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Intuition: The Wild Within of the Natural World

Rosemarie Anderson, PhD
Sofia University, Palo Alto, CA

In this presentation, I propose that human intuition and the wild of the natural world are interdependent. Intuition is the wild within, an internalized human resource that imitates or mirrors the wild of the natural world. Aligned with phenomenological accounts from indigenous traditions worldwide, our human wellbeing depends on the natural world for physical, psychological, and spiritual nurturance (Cobb, 1977; Maturana & Varela, 1988; Sheridan & Pineault, 1997). Without a vibrant natural world and vast stretches of wilderness to imitate, human intuition dims. The ecological perils to our planet are equally threats to human creativity and spontaneity. We are sons and daughters not only to our parents but to the earth.

Taking a playful approach to this worrisome thesis, I shall share a story. Some years ago, I was camping along the Klamath River in northern California just south of the Oregon border. The river valley is remote and river wild. I decided to drive across the Siskiyou Mountains to Oregon on a country road. At the summit, I got out of the car and walked along a ridge, knowing that I could easily follow the ridge back to the car. However, as I bushwhacked my way, I was frightened. There was nothing human here; nothing familiar to my knowing; nothing that reflected back to me humanness as I knew it. “No human has walked this ridge before,” I wondered. I scurried back to the car. Later, I knew that I had experienced the correspondence of the wilderness with the Buddhist understanding of *Sunyata*, Emptiness. I knew then in a way that I could never explain adequately in words that the human psyche depends on the wild for nurturance.

What makes human embodiment a spectacular drama is our surface sensitivities—not only to mothers, partners, and everyday objects and events—but in our tactile sensitivities to the world at large (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009) and the natural world (Abram, 1996; Sheridan & Pineault, 1997). Each human being encounters a symphony of environments daily. There is no end to these encounters, membrane to membrane touching. The more flowers, wildlife, and wilderness we encounter the better. As we move, more the membranes touch. There is no receiving without responding. Our tactile sensitivities are a sensuous embrace in the most basic sense (Anderson, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2011; Behnke, 1994; Friedman & Moon, 1997; Gendlin, 1981, 1991; Olsen, 2002; Pettimengin-Peugeot, 1999). As the Tibetan Buddhism has recounted for two millennia, the fundamental sense for animate beings is touch (Denma Locho Rinpoche, personal communication, November 2001). Humans are tactile-kinetic beings (Donaldson, 1993; Johnson, 1995; Sheets-Johnstone, 2009, Whitehouse, 1995). We can survive without the senses of taste, smell, sight, hearing but not touch. Without tactile surface sensitivities, we are dead. Without touch, we could not walk across a room or open a door—far less intuit the insights, patterns, and symbols associated with intuition.

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