

# What is Earthdreaming?

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What if the very language we now speak arose first in response to an animate, expressive world—as a stuttering reply not just to others of our species but to an enigmatic cosmos that already spoke to us in a myriad of tongues?

-- David Abram

For I have known, to some extent, what the Earth Horizon has been thinking about.

-- Mary Austin

Earthdreaming is a body of imaginative Earth-honoring practices for enriching our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the natural world. It is a deep psychology not only of humans, but of everything we interact with.

Combining interior exploration with crafting responses to outer concerns, earthdreaming can be done in bits, as a phase of life, or as a life path. The aim of earthdreaming is to envision, tell, and build on new stories for how to come fully, delightfully, and inclusively home to our homeworld as one species among many.

Earthdreaming emphasizes the consciousness-deepening dimensions of our relations with the world: “dreaming” as night dreaming, as day visioning, and as updating our orienting stories, as when C.G. Jung writes of “dreaming the myth onward.” (In Old English, “dream” meant “joy, mirth, merriment,” and even “music.”) We cherish what we come to love; and we cannot move toward what we cannot imagine. To actualize new possibilities we must first dream them up.

When employed as an embodied and practical philosophical or spiritual path, earthdreaming can be thought of as *terragnosis*: conversation with the transmutative wisdom of the natural world. Earthdreaming is “post-belief” in the sense that its concern is not with the authority of creeds, but with the quality of relationships.

## Whom is earthdreaming for?

- Those who dream about nature, animals, places, or planet
- Burned-out activists, or concerned citizens not called to activism
- Healers wishing to work with more than psychology or psychiatry
- Those seeking storytelling skills to use for personal or collective work
- Those seeking new tools for awakening others to our impact on nature
- Seekers interested in a new frame of orientation to self, life, and world
- Those for whom workshops and therapy have not solved key questions
- Anyone who wants to reconnect imaginative vision and effective action
- Those looking for a spiritual path beyond or outside of religion
- Religious people wanting to add a nature-revering dimension to their faith.

### **What fields of knowledge and practice does earthdreaming draw on?**

- Ecopsychology: psychology carried out with us as part of nature (Fisher, 2002). The effort to understand, heal, and develop the psychological and bio-social dimensions of the human-nature relationship through connecting and reconnecting with natural processes in the web of life: “There is a synergistic relation between planetary and personal well-being; that the needs of the one are relevant to the other” (Greenway, Lenzo, Dilworth, Worcester, Buzzell, 2007).
- Ecotherapy: an applied form of ecopsychology; “an umbrella term for nature-based methods of physical and psychological healing” (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009). Ecotherapy is part of an Ecological Circle of mutually healing relations between humans and the rest of nature (Clinebell).
- Depth psychology: the kind that takes dream, symptom, and fantasy seriously enough to work with them as expressions of our totality, not just our conscious minds (Janet, Freud, Jung, Von Franz, Hillman et al).
- Terrapsychology: deep, systematic, trans-empirical approaches to encountering the presence, soul, or "voice" of places and things: what the ancients knew as their resident *genius loci* or indwelling spirit. The study of how our dealings with the world tend to resonate back into our "inner" life (Terrapsych.com).
- Enchantivism: when we inspire deep societal change, whether locally or more widely, through inspiration and vision. Whereas reform and activism tend to push and pressure, enchantivism pulls through alluring stories of the communities of our desire.
- Storytelling: found in every corner of the world and given fresh emphasis through recent research showing it to be less polarizing and more effective than arguing or lecturing. The people who have moved humanity forward have almost always been entrancing storytellers.
- Engaged folklore: studying myths, folktales, and fairytales for how their ideas, characters, images, and motifs can clarify current situations.
- Systems Theory: an interdisciplinary set of approaches that study systems as self-maintaining and adapting organizations (Meadows) held together through complex internal and external interrelationships viewed as a whole (Laszlo, Krippner, Capra). In looking at systems this way we see patterns rather than static snapshots (Senge, Wheatley).
- Ecospirituality (also known as spiritual ecology): a decentralized collection of writings, practices, and insights from many cultures (including indigenous) and regions of the world focused on reverent nature practices. “If we are to restore the balance in our world, we need to go beneath the surface to heal the split between spirit and matter and help to bring the sacred back into life” (Vaughan-Lee).

### **What are some examples of earthdreaming?**

- Interpreting interesting daily events as one would interpret dream symbols
- Learning more about the animals and elements we dream about
- Getting to know the rhythms of a local natural scene by visiting it regularly
- Checking on how nature contact decreases anxiety and lifts mood
- Comparing themes in our life to those unfolding in the places where we live
- Tracing parallels between archetypal patterns around us and their interior expressions
- Sharing stories about renewing our relations with the natural world (and each other)
- Learning how to move from a compelling concern into action in the world
- Moving from what depresses and scares to wider stories of what inspires
- Composing simple but powerful rite of passage ceremonies for key transitions
- Advocacy for plants, animals, and countryside beyond parties and politics
- Outdoor reflective exercises that amplify our sense of the soul of place and planet
- Comparing lunar and seasonal cycles to how our lives unfold.

### **A few relevant quotations:**

The world is holy. We are holy. All life is holy. Daily prayers are delivered on the lips of breaking waves, the whisperings of grasses, the shimmering of leaves.

-- Terry Tempest Williams

Thus this Earth resembles a great animal or rather inanimate vegetable, draws in æthereall breath for its dayly refreshment & vitall ferment & transpires again with gross exhalations.

- Sir Isaac Newton

A human being is part of a whole, called by us the "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest--a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

-- Albert Einstein

What I have noticed in my small world is that if I praise the wildflowers growing on the hill in front of my house, the following year they double in profusion and brilliance.

-- Alice Walker

The way we think of Nature affects the way we treat her. When we see nothing but resources, everything is at our disposal. But when we begin to see organisms and ecosystems as mentors, we become students, and our relationship changes: from hubris to humility.

-- Janine Benyus

Our challenge is to create a new language, even a new sense of what it is to be human. It is to transcend not only national limitations, but even our species isolation, to enter into the larger community of living species. This brings about a completely new sense of reality and value.

-- Thomas Berry

Oh, what a catastrophe, what a maiming of love when it was made personal, merely personal feeling. This is what is the matter with us: we are bleeding at the roots because we are cut off from the earth and sun and stars.

-- DH Lawrence

We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own—indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder.

-- Wangari Maathai

I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child—our own two eyes. All is a miracle.

-- Thich Nhat Hanh

Throughout my whole life, during every minute of it, the world has been gradually lighting up and blazing before my eyes until it has come to surround me, entirely lit up from within.

-- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin