



One Earth Sangha

Loving the Earth

Guided Meditation Offered by Mark Coleman

This is a meditation featured in Mark Coleman's new book, [A Field Guide to Nature Meditation: 52 Mindfulness Practices for Joy, Wisdom and Wonder](#).

Every year I lead kayaking meditation retreats in the Sea of Cortez. As part of that experience, I have had the good fortune of being up close with gray whales in Magdalena Bay in Baja, Mexico. If we are lucky, as the mother floats by, a young baby gray whale will swim alongside our small boat and poke its head out of the water. With its deep brown eyes, he or she will gaze at us. In that moment of priceless eye gazing, my heart bursts open. It can only be described as love. This interspecies communication between a land-bound creature and an aquatic mammal transcends separation. It is in these times that I feel my heart bloom with love and a careful life that knows no bounds. It's the same heart opening I feel when I see a newborn lying vulnerably in a meadow, or swallow chicks shivering in their nests, waiting for their parents to feed them. The heart can be easily moved in many ways, to love spontaneously the majesty of an old-growth redwood, to feel compassion for the tenderness of a desert tortoise hiding in its shell, to experience radiant joy watching starlings murmurate in the sky.

In this meditation, you are invited to explore the heart and the ways that it loves the natural world. For this practice, take a walk outdoors in a place that touches your heart. It may be to a favorite place in nature, a beloved grove of trees, a cherished part of your garden, a pretty park, or beside an enchanting stream.



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Once you've found a suitable place, take a seat and establish a comfortable posture and absorb and open your senses into this place. Let your eyes roam around and take in what it is you appreciate. Notice what you are fond of. As you do this, sense your heart and how it feels in relationship to each thing you feel drawn to. What arises there in the landscape of the heart? And then begin to tune into greater detail and specificity. If you are with a tree, notice all her contours, her skin-like bark, her silent presence, the dappled light of her leaves. If gazing at a bird, notice his colorful plumage, his alertness, and the particular way he flies. Observe any responsiveness in your heart. Do you feel a tenderness, an affection or love for this beautiful form, this tree, this bird, or whatever it is that's touching you, or whatever it is that's touching your heart? Notice how each one of your senses can be portals into a loving heart. As you listen to the enchanting birdsong, be curious if that evokes a heartfelt fondness. Listening to the sound of waves or trickling water can evoke a fondness, an affection. Touching the silkiness of a flower petal or the delicateness of moist moss. And notice if that kindles affection, appreciation, or care.

And continue to practice in this way, either while seated or through meandering through this landscape, and pausing each time something touches you, moves your heart. Perhaps the flight of a butterfly, the tenacity of a dung beetle walking on the ground, the scent of jasmine wafting through the air, or the rich cinnamon scent of a ponderosa bark. Take any and all of these experiences in fully, and notice any quality of love that is evoked, any facet of care, of appreciation, affection.

With each passing experience that touches your heart in some way, you may also explore extending love from your heart through simply radiating a sense of warmth or kindness to whatever is moving you in the landscape, the birds, the trees,



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flowers, grasses, insects. And you may also extend love from your heart through wishing all these life forms well. For example, as you stand by an old tree, you may wish it to be well nourished. Seeing a young animal in the forest, you may wish it to be safe, free from harm. Listening to the sounds of the ocean, you may wish for it to be protected. Seeing a flock of birds playing, you may wish them to be happy together. In this way, you're not just feeling love or care, but actively expressing your heart's wish for life around you. You may do this silently, or you may whisper these wishes quietly to the ferns, frogs, and flowers. Observe what happens in your heart when you radiate this love to the natural world around you. Notice if it brings a sense of kinship or connection.

Continue to sit or meander through this landscape as long as this feels engaging, supportive for your practice. And know that you can draw forth this quality of love by simply attuning to the present moment and sensing the heart's relationship to the natural world around you. As the words of Jacques Cousteau pointed to, there is nothing in this world that doesn't cease to foster attention, and with attention, love. So shine the light of attention, awareness as you move through nature and see how that attention, that curiosity, that intimate connection, fosters love, fosters care, fosters affection.