earth. Touch Spirit.
Listen to the Earth. Listen to the Earth.*

Listen, listen, deeply listen. Listen, listen, deeply listen. Listen, listen, deeply listen.

Touch the Earth. Touch Spirit. Spirit speaks.

1.

***The Sunrise/sunset,
All becomes the Mystery.
Can we honor and respect the unknown
and the unknowable?***

Sunrise, sunset. Twilight. The veil between this realm and the Spirit realm is thin at these moments in the spinning life of the Earth. Dampness of the next morning's dew, lingering flower fragrances, spices of the night emerge into twilight air. The center of the deep depth--the peace beyond all understanding--at these moments I hear with all the cells in my body; I feel a consciousness present, being with me, supporting me. Spirit. God-of-the-Universe, The Ones with no names, the angels, the spirit guides, the light of an autumn tree's inner glow; just on the other side listening to me, to us, to humanity--a consciousness listening and waiting expectantly for us to be present, aware and listening. I must learn to trust, to respect the unknown and the unknowable within and without me; know Spirit is at work deep inside me as well as others even when that work isn't visible. Listen with my whole body. With every living cell, listen into the long, longer purple shadows and emerging stars of twilight. Can honoring the unknown and the unknowable help us merge into the Oneness?

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2.

Yellow light pours out, over all.

At dawn and dusk.

Are we watching?

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Merging edges and connecting to Spirit take place during my communion time at sunrise and sunset. There was one foggy morning, silvery and wispy. As I looked at our house from the boardwalk I could just make out trees emerging from the mist, their silhouettes dark black green with only fog in between the trunks. Picture the dark silhouette of house against fog, with the rising sun climbing up behind it.

Aaaaaah, yes the sun. Sunrise is more beautiful in the softness of the mist. Yellowness diffused to feel like droplets of creamy melted butter and golden honey, yellow edges merging gently with me through the low traveling clouds. Yellow golden light softens through mist. When I let go and let God, my edges merge with yellowness as I hear wholeness. In loosing my edges there is freedom in that I no longer have to be this or that, only be One.

As fog thickens, nothing is visible but swirling water droplets becoming the Unknown and the Unknowable. But the light it is known and oh so visible. Before, Into, Through and Beyond the Unknowable the “light it is sweet and it is [beautiful] for the eyes to behold the sun.” All else is unknown but the light is ever present, plainly known and visible. Stepping into and embracing the Unknown I will always know where the light is, even as our edges merge.

This feeling of merging edges has also been experienced when visiting the ocean. Salty tang fills the air mingling with sea gull voices. Stepping into the sea, warm salt water surrounds and supports me. It is so easy and effortless to float. I am One, I am One. My edges merge with the water, with Spirit. The salt and water that is me becomes the salt water of the great Atlantic Ocean. It is no longer clear where I end and the water begins but there is great comfort and freedom in the Oneness, the Wholeness. We are One, we are One. Can merging our edges with the rest of Creation help us to honor the small lives we seldom notice everyday?

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3.
Golden Sweetness flows
Light illuminates
Small bee lives are being expressed everyday.
Did we take the time to give thanks?

Spirit's messages can come in ordinary moments of every day life. One February morning I was baking bread. In making the dough, honey was added to feed the yeast. Sweet golden liquid flowed from a glass jar into the mixing bowl. I felt the morning light shining through the kitchen window and turned toward it holding up the jar of honey. Sunlight shone directly through the honey in the glass jar. I was stunned by what was seen and felt within me. It was an experience of being transported to a place of comfort, safety and Love. A place where time was still but energy flowed. A place of being, not this or that, but just being. The color of the honey had so much warmth and golden radiance within it. With clarity, I realized that place of comfort, safety, and Love, that

place of being was right here in my kitchen, was my home, was Spirit inside of me. Strong feelings, warm with contentment and satisfaction flowed around and through me never quite leaving. Now that I have had that experience, the image of the honey jar can be brought into my immediate awareness and consciousness anytime. The reality of the warmth and radiance of the light in the honey jar flows and remains alive within me. However, I don't always remember to let it rise up and flow out. There are times when in the moment I forget.

I want to practice being the living image. And so I give thanks to the bees for taking time to visit the flowers one by one; for their small lives and large gifts of pollination and making honey. I give thanks to the wildflowers for being there, for their fragrance, beauty and good cheer. I give thanks for the sun that nurtured the flowers, the rain in the passing clouds, and the moist soil supporting them. Heartfelt gratitude is also expressed to Spirit for giving me the gift of light shining through the honey jar. Thanksgiving is offered for sustaining and supporting the flowers and the bees that made the gift possible; for breathing life through them and through me. Giving thanks is part of caring for Creation. I am grateful I listened.

Is acknowledging Spirit in the very small lives expressed and unnoticed caring for Creation? Can we awaken to the commonalities we share with our neighbors, like small bear?

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4.
Somewhere, somewhere, somewhere,
A small bear is listening.
Are we aware?

I am in the process of listening to a message that comes to me from a small bear member of our neighborhood. We have never met, but I am aware of his/her presence from an adventure that came on Christmas Eve day, involving tracks: the hidden story. Walking, walking. There. There in the sand road, gentle imprints of a small bear--a child bear. Feet shapes left in there in the soft sand. I put my hands over the prints, still warm with small bear's spirit. Bear child where are you? What fragrances of the Earth fill your sensitive nose? What mushrooms have you found? Did you hear the swans too? Did you find a place in the scented pine needles to warm your black back? Was your summer full of blueberry feasts and insect grubs? Did Jenny wren's song tease you awake? Bear Child where is your mother? All this I wonder as I hold within me the image of your footprints. Small bear tracks. Subtly, gently held in the sand. Bear Child.

I have held the small bear in Love and appreciation prayer because it feels that is what Spirit is asking me to do. Maybe on some level small bear can feel it, I don't know but I want to be faithful. It is simply what I am being asked to do. However, I did go to the library and found a children's book on bears and thus learned that bears have acute hearing. They must for their survival. On a deeper level I am to awaken to the common areas of our lives. Places where our edges merge, such as knowing we live in the same community. To love Bear Child neighbor as myself, I am to consider his/her needs as well as my own, we are both breathing living mammals. So there it is. Small bear is out

there listening and so am I. Perhaps we will hear one another, connected through our sense of sound.

Can feeling a connection with a small bear's presence help us feel the rhythms of the Earth?

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5.

Circle of seasons

Rhythms come and rhythms go

Do we feel the heartbeat of the Earth?

Do we feel the heartbeat of the Earth?

I want to live the rhythms of the Earth, our Earth, our home, the Blue Planet. I live those rhythms by listening, by opening myself to the feelings and sensations of the Earth. Smelling the air just after it has rained, or feeling warm sunlight upon my skin. Tasting the raindrop on the tip of the pine needle. Watching the weaving of clouds as the days come and go. Paying attention to the changing seasons, or the change in light through out the day. Asking myself, "Where is the moon in its monthly cycle? Does the full moon rise in the same place each season? How about the crescent moon?" These are some of the queries I live into. In taking time to listen and be, there is movement into a place of deep stillness within. From this place I might feel the voice of Grandmother Live Oak tree say, "Go forth and be clear," or hear the swamp water of the deep woods speak of the how it is spiced with the essence of forest leaves and pine needles. There is an inner knowing that Spirit is speaking to me through the oak tree or the swamp water.

Living is feeling the rhythms of the earth, the pulse of Life and connecting to that of God in all of it. Listen and be open to the teachings of God through the Earth around us. To commune with the Earth and listen is to know I am not better than the lizard or the fly. If I think I am better I will never hear their message no matter how long I sit and wait. We might do well to pay attention to the life around us and listen to what lessons others have to tell us. The time I spend walking the land at home or somewhere else; or time spent sitting and being; or feeling the rhythm of breathing are moments when I am listening. It is about becoming familiar with the sounds, sights, smells and feelings of the earth, plants, animals, cloud shapes of the community that is home. It is about living the rhythms of the Earth through the framework of the Quaker way of life; by applying the teachings of Friends to include all of our planet. Living life through the Spirit of the Universe, the Creator, the Living Presence that is all. The One of all shapes and no shape. And so the Divine one appears even in the mundane parts of life. Are we afraid of touching Creation and one another?

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6.
Roots grow in the darkness of soil
Always in touch always in contact
Do our communal roots grow deep into Earth and Spirit?

Let us listen to our sense of community as Quakers. In focusing on the Divine relationship, both as one united whole as well as individually, our connection to Spirit can be seen as a vertical connection. Just as a mighty oak tree has a vertical tap root forming a deep down joining of tree and Earth and Spirit, it also has horizontal roots that

spread out around the tree joining one tree to another, one neighbor to another. Thus community is also about our connections to our neighbors, both other species and other humans. This forms a horizontal connection. Just like the tree we need our connections to other humans and the rest of the natural world for support; both in a spiritual, emotional sense in the beauty of love and light as well as support of our physical needs. My understanding of community means living and being together in physical support as well as spiritual support to one another. From where I stand this definitely includes other species as well as the land.

Let us listen to all the members of our community. Community is about paying attention to our inner lives and the inner life of the community as one united whole. In cultivating and nurturing our own relation with Spirit, we want to lift up and encourage the creative unfoldings of each other and our gifts. This is something we do with great care and tenderness. But are we familiar with the gifts of the oak tree, the pigeon, the cricket chirping or living organisms in the soil?

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7.
Feel the warm living soil under our feet.
Rhythms of our step.
Do we stop to touch?

The miniature world at my feet is often forgotten. Let us listen down into the soil where touch is a living way of life. Listen to the worm crawling. Listen to root breaking

apart a rock. Listen to mole digging and exploring in darkness. As I walk over a fallen tree I don't always stop to take in and experience the community hidden in the decaying wood. A community of fungi, beetles, and perhaps a small mouse or caterpillar. The tiny soil microbes that transform matter into soil replenishing the nutrients of the Earth. Have I considered them? These are times when I pass over or through someone else's community. How do they perceive this action of mine? Do they perceive it? Does it influence or touch them in some way? Do their lives touch mine? May we pay attention to Spirit in many life forms all around us as well as within us. As we feel and listen to the warm soil beneath our feet are we paying attention to the gathering of spring's energy?

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8.

***Spring energy gathers
To surge forth into new leaves.
Were we there?
Were we there?***

Tenderness. My buds are open and tender. In my humanness I feel at times my weakness, raw and wide open. Painful and tender. Trees have moments where they too are very tender, during the Spring time emergence as buds open and leaves unfurl. They are vulnerable to changes in the weather, being eaten by deer or rabbit, or of being clashed about by wind. And yet there is a great power that surges through them guiding them to unfurl their leaves at just the right moment. It is their way to be attentive and open to Spirit, their survival depends on it.

As I walk the earth there is a sense of expectant waiting, a heightened awareness. The energy is rising. Sap is rising. Buds are swelling in anticipation. Shoots are poised ready but waiting to push up above the earth's surface. Maple trees are among the first to bloom. The rest of earth is waiting expectantly. A gathering together of the life energy. A pause. A pregnant pause. Then, at just the right moment, the energy will pass over the threshold. There will be a great unfurling, flowing of energy that bursts forth. A surge and release of zing into the air. However, can we honor the small events in life, sinking down to find their deeper meaning?

Can we create the feeling of honoring the events in small lives?

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9.
***The last snowflake from winter's blanket melts.
A small tree springs up.
Do we feel the honor in witnessing this event?***

There is Truth in honoring the small and unobtrusive as well as the ordinary everyday life. I share a story, now, that takes place in the high country of the North Cascades Mountains of Washington state. On one ridge of one mountain is a grove of large old growth mountain hemlock trees. Thick trunks black green with patches of moss. Branches with needles arranged in green stars add their spicy fragrance to crisp mountain air. On the edge of the grove lives a young hemlock tree with other youngsters of its kind. From the place where the small hemlocks live, I can see down into three

different valleys. Rivers of glacial waters flow far below. Snow capped peaks surround me.

During the winter months a deep blanket of snow covers the area, burying the small hemlock sapling and associates, bending them to the ground with the weight of the snow. Every spring, which at this altitude comes in June, the snow melts off. On one particular day, I came hiking around the bend in the trail just in the nick of time to see the tip of one small sapling bound up into the air. I was witnessing the exact moment the very last snowflake melted. After enduring being bent and supporting heavy snow, the tree was at last able to grow straight and tall; to stretch its branches up to the sky. Free to breathe, letting its sap rise; pushing off old needles to be replaced with fresh tender green ones. A significant moment in the life of this small mountain hemlock tree. I felt honored to be there as a witness to that particular. Now, a pause in my life to share in the life of this sapling the exact instant the last snow flake disappeared. Seventeen years later I still remember and am still awed! I give thanks for you small tree and to Spirit for bringing us together at that time and place and also for giving us both life. Through this encounter with a small tree, Spirit shows me there is significance and purpose in what may appear as the small things of life. I can feel their meaning in my life as I listen. We can listen with sensitive hearts to Spirit's message in the life of a small tree but will we hear the truth in the voice of the Red-winged-Blackbirds?

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10.

Hear the voices

Of the Red-Winged Black Birds

Look at me, I live here too.

Look at me, I live here too. Do we hear their Truth?

Spirit is calling us to listen. To listen with all of our presence, awareness, and consciousness. Listen to the place where words come from. Listen to the language older than words. Listen to the heart. As I have been listening I have heard the chant that is woven through the body of this article. The chant sets the rhythm for the message or teaching that have come to me and led me to action. This rhythm has helped to open my senses to feeling Spirit all around me, allowing for Spirit to manifest within me at deeper levels. For example, picture me coming down the road one day on my way to town passing by our neighbor's open field. A huge flock of Red-Winged Blackbirds swirled up from the grass as I drove by. The flock spun and spiraled about me, rising up not far above the ground. They remained so close it felt as though their numerous red patches jumped out over and over touching me and lifting me; so that I became the red with in their red patches. I became an inner glow of Knowing. Their patches flashing a pulsing blood red, the birds gathered and turned as one, than settled back into the field of grass. The vibrancy of those red patches filled me up completely and flowed through me with a feeling of mystery and awe. I give thanks to brother Patches, the Red-Winged Blackbird for being there and allowing me to listen to their red patches against deep black feathers. An image of feeling into an experience and listening with the heart. How did our Quaker ancestors listen to Spirit speak?

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11.

The Book of Nature is available to all.

Earth colors. Subtle messages for the sensitive heart.

Do we cultivate this sensitivity within one another?

The sensitivity of the heart mentioned in the chant above puts me directly in touch with our Quaker ancestors. When I listen into their living memories, I find the art of reading the bible with an open listening to Spirit that they practiced reveals their sensitive hearts. These Friends placed great value on the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit. Their practice was to read a word or passage while being open to where Spirit might lead in response or in association with a word or phrase. Our ancestors listened deeply from the still quiet place within them, to the place where words come from. They listened for how that word or phrase was associated to some aspect of their every day lives that might lead to a new truth and/or move them into action.

This practice emerges into our present—Now—to show us the teaching of hospitality, of allowing another species to speak to our condition, to touch our hearts. This time the book we are to read is the Book of Nature, of which we are a living part. This book is written in a language older than words, the language of the heart. The teachings and messages that come through other species and the land are held up to Spirit, helping me listen to the meaning; just as early Friends did with Scripture. Spirit speaks in many, many ways. The meaning or the call of action I am to take is not always understood immediately but comes out of the waiting silence. For example, by slowing down, taking time to breathe consciously and look around me, I might notice all the different earth colors of brown, green, yellow or blue. When listening with my heart, with all the cells in my body I might come to understand that Spirit also touches me in

different shades and at different levels of my life; sometimes subtly and sometimes with boldness. The lesson that comes through might be very simple such as “I am here, I am here remember I live here too,” when I hear the cardinal sing. To hear a deeper meaning in this voice might be to learn what cardinals need in their habitat to survive and thrive. Or when mushrooms pop up suddenly where they weren’t before, the message might be that it rained recently and conditions are great for mushrooms to grow. Or on another level, I might discern, “It has rained recently go out and observe the new life emerging!”

One more example is from the pines as the wind moves softly through their needles. The teaching here might be, “Come, O come, and listen to Spirit strumming my harp strings. Smell the refreshing healing scent of my needles. Breathe deeply of the fragrance and find peace within you.” In this way, when another species or person crosses my path, I listen into what Spirit is speaking to me, calling me to listen and adjust my life accordingly. Where does this leave us in our journey into caring for Creation?

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12.

***Faith community, how do we care for Creation?
We are listening through the waiting silence
We are part of the message.***

North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative has been listening to Spirit this past year. Out of the waiting silence was heard, “How do Conservative Friends care for Creation?” I am listening, knowing we will find union as we share our stories in response to this query, coming together into the One. For now, I speak from where I

stand, listening to the immediate and perceptible guidance of Spirit. Looking deep within me, the response to the query is one of recognizing and acknowledging how all the other species care for me. In other words, how Creation cares for all of me. From this perspective all species, other humans, the land, moon, stars, sun, and water become potential teachers. Spirit often touches me by speaking through others; teaching me how to interact in nurturing ways with the rest of the interconnected world. If I misuse, abuse, destroy any of them, no one will be able to hear their message, including me. Holding in my heart the sense of Spirit caring for me through Creation, a deep desire to nurture and interact with the rest of the natural world rises up and flows naturally. The desire to walk lightly upon the Earth, with respect and acceptance comes naturally. I am part of the message. You are part of the message and together we are part of the message. Are we living into the message?

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13.

Our lives are intertwined in support of one another.

Love. Listen. Touch. Feel.

Are we living into the message?

Are we living into the message?

We are intertwined and connected through the Earth, thus through all that is the God. I feel Spirit calling us. Calling us to listen, to touch the earth and in doing so we touch Spirit. Spirit speaks to us everyday through a fragrance, a flower color, an encounter with an animal, the feeling in the air or a bird song, or a human friend or stranger. So that we might recognize and acknowledge how Spirit cares for us through

the rest of Creation. Spirit calls us to listen deeply with all the cells in our bodies to the place where words come from. To the language older than words. To listen with our hearts. It is for us to listen deeply by feeling the rhythms of the Earth through the moon, tides, and seasonal cycles, and the rhythm of our walk and breathing. Open ourselves to sights, sounds, smells and atmosphere of the living Earth. To see, observe, and give thanks for the small lives expressed all around us. It is then that we will want to in turn care for Creation. Community, with all of the natural world, is an open ended path to walk; giving and receiving, listening and speaking, being and doing. Energy flows both ways through us all. We will want to serve the Earth in love, knowing life style changes we make are acts of love. To reuse, recycle, and reduce our consumption level of resources become an acts of love. The living memory of early Friends invites us to hold our experiences thoughtfully, prayerfully up to Spirit to listen into them and hear Spirit speak through other species and the land where we live in the Book of Nature. Mother Earth opens her door to us everyday. Let us listen to the Earth, our home, our blue planet.

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