

Eco-exercise for the Soul - nature-spiritual timeline

When I was a child I brought endless animals home that I found in the bush.... My Dad had a fenced-off half acre of land where I could keep them. It was my joy to “tame” them and keep them for pets. Very often I would find tortoises. A wild tortoise in its new home, would take off at a rapid tortoise pace if it saw me coming. However, when I got close it, it would retract its head and feet into its shell and try to wait me out. This is where I learnt patience. I learnt that tortoises adore strawberries - and so I would crouch down on my haunches and hold the strawberry in front of it’s shell where its head was hidden.

If I kept very still and quiet it would believe I was gone and cautiously stick it’s head out and when it saw me turn 90 degrees away from me and waddle off at a fast tortoise pace. I would go after it and it would schloop into its shell and I would wait it out with the strawberry again. It took several weeks but the glorious day would arrive when it would gradually and warily poke it’s head out and with its horny, beaky mouth lunge at the strawberry and take a bite out it. From that day on it would be tame and would come marching as quickly as it could on its elevated clawy, scaly feet, with his strange tortoise wobble, to get whatever treat I had found for the day.

What did I learn. I learnt that banging on its shell, poking in it’s shell and being loud and jerky with my movements terrified it and made it withdraw tighter and tighter into his shell - control never works. I learnt to sit quietly and still and just offer to meet its’ needs. I learnt that relationships and connection can take a great deal of time. I learnt to observe carefully. I learnt that all sentient beings have the same fight/flight responses in different ways. I learnt that food is a powerful motivator. The skills are directly transferable to people who are not much different to the tortoise. This was one of my first lessons in being a therapist!

Draw an eco-spiritual time line of your life including all the significant nature lessons you learnt.

Describe first lessons you learnt from nature?

Were they life bringing and joyous or frightening?

What did you learn about yourself? About others? About relationships?
About our interconnectedness?

Do you continue to learn from nature?



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“All things in this creation exist within you, and all things in you exist in creation; there is no border between you and the closest things, and there is no distance between you and the farthest things, and all things, from the lowest to the loftiest, from the smallest to the greatest, are within you as equal things. In one atom are found all the elements of the earth; in one

motion of the mind are found the motions of all the laws of existence; in one drop of water are found the secrets of all of the endless oceans; in one aspect of you are found all the aspects of existence... Thus, Your life has no end, and you shall live forevermore."

Kahlil Gibran