



Partnering with Nature
Forever Sabah program workbook
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CLAIRE
VANDERPLANK
Partnering with Nature

Section 1

Preparation and Intention



The Partnering with Nature program aims to equip participants with the knowledge and understanding to enter into a conscious partnership with Nature.

To begin with, please write down your answers to the following questions.

Q1 How could my relationship with Nature be described?

Q2 What are the 3 things that I am most curious about with this program?

Q3 What do I commit to doing/how to I commit to being, in order to get the most out of this program?

Section 2

WWND

(What Would Nature Do)



Nature can be an incredible teacher.

The patterns of Creation are expressed purely and observably in Nature. Nature embodies generativity; life is always seeking create more life and move towards increasing levels of ordered complexity.

We recognise this ordered, generative patterning as beauty.

Exercise 1: Take a look around now, notice all the places you can see beauty.

Q1: What is the difference between sustainability and generativity?

If we want our work as human beings to contribute to a (re)generative future, we can both learn from Nature in a cognitive way, i.e. by studying and mimicking the principles of living systems, and we can connect more deeply with Nature in an embodiment way, so that we ourselves become expressions of the patterns of Nature. This is something we are doing on this program.

Q2: In what ways does your organisation use principles of living systems?



Exercise 2: Summarise your intention for the program below:

Finding your solo spot

To find your special spot for the solo time components of this program, allow yourself to be drawn to a spot in Nature, then ask permission when you get there.

You can use either a 'yin' approach or a 'yang' approach to finding the spot. For the yin, receptive, approach, begin by facing the outdoors and asking where you should go. Keep your eyes open and senses soft and receptive. Your feet may want to move in one direction, or you may feel a pull or a feeling in your gut. Something may suddenly jump out at you, calling you over. Keep going until you find the place you think you've been called to.

For the yang approach, simply pick a place you think you'd like to be, then go over and ask permission to be there.

Finish the site selection by asking permission from Nature to be there. If it is a 'yes', you may feel a warming, opening sensation, or feel like you're a being pulled into the site. If it is a 'no', you may feel a cold, closing sensation or feeling pushed away from the spot. Don't take it personally if you feel a 'no', just like humans, non-human Nature beings can sometimes prefer to be left alone.

Solo 1: Find your spot using the techniques described above. Go out to your spot with your intention and find a way to heartfully express your intention to Nature, asking Nature to partner with you on your learning journey. Rest in stillness, listening for what comes back to you.

"The goal of life is to match your heartbeat with the beat of the universe; to match your nature with Nature." Joseph Campbell

Section 3

Building Connection with Nature



A Recipe for Connection

The quotes in the section below are part of the Guiding Principles of Way of Nature, which has been a core part of Claire's training. For more info see <https://sacredpassage.com/index.php/about-us/12-guiding-principles>

Presence - Remain in Now

Connection relies on awareness. "Become aware of your distractions. If need be, even meditate single-mindedly on the flow of your inner and outer distractions. Be patient. Over time, as you meditate regularly, the flow of distractions should begin to slow, allowing present-centered awareness to rise. Remain in that pure presence. Give more and more precise, clear attention to the Now and Here - Meditate on the exact instant of the present moment and the surroundings — as you directly experience them."

Relaxation

Without relaxation we cannot open and go deeper into connection. When we are tense, we are easily distracted. "Deeply relax and profoundly surrender. To begin, first locate where you still hold contractions and tensions in your body, emotions and mind. Then learn to decontract and relax your body, your emotions, and your thoughts and mind. Let go of old ideas, judgments, emotions, structures, your own expectations, your need for approval or acceptance, and your idea of progress. Over time, replace your old habitual patterns of automatic contraction to life with new helpful habits of meeting life with openness and letting go."



Energy Cultivation

Connection in a literal sense relies on the smooth flow of energy. If we are holding blockages in our energy body then it is much harder for us to receive the gifts and information Nature has to offer us. Qigong is included in this program to assist with this. Other modalities such as breathwork and yoga can also be useful here.

As you deepen your presence and relaxation, as naturally happens in Nature, your energy body continues to refine itself. "As you relax - old bodily, emotional, energetic and mental blockages are released, freeing up bound life force (Qi). When you combine present-centered awareness with relaxation, you can deepen the journey of inner unblocking. Gently bring your awareness into deeper and deeper levels of body, emotions and mind."

Open Heart

The heart naturally opens in Nature, it is so easy to find beauty and things to be grateful for. We can assist this occurs by practicing reciprocity, gratitude, honouring and asking permission.

"Through the natural deepening of this openhearted radiance, the separation between self and other gradually dissolves."

The Connection Sequence

Connectedness is not a static, 2 dimensional thing. It is not simply a case of are you connected or are you not, rather there are degrees. An outline of the connection sequence used in Way of Nature is noted below, not to create any expectations of where you 'should' get to, but to point out that there is always further to go. "Boredom heralds the arrival of the teacher"... as in, if you find yourself bored on your solo time remember the wonders that could be uncovered if you go further.

1. Notice you are disconnected
2. Connection - there is some connection through your senses, you've placed your awareness on nature.
3. Communion - you begin to experience a feeling of commonality with a being of Nature. There is still a distinct sense of separate selves however within that there is also a sense of unity.
4. Union - you deepen connection so far that you cannot tell where you and the other entity begin and end.
5. Mandalic Awareness - experience union with all beings in the sphere of experience around you.
6. Source Awareness - you are the Great Mystery :)



9 Experiential Fields

The senses are the doorway to connection. Everything you connect with in life you do so through particular fields of experience.

1. Sight
2. Sound
3. Touch - pressure and temperature
4. Taste
5. Smell
6. Interoception, movement and balance
7. Energy
8. Thoughts
9. Emotions

Exercise 1: listening meditation

Pay attention to the field of sound, all around you in every direction. Allow sounds to come to you, do not label them.

Exercise 2: standing meditation (open gaze)

As described in the Qi Gong video, stand facing Nature. Either feet together or hip-width apart, slight bend in the knees. Relax every muscle, while standing tall like the crown of your head is lifted by a string. Turn your palms out. Soften the eyes and take in the full field of vision.

Solo 2: Observing the experiential fields

Go through the experiential fields in your solo spot. Start with the easy ones, sight, sound and touch. If you feel comfortable with those, you try 2 at the same time. You can also try apply all the fields to one subject in nature (narrow-focussed awareness), or staying in open-field awareness where you take in all the sensory information from one experiential field (coming from all the components of Nature around you).



Q1: When do I feel my most connected in Nature? What are the inner and outer conditions?

You may notice that our state of being makes a big difference to the quality and experience of connection. Tricks to unlock presence, relaxation, energy flow and open-heartedness include playfulness/childlike mind, gratitude, reciprocity and curiosity.

Exercise 3: Gratitude and appreciation walk

Go for a short walk outside. With each step, place your awareness on something new in Nature and use that as inspiration to think of something you are grateful for.

We can also use curiosity to continue deepening our Nature connection. By following the thread of what we become curious about as we spend time in Nature, we can engage our heart and mind at the same time to sink deeper into connection. This can be something you can continue with after this program.

Q2: What about Nature am I becoming curious about as I spend time in my solo spot?

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, you find it attached to the rest of the world." John Muir

Section 4

Communication with Nature



Q1: what are the conditions present when we have the best communication experiences with other humans?

What can we do to increase our ability to communicate with Nature?

Communication with Nature is based on a foundation of connection, like we covered in the previous section.

We receive information from the flow of energy/qi, through the heart especially. The magnetic field produced by the heart is more than 100 times greater in strength than the field generated by the brain and can be detected up to 3 feet away from the body, in all directions. The heart's electrical field is about 60 times greater in amplitude than the electrical activity generated by the brain.

Attunement of energy fields enables communication when language is not possible. It is very important that we get ourselves into a relaxed and open state, and 'smooth' our energy field to remove static that will interfere with the flow of energy between us and the beings we want to attune to.



Q1: when in our lives have we felt a direct communication with nature?

We may receive communication with Nature in various ways. We might ask direct questions, but also we may also receive what we need to know without even realising we need to know about it. It may come through holding an intention and allowing us to 'be dreamt' by Nature, daydreaming, and watching for signs/synchronicity.

Exercise 1: Partner question exercise (yang approach)

Solo 3/exercise 2: Practice asking a personal question (yin approach)

Night time activities

Exercise 3 (optional): Facing fear

If you are a bit afraid of being in Nature, stand at the edge of the dark and ask Nature to help you understand where your fear comes from. Ask her to help you overcome it.

Exercise 4: Ask for a dream to help you solve a challenge.

Section 5

Encountering Self in Nature



Ultimately, we come to realise that inner Nature (our inner world of experience) cannot be separated from outer Nature. Nature can be a place for encountering our deepest sources of truth, love, inspiration and creativity, a place for healing, as well as a training ground to help us be the best we can be.

Q1: What do I need/want to learn about myself?

Solo 4: Find a teacher in Nature to help you with this enquiry.

Relating

Our relationship with Nature mirrors our relationship with life and other humans. However because our biology is centred around social connections, relating with humans can be the most triggering of all. Nature provides a space to learn about our patterns of relating and combined with her healing power, a space for changing old patterns.

Q2: Reflect on your personal patterns of relating. How can you see this in your relationship with nature?



Bonus info: The vagus nerve and heart rate variability.

The vagus nerve connects the brain with most of our internal organs, including the heart and gastrointestinal system. Good 'vagal tone' correlates to psychological well-being. It's especially important in our ability to bounce back after stress.

One of the ways to measure how the vagus nerve is functioning is by assessing our heart rate variability. Heart rate variability refers to the oscillations of your heart rate that occur with the breath. On the in breath we have a faster heart rate. On the exhalation we have slower.

Higher heart rate variability is associated with a greater ability to recover from difficult situations. On the other hand, lower heart rate variability is associated with prolonged stress, anxiety and emotional dysregulation that carries on after a situation that was hard for us has ended.

A couple of ways to improve heart rate variability (and therefore your ability to shift your state and connect better):

- rhythmic breathing, extend the exhales
- somatic meditation - progressively focus your awareness on sensations you are feeling in from different parts of your body

Q3: Reflect on capacities that Nature helps you develop. How is this important in your work?



Nature as Healer

When we are in Nature, we gradually attune our energy bodies to the dynamic, free-flowing energy of Nature. This begins to lift stuck/stagnant/dense energy and emotional residue out of our system; things come up to be healed when we have the gift of stillness and connection in Nature.

This may be free past traumas, emotions we weren't ready to fully feel and even our grief for the Earth.

Fortunately, Nature provides a space safe for us to do that healing, and also medicine.

Solo 5: Healing & Art - use a form of creative expression to go deeper into what is arising for you, and allow it to be expressed and moved (could be nature art using leaves, sticks etc, sketching, colours, music, poetry etc)

Reflection Q4: What have are the most important things I have learnt here, what am I taking forward?

Sacred Activism

Another way we communicate with Nature is through prayer. When we empower our prayers with love and commitment to something greater than ourselves and envision the positive - what is calling our hearts - surprising, 'nonlinear' things can happen.

But we must leave room for the non-linear forces of changes, and be too attached to exactly *how* something happens.

We may experience inspired creativity as a result of our prayers, from the conjunction between inspiration and commitment. "Creativity is not an outcome, but a way of sourcing guided action from the ground of Being" ~ Charles Eisenstein.

Return to your solo spot and give back, offer prayer, rest in listening stillness.

The End



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