

# The Power of Nature

Cresting the summit near Black Butte, Fox Valley spreads out, ringed by mountains on all sides. This April Sunday morning is chilly, 28 degrees, a light frost coats most everything. The low angle of sunrise adds a subtle color wash over sky and land and me.

Coasting through this highland valley in early morning nourishes a sense of quietness, stillness, spaciousness. Lots of space, stretching out until the next ridge of mountain.

On the other side of the next summit, from 800 feet up, the Middle Fork, John Day river winds through tight canyons & trees, a white capped ribbon twisting a path downhill.

Dawn sunlight & frost. Mountains & trees. The smell of high, runoff whitewater rushing downstream mixed with the arid desert & mountain pines. Ahhhh....

The well worn phrase, "it takes my breath away" pops up as a response. It doesn't truly fit. More accurately it feels like breath returns, deepens, expands. This setting, nature, brings my breath back.

This is where healing can start. When we are in a place where breath returns, there is a letting go. Letting go of tension, stress, over-thinking, over-doing. We tend to seek out people, healers of many techniques or modalities to help us with this letting go. Being in nature is also a healer that facilitates this process.

This is why these day trips on the river, in the mountains, to the desert feel so important and valuable.

Today, it is a kayak journey on the North Fork, John Day River; Gold Dredge campground to Ritter Road bridge. Drop Kayak upstream. Drive to take out. Bike back to Kayak. Paddle down to car. 20 miles of pedal, paddle and healing.

Along the way: Osprey, Kingfisher and Great Blue Heron; Salmon and Bass; Snake and Frog. Rabbit and Raccoon; Deer and Elk; Pine and Juniper. A frequent companion: red-winged Blackbird. Jet black, deep red shoulders outlined in gold, against a background of green river bank, earth brown canyon walls, pure sky blue. Ahhh....

On this journey, yellow wild rose appears for the first time. Over the next ridge is newly opened white blossoms of mock orange.

All these and more provide a healing context.

Many cultures have accessed this healing quality of nature through various ways: Native American vision quests; Australian aboriginal walkabouts; Chinese Taoists wandering the mountains; the pilgrimages of various traditions throughout Europe. And then, there is Thoreau on Walden Pond.

Throughout the centuries, we have recognized the healing qualities of nature in whatever environment that might be, from tropical, equatorial jungles to snowcapped Himalayan mountains. Nature pilgrimages provide opportunities to let go of the accumulated weight, stress, baggage of the day, week, month, decade or lifetime. The basic elements of nature, individually and combined, form a healing team that allows us to breathe, relax, reconnect to Earth, sky and ourselves.



Sometimes in this process long-held hurts, thoughts or emotions can dissolve. Sometimes we encounter or experience guides that unfold in unexpected ways. Being in nature can also connect us with that natural healing in humans. For example:

## Kindness



A recent kayak pilgrimage called for a longer distance, 26 miles, Kimberly to Service Creek. Also called for was hitchhiking rather than riding Bike back to Kayak. It seemed like there was someone waiting to be met out there, in nature.

Drop Kayak at Kimberly. Drive to Service Creek. Barely step on the highway and the first truck pulls over and gets me halfway to Spray. On the outskirts of Spray, standing, quiet Sunday morning. One half-hour. 45 minutes. One hour. Hmmmmm....

Only fools and mystics hitchhike on a road with no traffic.

The brain generates a lot of commentary. Time to start walking back? *Should* be on the river. *Want* to be on the river. ***Are we there yet?***

The morning stillness is broken with:

“Where ya headed?”

Looking around, no one is seen. After several 360 degree scans, through some trees, a man is waving his arm overhead about 50 yards behind me. He's probably 70 something, deeply tanned & weathered face, straw cowboy hat: Rancher.

“Where ya headed?”

“Kimberly”

“Almost there, only 13 miles.”

“Yes.”

“Got enough food and water?”

Silence deepens like a temple gong echoing through the Himalayan Mountains. Time makes a subtle shift. Everything changes and it is also all the same. It just looks different.

“Yes. I have enough food. Thank you.”

The nature of kindness washes through me like three foot standing waves on the river wash over Kayak and me.

*Got enough food?*

Rancher did not know me, nor did it seem to matter. He gave a natural response without conditions or thinking about it.

*Got enough food?*

Called to be in nature got me to the outskirts of Spray, hitchhiking on a road with no traffic. And then the nature of kindness appeared in an unexpected form just as powerful as Pine, River, Osprey and Rock.

*Got enough food?*

Rancher waved, turned, finished his burn pile. A few minutes later some recorded music rises from his back porch: country/western. Halfway into the song he begins playing the accordion in accompaniment. Not too bad, either. A few songs later, a little country swing. With the next tune, he trades accordion for saxophone. "Moondance". Willie Nelson. Then, some very solid blues.

A red-tailed hawk circles the sun several hundred feet directly overhead. In a few minutes a second hawk joins, forming a moving circle, tai chi - yin yang. A very large shadow crosses the highway. Looking upward, a huge raptor silhouetted against the sun, light streaming through translucent tail feathers.



A warm, gentle breeze arises with saxophone and blues carried along. Waves of kindness wash out busy brain, ideas, wanting, holding on and the stress & tension of a modern life.

*Got enough food?*

Yes, thank you.

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