

A lifelong love affair

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A long and loving look at the natural world we inhabit can actually change us. We can become different persons. In his book *The Universe Is a Green Dragon*, physicist Brian Swimme points out that when you stand, for example, in the presence of the moon, you become a new creation. There is an actual physical interaction between the photons of light coming from the moon and the optical nerve cells in your body.

The feeling of awe that arises in the presence of the dazzling, luminous night sky is as much the creation of the moon, planets and stars as it is yours. The universe conspires with us in that moment of contemplation. It enters into us in a new way. We become something other than what we were before. "To live," Swimme writes, "is to enter this beauty, surrounded by enchantment, summoned by magnificence."

Captivated, charmed and entranced by the world, an inner and outer evolution takes place. When surprised once again by spring's bursting wildflowers out in the bright morning fields or while stalking the rare orchids of praise in green summer forests, we begin to notice that we too, in our own way, are beginning to bloom and to flourish.

Praying with nature is not just a good way to spend some idle moments. An hour of ardent bird watching is an hour of letting go of ourselves as the center of things. Anyone who can be content to perch on a rock for an hour and listen to the southwestern desert come alive at sunset or watch the nighthawks rise and plummet on carefree currents of air over the Kansas prairie, anyone who is busy awakening and nourishing the appreciation of the wholeness in nature is also developing an ability to live more fully, more heartily, more effectively, more genuinely. Enjoyment and contemplative attention put us touch with our own best energies.

We know that somehow we are better persons for this lifelong love affair with the natural world.

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