

The Radical Step: Self, Nature, & Decolonisation

John Siddique

Some days, I am overwhelmed
with gratitude that I wake up in my right mind,
that I feel my own feelings
that this consciousness looks out of these eyes,
and for all the horrors and difficulties of the world
still sees beauty without denying or bypassing anything
of our human experience.
If anything, it burns as strength,
dignity and tenderness.

The best way to walk in nature is to put one foot in front of the other, not to have music, not to take photos, not to share on social media, to 'keep this as something for yourself'. We've been conditioned to commodify and monetise everything: colonisation is not just outside of us; it's in so much of what we think, feel and believe in as

ourselves. No number of affirmations will counter its occupation of our lives, societies, countries, and infrastructure. But what does help is putting one foot in front of the other and walking, whether in trees, desert, or a scrubby bit of land that no one else pays any heed to.

There are a couple of practices from original yoga, which are very different from colonised 'yoga' that I like to lean into as I walk. Arya Mouna – the practice of noble silence. This is an allowing of yourself to align with the silence that is between and under all things as you go. Nature is beyond culture, beyond the names of countries, beyond labels, both external and internal, of ourselves and others. Trees, rivers, earth, sky show you their life in Arya Mouna, and you start to know the life in you. You start to know again the sense of your own self – your true name before you were named. Your heart beats rather than thudding. Thoughts give way to consciousness and to joyful spontaneity, awareness, and dignity – as the rhythm of your steps begins to melt the fear and the grip of what has been added to us and that we have desperately added to ourselves to try to survive. The yoga name for the life you can feel in you is Prana; it is not breath but life force. When you feel your own life force, you know yourself and the trees and the river. You might start to notice how the birds love you when you are you.

Colonisation is all that I knew until I woke back up to my own awareness and could admit that that strangeness, that internal pressure I had felt my whole life, was a prison. But here is the thing – aren't you consciously and unconsciously tired of fighting? I am. We are expected to convince supremacy culture to decolonise using the manners and language that it has dictated to us. We are told that concepts such as self-care will make us feel better. To quote James Baldwin: 'You always told me it takes time. It's taken my father's time, my mother's time, my uncle's time, my brothers' and my sisters' time ... How much time do you want for your progress?'

The choking hands of never having experienced equity at any level, these strangling fingers have always been about my throat, always been in my wallet, always signing bills to put limits on my ability to live, love who I love, telling me I'm ugly, that I'm not seen as a sexual being, that I can't marry who I like unless I have a certain amount of money, can't have a family, earn a living, be a creative. Its fingers are everywhere: in the check-out queue at the supermarket, applying for arts funding, and not being able to write the books my spirit wants to write without having to explain to the internal and external oppressor in the audience. That my human rights are a matter of debate, that I am supposed to integrate into a culture with no culture of its own, where everything is stolen and hoarded away behind borders and business politricks.

Supremacy tells me how complicated everything is and that I should always consider its feelings. The river doesn't do that, the sky doesn't do that, the trees don't do that, the rocks and the earth don't do that, nor do birds or the animals in the fields. For us to be disconnected from nature is to allow ourselves to be further bought and sold in supremacy culture. And it is that very culture that has brought ecocide upon the planet that is now placing the responsibility to repair things on you and me, all the while continuing its ecocide. It asks you and me to go without while it kills men and women and children in Palestine for nothing more, at the end of the day, than to grab its racist patriarchal balls and line its supremacist pockets, always at the suppression of equity. For all its wealth, it's a cheap bastard. It pushes families and children into slavery in DR Congo so it can pull the con of clean energy so that you can be eco-washed into feeling better about yourself and the environment by driving electric vehicles. I wonder if the various genocide projects of our time have recycling schemes. Observe how genocide and ecocide always go hand in hand.

If I have no home to return to and am not wanted or supported here, if I don't have equity – I will not be reasonable by your standards. FUCK civility – I will be aware of the fire and anger in my blood, but even more than these, I will be aware of the truth of my own being, free and clear of these imposed and woven layers. In my own way, I will burn down the structures that have been wired into me – through awareness, through

love, through sexuality, through equity with myself, through writing, through authenticity and self-realisation. I will name it clearly and meet that shadow with the integration of love and awareness. By doing things this way, we burn down the outer structures as we no longer feed them our life's blood and energy. I see the hands that are around our throats, how unfree we are. When we know and admit where we are, we can choose self-knowing and begin the process of self-liberation, for it is in these things, individually and collectively, that we can start to know and live our own lives.

Look how small we have had to live our lives just to survive. So I take this world, these histories as mine, as ours, and I don't need to tell anyone what I am doing, how I am loving or living. I am part of nature, you are part of nature, there is nothing to connect with. We are! It is the vast reservoir of life and being in which every atom of us is part of existence. We are told and told over and over again that there is no truth anymore. But nature will show that truth is beyond those borders, and our bodies and spirits know truth and life when we meet it.

While Walking

Trees are my friends

Birds are my friends

The river is my friend

The heart within the heart

is the sacred heart

The path of my life is the teacher

Tiny ducklings swimming on the canal

Heron in slow motion

Full green of summer leaves

The wind in the air is the call to prayer

We pass each other on the path

Who meets who?

One step after the next

Always becoming

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