

# TEFIST PATHS TO NATURE

Vern Crawford

## TEFIST PATHS TO NATURE

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1996 I self-published a book entitled *Druidic Paths: A Naturalistic Druidism*. I had been studying modern Druidry (also called modern Druidism), and I wanted to share my successes in adapting Druidry to my home region, Southern Oregon. (NeoDruidry is the name I later gave to my personal brand of modern Druidry.) I also wanted to share many of my personal philosophical and spiritual insights about life, garnered since childhood. So I rolled all of this—modern Druidry, my personal practice (NeoDruidry), and my own philosophy (the centerpiece of which I call Tef Theory)—into a unique little book, *Druidic Paths: A Naturalistic Druidism*. I hoped my book would be widely welcomed and put to good use. But in fact it garnered little response. There was no applause, mostly just silence!

Now, more than twenty years later, my understanding of NeoDruidry has matured, as has my development of Tef Theory. (“Tef” is an acronym for Total Experiential Field, my model of all reality. For an introduction to Tef Theory, see my book, *A Theory of Everything: Tef Theory*, and other writings, in the Tef Theory section of this website.) Indeed, my understanding of life and reality has expanded beyond both modern Druidry and NeoDruidry (though I continue to use and recommend much of the ritual and tradition that I enjoyed in my practice of them). At the same time, Tef Theory is, and has always been, only a sketch map of reality, not a complete set of instructions for living life.

So, here I am again attempting a synthesis of my enthusiasms, and the result is this website. Out of necessity I have coined a new term—Tefistry—to combine together NeoDruidry, Tef Theory, and my suggestions for how to apply Tef Theory to your life. As part of my synthesis, the present document—*Tefist Paths to Nature*—extracts and revises the guts of *Druidic Paths*. This document, together with *A Theory of*

*Everything* and many others of my writings, offers as full a view of Tefistry as I can give at this time. I plan to revise and add to this website as time and inspiration allow. May all these writings be useful to you. Love Thy Tef!

### NeoDruidry, My Own Brand Of Modern Druidry

But first, a bit more personal history. In a way, I have always been a Druid. My ancestors mostly lived in western, northern, and central Europe—all lands where the ancient Druids lived. (Crawford is a Scottish name, said to mean “Crossing Place of the Crows”.) My father enjoyed philosophical and religious discussions and held strong interests in things natural: geology, forestry, agriculture, hunting, and fishing. My mother enjoyed flowers and animals, believed in the importance of education, and was a deeply loving and kind person. Both parents were musical, and they encouraged the musical training of their three children. As a child, I spent much time in direct contact with nature, playing and working in the Oregon outdoors. When my father asked me, a maturing teenager, what I intended to do with my life, I replied, “Teach and write, I suppose”. To me that meant teaching and writing about nature and our relationships with it, both material and spiritual. In college I studied the natural sciences, general liberal arts, music, and education. Two thousand years ago, these life experiences could well have been part of an ancient Druid's training.

During my working years I called myself a naturalist, one who claims greater than average knowledge and rapport with nature. Vocationally, I was a teacher and writer, helping students of all ages understand and appreciate the natural world. In addition to nature study and

the natural sciences, my interests have also long included the philosophy, spirituality, esthetics, and ethics of our relationship to nature.

My life aspiration, verbalized in early adulthood, was to become a “Poet of Life”—one who achieves proficiency at living—which was also, I surmise, a goal of the ancient Druids. Thus, it seems I have always been a Druid, though not always a Druid by name. In fact, I did not meet modern Druidry face to face until midlife. I had heard of the ancient Druids and had seen photographs of twentieth century Druid ceremonies at Stonehenge, but like most Americans I possessed little knowledge or understanding of Druids, ancient or modern. They seemed archaic, secretive, perhaps daft, and possibly sinister.

Eventually I encountered Philip Carr-Gomm’s excellent books on Druidry. Philip is Chosen Chief of the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD), a prominent British Druid order. After four years studying modern Druidry with OBOD, I decided to attempt an integration of my Druidic training with my own growing wisdom, all with a focus on nature in my bioregion, Southern Oregon. The result was my 1996 book, *Druidic Paths: A Naturalistic Druidism*.

What are the enduring themes of Druidry? My understanding is that the Ancient Druids were people of honor, seekers of truth and justice, and celebrators of nature. They worshipped Celtic deities, believed in the immortality of the human soul, and took for granted the existence of otherworlds. Being religious and philosophical Idealists, the Druids saw reality as essentially spiritual, not material. The image we have of them—as sages, as honored elders, as philosopher-priests—seems to be an archetypal image, persisting as an ideal of human aspiration right across the ages. Modern Druids honor this ideal of ancient Druidism.

In my practice of NeoDruidry I have not embraced all of the views of Druidry, ancient or modern, for I am much too educated in the sciences and am much too independent of mind to buy all of it. I have, instead, evolved my own path, called Tefistry, which incorporates selected parts of the Druid and NeoDruid heritage. Today, on my Tefist path, I seek more love, more peace, more awareness, and, especially, more integration and balance in all areas of life: inner and outer, cultural and natural. Simply put, Tefistry seeks Wholeness, Home, and Harmony. Its field of interest is all of reality, knowing full well that each of us cannot be proficient in all skills and fields. The goal of the Tefist, as I see it, is therefore to become as comprehensive as a lifetime of study and experience will permit and—especially—to seek to interrelate, to orchestrate, his or her life experience, to achieve harmonious connectedness across body, mind, soul, and world. As a Tefist—as a Poet of Life—I seek:

- \* To have rich life experience
- \* To invest my experience with value
- \* To give pattern and meaning to my experience
- \* To integrate my experience, in all of its diversity
- \* To act so as to bring Harmony to all of Tef.

If these goals of Wholeness, Home, and Harmony strike you, too, as desirable goals, then this document and the rest of this website may give you much satisfaction.

Critics may charge that I claim too much for Tefistry, that similar ideas, goals, and methods are shared by other wisdom paths. And I concede that Tefistry does indeed overlap greatly with many other wisdom paths and ism's, even with orthodox psychology, philosophy, religion,

art, and science. Some others may feel that Tefistry, as presented here, is too personal, too confessional, too emotional for their taste. I do not entirely disagree—for I do express emotion here! I *am* a Romantic, I concede! Still others may feel I write in more than one voice: at times expository, at times ecstatic, at times exhortative, at times poetic, at times vague or evasive or paradoxical. All true! My response to these criticisms is that I am a real person, with multiple dimensions. I feel it is unrealistic to insist that a writer always employ a single voice, or to try to communicate the most important stuff in life without ever being personal or even idiosyncratic. Moreover, I think it is unrealistic to expect the world's wisdom paths not to overlap. We are all human beings, whatever path we follow. Therefore, regardless of its strengths and faults, I offer *Tefist Paths To Nature* to anyone and everyone who can benefit from it.

### What This Document Is About

*Tefist Paths to Nature* is about two things: Self and Not-Self. Or more narrowly, Person and Nature. It is about ways we can relate to nature: by using and enjoying all the senses, by Communing with nature, by Contemplating nature, and by seeking to Orchestrate a harmonious integration of ourselves and nature. (Using Tef Speak, *Tefist Paths to Nature* seeks to optimize the H/D Ratio through L.4 enhancement of both Passive and Active Perception in L.1, L.2, L.3, and the Archives. Perfectly clear? Probably not. To translate this and other Tef Speak, see *A Theory of Everything* and other of my writings in the Tef Theory section of this website. In that book you will find additional perspectives on related topics: Sensory Communion, Intellectional Paths to Harmony, Love and Loving, etc. Chapter 7 could have been titled Tefistry.)

From another perspective, we may say that this document is about ways to change our Perception. Tef Theory asserts that all of our experience—and therefore all of reality—results from Perception. So this document explores how we perceive nature, and how we can change and enhance that perceiving.

Note (for clarity, I hope): In this document, as elsewhere in this website, I have used certain terms interchangeably. Thus nature means almost the same as the natural world and An Other Place and The Great Surround. And The Outer Realm, and the Sensible Realm, and This World, and The Herenow, and The Sensation Sector/Material World—all these are near synonyms that include nature, but are larger than nature.

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## **Chapter 1: TEFIST PATHS OF THE SENSATION SECTOR**

### Sensory Techniques For Relating To Nature

We begin this chapter with eight Sensory Techniques. These focus on the Sensation Sector/Material World (aka L.1) of megascale Perception (see *A Theory of Everything*, and other writings in this website, for explanations of these Tef Theory terms). Although I have saved the term Communion for use in Chapter 2, nonetheless the term Sensory Communion could justifiably be used, in this first chapter, for whenever I go beyond mere Sensation and add Value and Emotion. Thus, any of these Sensory Techniques actually becomes Sensory Communion when we respond emotionally to nature. But in this chapter I will stick with the term Sensory Techniques, reserving the term Communion with nature for Chapter 2.

Today's Tefist needs a close rapport with nature, one based on firsthand experience. To this end, I encourage you to try out all eight sensory techniques. Keep notes on your progress, if you like. Jot down where you go in nature, which techniques you use, whether they “work” for you, and any suggestions you have for improving them. Repeated experimentation with the techniques will repay you with richer experience. Instructions are given in detail, but these are only by way of ex-

ample. Once you have tried out these techniques, you can alter and adapt them to your personal needs. You can easily do them alone, although asking another person to serve as your reader will free you from the text and leave both hands free for gesturing or touching the world around you.

## 1. Profile Gesture

Kinesthetics is our inner sense of motion, such as our sense of “towering” trees, “hulking” animals, “unmovable” boulders, “mounding” clouds, “sweeping” panoramas, and “sinuous” stream courses. Gesturing gives us a way of acknowledging, imitating, and intensifying the kinesthetics suggested by natural forms and shapes. Simply, by pointing with your finger or hand, you can trace the outline of a tree, a cloud, a mountain, or the far horizon. Close one eye, if that helps. Even better results may come from using two hands as a pair of pointers. Or you can use the whole lower arm to align with and mimic natural line and form. In fact, you can even imitate shapes and motions in nature by using your entire body, such as when mimicking the posture and behavior of animals: Be a bear! Be a snake! Be an eagle! Walk, slither, or soar as they do!

## 2. Sideways Gaze

I have discovered that my visual perception is sharpened, clarified, and enriched by viewing the world from a nonstandard head position. Because much of the time we keep our heads upright, eyes level with the horizon, any change to this customary viewing position is bound to have interesting effects.

In the Sideways Gaze, standing or sitting, you bend your head and upper body over to one side—being careful not to lose your balance!—and remain bent for a moment or two while observing the world. For me, the Sideways Gaze enhances vision, bringing richer colors and sharper awareness of form and detail. Moreover, what was formerly horizontal (e.g., the horizon) now becomes “vertical” and therefore partakes of vertical exaggeration. (We normally exaggerate vertical objects, making them seem taller to us than they are by actual measurement.) Likewise, when you bend sideways during the Sideways Gaze, you will find that vertical trees and tall buildings—now “horizontal”—no longer seem so tall, whereas the horizon line—now “vertical”—seems to stretch up and down “forever”.

The Sideways Gaze reveals just how narrow a band the horizon really is. The associated hills, shoreline, or clouds become equally “tall” and narrow. The Sideways Gaze effect also occurs when you lie down, though perhaps less strongly. An effect similar to the Sideways Gaze can be achieved from a standing position by bending all the way forward, to view the world backwards through your legs, head upside-down. (To avoid falling over, you may wish to hold onto a tree or post for support when viewing sideways or upside-down.) I find this activity works best when my view of the far horizon is not blocked by trees, brush, or other objects.

Why does the Sideways Gaze work? I cannot fully explain the enhanced perception that results from it. Perhaps it results from (1) using fresh parts of the retina, or (2) forming nonroutine percepts in the brain, or (3) altering the gravitational pull on the eyes and body, or (4) increasing blood flow to the eyes and brain.

### 3. Fresh Views

In Fresh Views I simply seek out novel, nonstandard, nonroutine viewpoints. You can easily do this, too. Here are some ways:

\* Try changing the eye's elevation—its height above ground. View the world from down at ground level. Lie down, or even stand in a hole in the ground. Or get high up in a tree (climb carefully, of course), or ascend to a promontory, such as a clifftop or a tall building.

\* Lean your cheek against a tree trunk and peer upward to get a squirrel's-eye view of things, up along the bark and out among the branches.

\* Change the time of day when you view the world. For example, take a moonlight stroll, get up early to see a Summer sunrise, or substitute an afternoon walk for your morning walk.

\* Explore the natural world during non-routine weathers. For example, try sunbathing in winter, go walking in rain and wind, or experience wandering along a riverbank in swirling fog.

\* Get inside or underneath things. For example, explore caverns, lie down beneath the foliage of large shrubs, lose yourself in head-high grasses, wade in swamps, or go diving in aquamarine bays.

In short, to get fresh views, to greet nature with the child's "Wow!" or the naturalist's "Aha!", you need to break your perceptual habits. We all need to get out of our perceptual ruts. When we open ourselves up, let new experiences in, and challenge ourselves to perceive freshly, then the inner self responds: "Awesome!"

## 4. Symphony of the Senses

Each of our four Outer Body sensory channels—vision, hearing, savoring (smell and taste), and tactility—is like an instrument playing its unique part in the full symphony of sensory experience. First we can “listen” to each sensory instrument separately, then we can blend two or more of them, and finally we can “give ear” to all of our senses combined: the Symphony of the Senses.

So, to begin, try attending to each sensory channel separately. The examples I give here are from Southern Oregon. You can seek out similar examples in your own place.

(a) Attend to Vision (Sight). Savor colors, textures, patterns. See how many kinds of blue you can find among distant mountain ranges, among masses of cloud, or across a broad sweep of clear sky. Do the same for greens among forest and field, or reds among the petals of rose and zinnia blossoms. See the differences in detail within shadowed scenes and well-lighted scenes, among the lusters of mineral crystal faces, and in the limpid depths of clear, deep lakes and springs. Using Profile Gestures, trace leafless winter tree patterns and note the contrasting shapes of different tree species (say, oaks, maples, ashes, and alders). Use the Sideways Gaze to enhance your visual “listening”.

(b) Attend to Hearing. Eyes closed if necessary, focus your hearing on just one sound, then on another, then on a third, and so on. In a woodland setting, hear first one bird song, then another, then the wind, then insects in the leaves, then the “chuff-chuff-chuff” of a gray squirrel, and so on.

(c) Attend to Smell. Focus your olfactory attention on just one smell, then on another, then on a third, and so on. For example, you may identify the fragrance of damp soil in the springtime breeze, followed by

the sweet scent of violet blossoms, followed by a whiff of pine or juniper or oak leaves.

(d) Attend to Taste. Cautiously taste things in nature (but only those you can identify with absolute certainty and know to be safe for you). Perhaps you will nibble a pine or fir needle, perhaps savor a fresh blackberry or strawberry, perhaps taste a bit of seaweed.

(e) Attend to Tactility (Touch). Using some or all of your body surfaces, as well as various senses of your Inner Body, explore tactile experiences such as texture, pressure, pain, temperature, vibration, muscle effort, joint pain, physical posture, and so on. Expose your tender belly skin to the air and sunshine for a few minutes. Palpate the smooth, muscly texture of a Madrone tree trunk, then contrast this with the texture of a Ponderosa Pine tree. Enjoy the flow of dry sand sifting through your fingers. And so on.

Now, having practiced each of these sensory instruments separately, try expanding your attention by taking in two or three instruments at once, for example, smell and sight together. Then try another combination of two or three senses. Then open your attention to most or all of the sensory channels, all at the same time. You may find that you can enjoy multiple channels only by the tactic of rapidly shifting your attention from one “instrument” to another, and then to another. If these shifts are rapid enough, you can gain a sense of completeness: all of the senses “performing” together, as the Symphony of the Senses.

## 5. Anticipatory Listening

When listening to sounds in nature, listen carefully for words among the natural sounds around you. Really! Sometimes you can hear

human speech among “sighing” trees, “rustling” leaves, “babbling” brooks, “calling” birds, even in the silent “voice” of pure desert air. Well, no, probably not whole words! However, you may sense *fragments* of words, and this simple act of *expecting* to hear words will open up your hearing, put you in the receptive mode, and make possible richer sensitivity to the natural world. In this way, you can trick yourself into really listening to nature. So, go outdoors: Try to catch those elusive fragments of nature’s “words” floating on the air.

## 6. Hug/Palpation of a Tree (or Rock, or Animal, or Human)

To explore your senses in yet another way, try encountering large, graspable objects. Try giving them a hug/palpation. And follow this up with a Question/Answer to deepen your consciousness, as follows.

First, approach a tree (or rock, or animal, or even a human) with respect and anticipation. Your initial objective is enrichment of sensory experience, but you are also open to emotional bonding with the object: a sense of worship, veneration, affirmation, or an expression of love and gratitude.

Place your hands on the tree's bark and palpate the surface nearest to you. Palpation is sensitive, inquisitive touch. Feel the texture, temperature, size, and shape of the tree. Look at your hands as you begin this activity, but after a moment or two avert your vision away from your hands, or even close your eyes, as you continue with palpation. Also smell the tree. And listen to the sound of your fingers moving over its bark.

After a while, with vision still averted or eyes closed, reach one hand around to the far side of the trunk and sense the tree’s thickness

and solidity. The tree's three-dimensionality may become unexpectedly vivid.

Next, if possible, lift, push, or bend the tree. Do not injure it, of course, but exercise it a little.

Next, hug the tree and offer silent or audible words of greeting, acknowledgment, veneration, gratitude, or other deep feelings toward it. Touch your cheek to its bark.

Next, do a Question/Answer, ideally with another person asking the questions, something like the following:

Q: "What are you doing?"

A: "I'm hugging a tree." This response, perhaps with some additional inquiry from the questioner, deepens your consciousness of both yourself and the tree. Not only did you have the experience of palpation, now you are confirming this fact to yourself and another person, making the experience public and more conscious. The value of this act to you becomes apparent through doing it.

Q: "Why are you hugging a tree?"

A: "Because hugging feels good. And I'm learning about reality. And I'm seeking to relate to nature. And I'm offering respect and gratitude to this tree."

This Q/A enriches your sense of relationship and direct experience. The questioner may need to prompt you further to elicit the fullest effect. With modification, this questioning may be applied to palpation of rocks, animals, and even humans.

To conclude this activity, either repeat it or do a final hug and then thank the tree.

## 7. Touch Makes It Real

Whenever possible, our sensory channels of vision and hearing and savory need to be “grounded” and confirmed using the sense of tactility. Recognize that vision (and hearing and savory, too) are only *tentative* evidence of matter. If matter is to be confirmed, we have to engage it with tactility. In other words, seeing (by itself) is not believing. In order to be well-grounded and whole, we need to “get our hands on the world”, and this means intentionally touching, handling, fondling, groveling, rolling, basking, or submersing ourselves in it. In short, we palpate the whole world to order to confirm its materiality and to experience oneness with it.

## 8. Welcoming Nature into Intimate Space

You need not be passively receptive in your contact with nature. You can use gestures to actively welcome the natural world, inviting it into your sphere of intimate space, that envelope of privacy and sanctity that surrounds your body. To do this, use welcoming motions, such as:

(a) Reaching out with outspread arms and *symbolically* drawing toward your body a distant object or even the whole world. Keep your visual focus on the object you are welcoming, not on your gesturing hands. Repeated beckoning with arms, hands, or fingers can work well; and

(b) Reaching out and drawing an *actual* object, such as a tree bough or an animal, into your intimate space. This action merges with the Hug/Palpation described above; and

(c) Seeking to have a feeling of good will, hospitality, and gratitude as you welcome a part of nature into your intimate space (or even into the interior of your body). Using in-drawing gestures, you may wish to say, “Welcome! Welcome, Tree! Welcome Branches, Buds, and Roots! Welcome Earth! Welcome Sky and Clouds! Welcome all natural things! Welcome into my intimate space! Welcome into me!”

### Making a Tefist Color Wheel

For 99 percent of human history, people all over the planet closely attuned their lives to the rhythms of nature. Our Paleolithic ancestors hunted and gathered in step with the seasons; our Neolithic ancestors herded and farmed in step with the seasons. Only in recent times have we seriously lost touch with nature’s rhythms. Yet even in today’s urban confusion we can still feel the old rhythms, though we have to watch more sharply for their cues. Dawn and dusk can still orient us to the day. Phases of the moon can still orient us to the month. Spring blossoms, Summer heat, Autumn leaves, and Winter chill can still orient us to the seasons. This ebb and flow of nature’s great rhythms is still in our bones, though sometimes latent or suppressed. One of Tefistry’s prime goals is to renew our awareness of, and deepen our rapport with, these ever-returning rhythms.

A helpful aid for keeping us alert to nature, season by season, is the Tefist Color Wheel, a circular calendar I have invented for my own Tefist practice. For ancient peoples, the relentless onward march of years was less important than the returning, repeating cycle of the sea-

sons. Time was experienced much more as circular, in contrast to our modern linear experience of time. However, when we merge the two ideas—circular time and linear time—we end up with spiral time: rhythmic cycles of experience repeating throughout our life’s journey. Unfortunately, a spiral is difficult to convey on thin, flat paper! Because a wheel (a single turn of the cycle) can be depicted more easily, this is the model of the year I shall discuss here.

I encourage you to make your own Tefist Color Wheel. It is a circle divided into the standard four seasons, each three months long. In addition, you can add three kinds of subseasons, eight NeoDruidic Festival dates, and associated stages of the human lifetime. Of course, your own Color Wheel could allot each season a different length. In some climates, for instance, Spring really is longer than Autumn (because of climatic patterns and differences between rates of solar heating and cooling). But my advice is: Unless your seasons are quite unequal, keep your Color Wheel simple, stick to three-month seasons.

The subseasons are my own idea. They, too, can be of lengths and names different from those I have chosen for use in Southern Oregon. (Our familiar Gregorian Calendar is very much a human construct, and a rather artificial one at that. No law says you and I can’t make a better calendar!) To establish the subseasons, I first studied how the four main seasons actually do progress in my own bioregion and then marked their starting and ending dates on my calendar accordingly. Once I had established the boundary dates of the four seasons for Southern Oregon, the subseasons fell into place as the beginning, middle, and concluding periods for each. I named these subseasons Welcome, Heart, and Farewell.

Thus, for example, I observed that Winter in my place begins at least three weeks earlier than the Winter Solstice (~21 December), which is the standard first day of Winter on the Gregorian calendar in the

Northern Hemisphere. In the valley where I live, cold weather and sometimes even snow have already arrived by late November. Therefore, I chose to begin Winter on 1 December. Consequently, my Winter Welcome subseason begins 1 December. It lasts until the Winter Solstice, 21 December. (The solstices—when the Sun reaches its highest or lowest position in the Sky—and the equinoxes—when day and night are equal in length—occur anywhere from the nineteenth to the twenty-third day of their respective months: March, June, September, and December. The twenty-first is often the actual date, and for most ritual purposes no greater accuracy is needed. So, for ease of remembering and calculating, I stick with the twenty-first day for all four events.)

Next, the Heart of Winter subseason—which comprises real, unambiguous winter—lasts from 21 December until the next NeoDruidic Festival, Imbolc, during the first week of February. At Imbolc my subseason called Winter Farewell begins, running about three weeks until the start of Spring, 1 March (instead of 21 March, the customary first day of Spring). These subseasons and the dates on which each season starts are fairly specific to Southern Oregon. You can adopt the same dates I have, but I hope you will first check to see if your place on Earth is different from mine, with different dates.

I have assigned separate colors to each subseason on the Color Wheel, starting with violet at Winter Welcome, followed by dark blue at the Heart of Winter and running through the spectrum of rainbow colors to red at Autumn Farewell. Red-violet binds the ends of the spectrum together in a special Tefist time of Thanksgiving near 1 December. Note that I did not just randomly appoint these colors to the wheel. Winter really is the violet and blue season—when we turn purple and blue in the cold air (!) and the sky is often a rich, deep blue overhead, no longer obscured by leaves. Spring is the greening season, of course. Summer is the season of yellow sunshine, yellow blossoms, and tawny hills of cur-

ing grass, at least here in Southern Oregon. And Autumn is the time of colorful falling leaves, red Madrone berries, and lingering warmth, hence its orange and red colors.

Around the perimeter of the Color Wheel are posted the many stages of human life, guiding us to devote specific times to contemplating and honoring these stages. Eight festivals mark these times, and I have honored four of them with their old Celtic names: Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasa, and Samhuinn. Thus, on my Color Wheel, Imbolc (in the first week of February) marks Birth (aka Emergence), a brief transition stage in life. This is followed by Childhood (beginning on the first day of Spring, 1 March). Childhood runs right through the Vernal Equinox festival (21 March) to the festival of Beltane (in the first week of May), which honors the stage called Puberty and the initiation of Adolescence.

On 1 June we end Adolescence and begin observance of Adulthood (and/or Parenthood), the Summer of our lives, including the Summer Solstice festival (21 June). Midlife, a longer transition stage, begins at the festival of Lughnasa (in the first week of August), followed by the first day of Autumn (1 September), honoring Elderhood (Old Age) and including the Autumnal Equinox festival (21 September). The final transition stage of our lives is Dying and Death, beginning at Samhuinn (in the first week of November), followed by memories of our Ancestors. Then we enter Winter Welcome (on 1 December), a subseason that I devote to contemplation of life's Ultimate Mysteries, such as Consciousness and Infinity and Change and Vanishing. When Heart of Winter arrives at the Winter Solstice (21 December), we celebrate two other mysteries: Inception, and the Gestation that will follow. This leads us back to Birth, at Imbolc, as the Wheel of the Year continues along its ever-turning cycle, along the spiral of time.

## **\*\*PRAXIS\*\***

Learning to heed the seasons of nature is a basic Tefist path. The Tefist Color Wheel is an excellent aid in this. Try making a Color Wheel that fits both you and the place you inhabit on Earth. Initially, your Wheel may be tentative, because you may need a year or more of watching your seasons to decide when they really do begin and end. You can ask for help from old-timers and farmers and gardeners and meteorologists—people who often know about such things.

Tip: If you draw your Wheel by hand, you can position and draw boundaries for the seasons and subseasons using a protractor. Its 360 degrees are almost the same number as the 365 days of the year, so you may simply let one degree equal one day on your Wheel. For example, letting 1 January be the zero/360 degree mark, you can draw boundaries marking the twelve months, arbitrarily giving 30 degrees (for 30 days) to each of the twelve months. Then you can draw lines to show the start of each season—I have drawn my seasonal boundaries at 1 March, 1 June, 1 September, and 1 December. Extend the seasonal boundary lines out from the center to the periphery of the Wheel.

Then you can fill in the subseasons, if you plan to observe them. I link the subseasons to the solstices and equinoxes (21 March, 21 June, 21 September, and 21 December) and to the dates of the four Celtic Festivals mentioned above. The latter are often observed on the first day each of February, May, August, and November—although I prefer the fourth day of these months (in order to give my festivals some “breathing room” from Groundhog Day, Mayday, and Halloween). It's your choice—in my view the specific dates are less important than the act of observing the festivals, subseasons, and seasons.

Take pride in making your own personal Tefist Color Wheel. Refer to it frequently as a way of tracking the turning of the seasons and the stages of your life. I keep my own Wheel posted where I can see it daily. (Note that I have drawn considerable inspiration for the Tefist Color Wheel from modern Druidry and similar wisdom paths.)

### Making a Tefist BioCalendar

The Tefist BioCalendar will remind you of the Tefist Color Wheel, and the two can even be combined into one wheel, if you wish. But the BioCalendar is more "scientific," and it needs to be larger because it contains much more information. I call it a BioCalendar because it focuses on Bios, the living world of trees, wildflowers, mammals, birds, fish, bugs, and so on. It is a circular nature calendar.

Making a BioCalendar invites you to notice and record the details of the great cycle of the seasons. It is very place-centered (my own is specific to Southern Oregon), for I believe every place, and every bioregion, needs its own BioCalendar: a record of when the wildflowers unfold, when the birds migrate, when the insects hum, when the snow and ice return, and so on. The timing of these events varies greatly from place to place (even in the space of a few hundred feet, in ecologically complex areas). Every Tefist needs a working knowledge of his or her local outdoors—what, where, when, how, and why—and the Tefist BioCalendar can help you discover and enjoy this knowledge. (Note that climate disruption in coming decades may require updating of your BioCalendar from time to time.)

My BioCalendar for Southern Oregon, like the Tefist Color Wheel, is a map of the year, marked off into four equal seasons, each having three subseasons: Welcome, Heart, and Farewell. Most of your BioCalendar will start out as empty space—room to write in numerous natural events, at the dates when they occur, where you live. For instance, First Frost comes to Southern Oregon in October, most years. (By contrast, some American bioregions get no frost at all, and others get frost in every month of the year, so neither of those bioregions would have a “First Frost” to record on their BioCalendar!)

Making a BioCalendar is easy. You simply draw a series of four concentric rings, the largest no less than twelve inches in diameter, within which you can label the seasons, subseasons, and months. You draw lines from the center outward, to divide and subdivide the seasons and subseasons. (To do this by hand, you can use a protractor, as described for the Tefist Color Wheel, above). This leaves a lot of open space in the center. Here, at the appropriate dates, you write in natural events that happen in the world around you. And that’s it. Simple!

The catch? The BioCalendar needs to be based on accurate observations. Most of us can’t recall more than one or two accurate dates for natural events in the place where we live. Just when do the daffodils spring up and begin to blossom? Just when do the swallows return for Summer? Just when do the Autumn crickets stop singing and die in the frost? The need for information and accuracy may lead you to contact your local bird expert, wildflower enthusiast, or professional naturalist, seeking the knowledge that only these people possess, gathered over years of field observations and careful note-taking.

Better yet, you can do your own observing and keep your own records through one or several years, maybe even prior to actually constructing your BioCalendar. In a notebook or on computer you can keep

records by date and location of natural events in your own place. Indeed, over a period of several years I wrote down my own seasonal observations. I labeled my pages “Nature Notes” and used four main headings: Trees & Shrubs; Smaller Plants (wildflowers, grasses, mosses, etc.); Vertebrates (mammals, birds, herps, fish); and Miscellaneous (spiders, insects, fungi, lichens, algae, weather, and so on). I compiled these Nature Notes for each month (remembering to label the year, too). After a few years I was able to review a wealth of accurate data with which to build my BioCalendar. You can do this, too. One bit of advice: Perhaps you should not try to keep track of everything. You can get overwhelmed! You may wish to emphasize, say, just trees and birds, or just wildflowers and insects, or just mammals, mushrooms, and amphibians.

Having compiled your own “Nature Notes”, you can then prepare a unique record: your BioCalendar for your place on Earth. During its creation you will have had many hours of satisfaction and surprise; you will have become attuned to the natural cycles and events of your area; and you will have learned a great deal. Building a BioCalendar does take time, of course—no instant gratification here! But taking time is an important Tefist lesson in itself. Nature, to be sure, has lots of time!

I use one of the concentric rings on my BioCalendar for second-naming the subseasons according to what is happening outdoors. Where I live, for instance, oak and maple trees put forth their blossoms in the Heart of Spring. So I have second-named this subseason “Oak and Maple Time”. Similarly, most trees in Southern Oregon shed their leaves during Autumn Farewell, so this is “Falling Leaf Time”. You, too, may wish to second-name the subseasons, based on the outstanding events of the year in your area.

## **\*\*PRAXIS\*\***

Adopt the making of a Tefist BioCalendar as a long-range work of art. Put yourself into it. Try to get outdoors each day for a walk or a slow bicycle ride, even if only in your own backyard, neighborhood, or city park. Record your observations daily. After one year (or more), proudly put your BioCalendar together. Share your observations with others of like interest and engage your family and friends. Children are great observers, so ask them to help you with your BioCalendar, or encourage them to make one of their own. If you amass data year after year, you can fine-tune your special creation. You can also add drawings or photographs for interest. You might even decide to distribute your BioCalendar to other residents of your bioregion as a gift or sales item. It will be something unique and very valuable to your experience of Tefistry!

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## **Chapter 2: COMMUNION WITH NATURE, A TEFIST PATH OF THE INTUITION SECTOR**

During our megascale Perception, our Sensation Sector/Material World (L.1) experience typically becomes merged with—perfused by—our Intuition Sector/Story World (L.2) experience. “Body merges with Heart.” The result of this merger is the Enchantment Mode of experience (our innate Animism), in which all things in the universe are taken to possess a greater or lesser degree of spirit/soul/psyche. Sensation becomes perfused with what Tef Theory calls Intuition.

The process of Enchantment can take various forms, but much of it can be subsumed under the name Communion. Among the various kinds of Communion, our topic in this chapter—which is Communion with nature—is the Tefist path that merges L.2 emotional response (and empathy) with our base of L.1 sensory experience of nature. Through this Communion we build and strengthen our rapport with the natural world. I sometimes call nature “An Other Place” and “The Great Surround” to emphasize its difference from culture and our daily, mundane lives. Communion with nature can also, of course, be called Nature Communion.

So, this chapter is a guide to Tefist Communion with nature, drawing upon my own life experience. Will your Communion with nature be the same as mine? Perhaps. Perhaps not. You will find this chapter is mostly first-person and rather personal. Some readers may find this voice excessive or sentimental. However, I do not ask my readers to become clones of me. Rather, I offer these personal experiences as examples, illustrations, and suggestions of how you might deepen your relationship with An Other Place, wherever and whenever that may be. May this help you to increase the H/D Ratio in your life!

To make the most of this chapter, *I suggest that you read only one or a few pages at a time.* Then ponder these passages, perhaps sharing them with friends, family, or coworkers, and, especially, employing them in your own Communion outdoors. Think of this chapter as a series of *seed thoughts* to enrich your experience. As you explore this Tefist path of Communion with nature, may you find ever richer rapport with this beautiful planet we live upon!

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### Communion: What Is It?

There is a current in my life, and I cannot resist it. It buoys me onward, whether I paddle with it or against it. It is love. And my worship in nature. And my need for Harmony. I am borne by an irresistible flow.

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Why do I yearn for the “Great Mother”: the shore, the mountains, the forest, the desert? Why do I feel more one-in-spirit with trees and birds and streams than with chrome and glass and alcohol? Why do I feel spontaneous hope in a fragrant fir forest—and spontaneous pessimism along the city street? My rapport with nature is mysterious...and perhaps the key to life.

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Those who are uncomfortable out of doors—who are unhappy and awkward upon the soil—have lost contact with their roots. They have grown disjunct, alienated. To accept and welcome nature is a great joy. To feel at home in nature, to feel that oneself is a part of it—this is to feel divine love.

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Sometimes everything I see, everything I touch and hear— everything is cliched kitsch! These are artificial things, lacking the healthiness, the freshness, the rightness of nature.

But where is nature? Why do I clutch only plastic when I grasp for solid rock? Why do I see only paint when I yearn for blue Sky? Why must I endure pop music when I deeply need windsongs? Alas, I know why: We are all inmates!

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Preoccupation and routine continue to be the shackles of my life, the prison of my genius. I am a slave to the business of life. Too often—still—self-enhancement in nature is merely a theoretical good, not a legitimate, explicit good, as is making money.

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Certainly we do not eat the recipe instead of the cake! We never confuse the two. Why, then, do we so willingly accept symbolism—books and TV and theater—in place of nature’s fresh immediacy?

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Science, with its love of symbols and concepts, should never inhibit my sensory and emotional contact with nature. Rather, may it help promote my Communion, that I may enjoy living close to nature all the more.

Give me the rich life of nature! Give me health, nature’s health! Let me sing with joy, let me thrill with awe! Give me the leisure a lover needs!

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### “Milky Quartz”

I poked my toe into rushing water. A white stone loosened and I picked it up, dripping, glistening. Shiny flakes of golden mica fell off and drifted away, golden flecks in the sunny stream. It was a chunk of white quartz, milky quartz. Hard and glassy in my hand. A real handsome stone.

With the wet quartz stuffed in my pocket, I waded, bare-legged, into the water. I came to a ledge where silver streamlets rushed over and around, partly hidden beneath overhanging stone. Plush moss clung there in luxuriant pads; I gently pressed their cool, dripping green. Soft green! Deep green! Water oozed between my fingers and trickled through the hairs on my arm. A frightened daddy-long-legs lurched from a shadow and bounded across my fingers. I flinched. Funny, skit-

tering thing! Like a tan raisin on wiry legs. Ridiculous engineering—how did it get that way?

I stepped out upon a flat, wet rock. Suddenly slick! as I slipped on its algae. Arms swinging, I grabbed at a smooth boulder—a savior boulder—clutched it, and held on. The stream swirled and chuckled between my legs.

After a few moments, I softened my grip on the rock and waited there for full composure. The breeze ruffled my hair and overhanging alder leaves. At last I peered on ahead, upstream, where additional huge boulders crowded the water. Releasing my grip, I abandoned the savior boulder and began wading again. I climbed atop another, even larger boulder, this one lumpy on top. Settling down there, I wiggled around several times before my buttocks quit their petty complaining: For streamside watching, a comfortable boulder is essential. Then I and watched and waited.

Along the opposite bank, flooding waters had undercut the roots of a tall, copper-barked pine. Its trunk now leaned over the water. Someday, I thought, that pine will crash across the stream, ripping its roots from the earth and tossing up dirt and leaves. Today, it still stands. I noticed a small insect buzz up to the trunk and repeatedly dive at it. Why? What? A beetle? A wasp? A fly? Who knows—this woods is home to many nameless creatures.

“Yank, yank, yank; tew-tew-tew.” A nuthatch gave its tin horn call among sun-glistened pine boughs. Proud little bird. Happy in its home. Fully competent here. (Me, too? No. Just visiting.) With its agile beak it pried off tiny loose flakes of bark, questing for food. Then with a burst of wings it hurried upstream to another tall pine. Wish I could fly

like that. I picked at the hangnail on my toe. The sun pressed warmth all over by back. Warm, bare skin.

I reached into my pocket. Dry—my chunk of milky quartz was dry now. And duller, not as handsome. So I leaned over and dropped it straight down—splash!—into the sliding water. It sank to a dark, sandy bottom. Yes, it looks much nicer down there, under wavery, cool water.

Just then, a yellow jacket zoomed up and landed on my pants. Its yellow-and-black abdomen pumped in and out. Its legs twitched nervously. Suddenly it buzzed up toward my face and I jerked backwards, allowing it to disappear over my head, up into the alder branches. Good riddance! No stings for me today....

Calm returned. I fell into thought. If this place is doomed, why am I out here enjoying it? A thin crust of gray-green lichen crumbled beneath my fingers. I tasted a bit of it. Sandy. The grains gritted in my teeth. I am here because...because I like being here. Because this kind of place is real. To me, this forest is real life: birds and trees and moss and stream water. Not the manufactured world. The natural world, the natural, given world. Yes, that's it, given. Didn't come out of somebody's brain. Always new and different. Refreshing novel shapes and keen sensations. Sensational! Makes me feel good. Really good!

Edging down off the boulder, I waded farther upstream. Oooh, cool water! Chilly currents. Thin rivers of sand sifted around and beneath my toes and instep. Nearby sat another big boulder, silent, tawny, granite. Hi, Boulder! And beside it grew tufts of green rushes. An empty, brittle shell of a dragonfly nymph still clung to one stem. Right now, somewhere along this stream, I am sure of it, an adult dragonfly is hunting mosquitoes.

I pushed ahead. In every quiet pool, water striders cast their mottled shadows on the soft, muddy bottom. Rounded, oval shadows. Nearby, the water mirrored pieces of blue sky and massed green alder boughs. I waded into a pool of quivering lapis and liquid jade. What striking beauty! The new road will cut through here somewhere, maybe right here. And they'll need a huge steel culvert to contain this stream....

Suddenly, a squirrel exploded up the trunk of a pine, its feet ripping loose a little shower of bark dust. At the first big branch it paused and peered down at me, flipping its tail in excited S-curves. It watched me with a cold eye. Hi, Squirrel! Sorry we can't be on better terms—you squirrels and us people. Well...what else can I say? I didn't choose to be born human.

So maybe I shouldn't have come out here at all. Don't ever love a place and you don't have to suffer when it goes. Besides, this stream's just ordinary. These mountains have lots of streams and boulders and milky quartz, lots of sand and moss and dragonflies. After all, no money was spent building this stream, so nobody will lose anything when the road goes through. Right? This stream has been here for thousands of years, and nobody has ever used it for anything. It's time for somebody to open up this area, milky quartz and all. Right?

Overhead, the squirrel eyed me with deep suspicion.

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Romantic joy! Reverie! Ecstasy! Not explained by the tight-laced Intellection. Yet, the life of the world! Is it soft-headedness? Fantasy? Mere subjectivism? Yes, yes, if you so define it. But never forget, with-

out Communion you have no ground, no roots. Do not prune roots, prune branches. Joy is forever, you know. (Don't you?)

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Thank heaven I have not forgotten! Not even after periods of anguish among the Lost. If ever I forget, then truly I will have joined the Lost. Forgotten what? Lost what?

Ah! Firsthand experience! The depth of life! Not thoughts. Not words. But all those ineffable and thoroughly satisfying, thoroughly complimentary experiences that are free to the open soul. The joy of rolling surf and sea gull cries. The joy of desert heat and twilight solitude. The joy of pine woods and craggy mountaintops. The joy of weeds and grass and butterflies in spring-wet meadows. The joy of being at one with the universe, at one with nature. And wanting nothing else, forever and forever.

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To experience nature directly and with the whole self is to *be* nature. It is to commune, to worship, to participate in divine love. It is to create profound Harmony, to become—as the Taoists might say—one-with-Tao. It is to merge with deity. And this is good—though I cannot prove it to you. You have to confirm this goodness for yourself. I cannot command you to agree with me. In this matter, you are the sole and final authority.

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Communion with nature is one of life's most profound, fulfilling, creative engagements. I sing its praises! This special rapport with the universe is a sweet fruit of living. Sadly, it is not shared by all.

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Worship in nature acknowledges the natural as proper and fitting. Most other worship is cultural idolatry or otherworldliness—worship of the unnatural or of the supernatural—when the natural itself is exactly enough.

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Communion: How Is It Done?

### “In The Real Spring”

Now that Winter is safely past and forgotten, more and more of us head for the great outdoors. Spring lures us, Pied-Piper-fashion, into woods and lakes, into recreation among its warm, sunny congratulations. We flee our homes and cars, seeking new life where the Earth is green and fresh, dotted with blossoms.

Happily for us, Spring returns each year as expected, and we are eager to go boating or fishing, hiking or driving. But Spring—the Real Spring—offers us more than new fun and new muscle tone: It also throws us a challenge. It dares us to become, to join, to Commune. Yet, who among us is fully prepared to go Communing, in nature, in the Real Spring?

If you want know the Real Spring, you must be wholly alive—wholly receptive—to all the season offers. As an easy start, you can take a walk in a fresh, greening woods. Just amble along. Although

your stated goal is to complete your walk, your actual goal is to savor the joy of springtime.

Pause a moment here. Press your back against this tree. Look straight up where the leaves mingle with the sky. Focus first on a single leaf, then on the whole treetop. Do this again. And again. Feel the trunk against your back. Feel its shape and the texture of its bark. Roll up your sleeves and measure the season's temperature with your naked skin. Avoid tacking quick labels onto your experiences: Our words are not reality, not real life. The soft new leaves around you are more than “pretty”; the furrowed tree bark is more than “rough”; the wind is more than “warm” or “cool”. Try to accept these varied sensations for what they really are: the sensory, pre-verbal realities of Spring, the ineffable facts of nature.

Searching through the woods for all things new and curious, discover slick-shelled beetles beneath chunks of rotting wood. Hold up a delicate leaf to the sun and see rainbow sparkles among its cells. Grasp tree limbs and bend them, feel their strength. Hear birdsong in the sky. Gather handfuls of last year's fallen leaves, inhaling their earthy pungency. Or crush an aromatic, green-growing leaf and sniff the Real Spring. Like an animal, roaming your habitat!

In this way, Commune. This year, meet the challenge of the Real Spring. This year be prepared. How much finer boating and fishing, driving and hiking will be! This year, feel satisfaction in your deepest inner person...in the Real Spring!

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Today's walk in Oregon's Siskiyou Mountains, after a long absence, showed me how out of tune with nature one can get. There I stood, a divine silence howling in my ears—yet I was barely able to hear it, to integrate it, to harmonize with it, so great was my estrangement. I could not conquer my runaway thoughts, I could not leave my culture behind.

After a period of acclimation—a quiet time of sitting and listening—I began to see more clearly my failing. It was the sin of forgetfulness, the sin of self-neglect: for I do wrongs less often against others than I do against my own depths, against the Deity Within. Indeed, proper living asks that every part of my life be an act of worship. Yes, above all, I need an attitude of worship. To neglect this is to erode my basic integration with reality.

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Communion with nature doesn't always happen easily. Even after years of Communing, I'm sometimes nervous. Alien-nervous. Fidgety-nervous. Tangled in a sticky web of thoughts and habits. Sometimes my attempts at Communion require many minutes, or even hours—time needed to round up the galloping intellect and tame it...so that the feeling soul can emerge, unimpeded.

Sometimes outdoor sports can help: like fishing or hunting, photography or skiing. Yet these activities are not really necessary for me to commune and can even become obstacles to my Communion. You need them only if you lack a kind of gentle discipline—thus to cradle loving hands around the soul, to lift it into the sanctuary of nature, there to Commune.

Moreover, our lives in cities and suburbs do not encourage Communion. We have to search for quiet places, for fresh nature untrauma-

tized by shopping centers and airports and a thousand other human inventions. How can people Commune with nature if it is nowhere at hand? We simply can't enjoy tone poems among jackhammers!

Beyond this, for many people, the values of nature are not obvious. Really, why should they leave their familiar concrete sidewalks and go off among rocks and trees? To the uninitiated, nature is insignificant...just rocks and trees. Meaningless or even threatening rocks and trees. The fact is, these people are not really in nature, even if their bodies are there. They are still in their high-rise apartments or on their suburban tennis courts. The ancient Druids knew it, the modern Druids and Tefists know it, too: Nothing much happens in nature unless you are fully there, fully present in that Other Place.

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If you seek to Commune with nature, but are unsure how to go about it, take heart. You need no special talents or techniques. Merely be open. Open up your eyes and your soul. Expect to give birth and you will. Don't think too much. Don't look too hard. Merely be alert and open. Be receptive. Communion is not meditation of a "tune out the world and contemplate your navel" kind. Neither is it a metaphysical or visionary quest. Rather, it is a way to behold the earth, to love it, to participate in its wonderful reality.

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I go to nature as an antidote to my culture. But I also seek the many additional benefits it offers. Thus, for me, Communion is both escape *from* and escape *to*. For in nature I can banish the demons of cul-

ture and exalt the soul. I can see beyond the facades of life. I can make contact with things that are real, elemental, gut-felt. Things begin to make sense again. Life regains its single, simple axis, regains its composure, returns to its basic common sense. Equipoise! Sanity! Insight! Joy!

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### “Lights In The Field”

There they are! Spread along these Summer roadsides and across this old farmland: lights in the field, bright weedy wildflowers! The morning sun shines clearly through the treetops, and we have come to free our souls. Let us leave our bicycles in the grass—while we revel in the richness of chicory, Queen Anne’s lace, and goldenrod.

Here at the roadside, whole banks of blue chicory flowers face in unison toward the brilliant life-source. Let us pause a while, letting their soft blue light soak through our tough mental skins. (Amazing that these flowers can feel so satisfying. Rather like the eyes of loved ones.)

Chicory, *Cichorium intybus*. Its dried roots are sometimes ground as a substitute for coffee, and in Europe the leaves have been used as salad greens for centuries. In America, on the other hand, chicory plants are more a visual feast (a morning feast, in fact, as the flowers typically close shut and wither after midday).

And well mixed among the chicory blossoms grow round, white doilies of Queen Anne’s lace. Each detailed doily is crocheted from hundreds of tiny white blossoms, the handiwork of *Daucus carota*. Wild ancestors of our cultivated carrots, these are beautiful and common

plants...though of course, to some people Queen Anne's lace are mere weeds. Pests. But I have found them just right for building sun-drenched reveries. Why else go walking in old, weedy fields? For open souls, these are lights in the field!

Grasshoppers snap from stem to stem and bees hum all around. Clouds drift in the sky. Birds call softly from trees along the fence, and, as we wander through these fields of weedy wildflowers, time seems to slow down. So much peace in such an ordinary place!

Goldenrods, too, toss their yellow *Solidago* plumes and sprays across the fields. How good it is to play among these dancing golden colors, among these organic earth-thoughts. How deeply exhilarating they are! Forthright messengers, they speak precisely for and about themselves: golden, golden, golden, golden....

Which calls to mind the academic assertion that great art entails more than mere imitation of nature. The true artist must manipulate a medium in order to improve upon or transcend ordinary experience. And so it is with us today! Our visits to these old fields and weedy roadsides are genuine artistic events...except that here *our souls* have become the artwork! Here *we* are the medium manipulated! Here we are the ones improved, the ones transcended! For we have come among the wildflowers seeking re-creation...and have found it. In the hands of an Artist whose face is cosmic, we have become the paint, the stone, the tone, the pen: seekers after lights in the field.

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Where else in the world can we go, but to nature, to discover or re-discover the extent of our confusion and misdirection? Only in nature are we released from the strictures and handicaps of culture. Since most of the time we are immersed in a sea of confusions, we have difficulty

keeping our sense of direction. We become badly disoriented. We do not realize our lostness. Only when we leave the cultural milieu and enter the contrasting world of nature—An Other Place—can we once again see the world, as Henry David Thoreau saw it: “grand and beautiful”.

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Going to nature, I enter another world. My citizenship changes. In a spontaneous engagement, nature and I come together in a mutual embrace. I go home. And home smiles on me, and takes me in, and says, “At last, we are together”.

For this encounter, this alteration of Perception, I need no space vehicle, no time machine, no cybernetic wizardry. Nor do I need drugs, drums, yoga, chanting, prayers, or elaborate rituals. I need only go into nature, seeking Harmony. I need only anticipate the wonderful—to open up my heart to whatever may happen. And usually I am richly rewarded.

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You cannot *think* your way into nature. Sure, you can learn *about* nature through reading or research. But if you would Commune, you must seek loving, personal contact with the world, a state of inner expansion and ecstatic abandon.

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Simply leave behind all of life’s tension and noise. Just walk away. Or simply ride away, drive away, boat away, fly away. Just get away from it all. Even if only to your own backyard.

Take care to go prepared. Wear suitable clothing for the season and the day, take a lunch perhaps, and don't be rushed. Be warm enough or cool enough to be comfortable. Most important of all, get away to na-

ture when the urge strikes. The most fertile moment is when you yearn for Communion.

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Communion is not entirely passive, for it entails an active kind of reception and expectation. Not the expectation of something we have preconceived, but an openness to whatever nature happens to offer us. We need to feel anticipation: a sense of total openness to ourselves, to our environment, to mystery. Communion needs alert expectation—not for a known reward, but for an unknown reward!

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The challenge is to be less clever and engineering, and instead, to let love of Harmony have its way, to let the Tao flow unobstructed. We *are* going somewhere; we need to feel that. We need faith.

When I Commune, it is not that I reach inside and grasp something precious. Nor is it that I seek out a pagan deity. Rather, Communion is my willingness to help a great, mysterious potential become manifest. I suppose nature is rather neutral—until the soul is free to love it. And then, when the soul is free, we perceive at last that nature is divine.

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### “Winter Stars”

At Winter Solstice, in the Heart of Winter, we need to be childlike. I mean, for a few days at least, adults need to become once again a child at heart. We need innocent wonder.

Winter Solstice is a time of stars and the spirit of childhood. For Christians it is the season of *the* star and *the* child. Yet everyone—Jews and Muslims, Pantheists and Atheists, Hindus and Taoists and Tefists—everyone can thrill to the Winter stars, and to the spirit of childhood. It is a universal heritage. Still, I wonder how many of us in this Winter season will pause to remember the nighttime skies of childhood? How many of us in this Winter season will renew our bonds with starry skies?

Look now

Far upon the night

Starry sky

Twinkling lights

Sharp

Crystal

Icy bright

Beyond the hand

Beyond the cry

Come, fill your soul with stars  
Drink them deeply from the night

Drink the starry crystal sky

Together

You and I

Do you find my starry joy too simple? Will you turn away, uninspired? No, no! Please stay! For if stars and childlike wonder no longer thrill you—then clearly you are dying.

Please stay! Reverse that trend! Dare to regain the elemental. Now. Hasten while you still can hear the faint inner voice. Now. Get your coat. Leave the town and stand upon a starry hill, out where you and the dark sky and the frozen earth can be together.

Look up and drink...drink the stars! (How else to say it? Embrace them? Engulf them? Soak them in?) For our seeking, upturned eyes, they are fresh raindrops, falling inward upon the deserts of our souls. Out beneath the open sky, be fully aware. Be fully awake. Seek oneness with infinity.

Winter brings us some of the brightest stars and boldest constellations of the entire year. At nine o'clock, high in the eastern sky, yellow Capella and orange Aldebaran sail upon the silent void: Capella in Auriga, the Charioteer; Aldebaran in Taurus, the Bull.

Beneath Capella shines the constellation Gemini: the Twins, Castor and Pollux, strolling sideways up the sky. And over there! Beneath Aldebaran, behold the Mighty Hunter, jeweled, glittering Orion, brightest of all the constellations, its stars scintillating in a range of hues: silver-white Bellatrix and Saiph; red-orange Betelgeuse; and—what a prize!—sparkling, blue-white Rigel.

Farther down, near the eastern horizon, welcome the sharpest, greatest star in all the night: Sirius—blazing, blue-frozen gem—eye of Canis Major, the Greater Dog. Not far away discover yellowish Procyon, chief star of Canis Minor, the Smaller Dog. Still other stars spangle across the sky. Hundreds, thousands of them. Lamplights among deep secret infinities.

And here are we, standing beneath them all. Yet, no one demands that we look up at them. Indifference to the stars carries no penalty. We may calmly ignore them. We may even allow our spirits to atrophy and die, if we choose.

But I choose to look! I need stars! They beckon, like old friends returning. This is the season of Winter Solstice and the Winter stars, and a time to renew my childness. Lest I die before my death. That I may actually live my life, alive.

So, come! Come with me! Let us drink together from the night!  
Let us drink the starry, crystal sky—together, you and I!

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Just how does one Commune in nature? It is as the Taoists say—“Those who know don’t say, while those who say don’t know”—almost. For Communion lies *beyond* words; you must *do* it. No one can *tell* it to you.

But try this. Sit down alone, somewhere in the woods. No need to be isolated, just be alone with yourself. Take time to release, to relax. Leave the ordinary world behind. Acknowledge that for now you are free—existing for a while in An Other Place, beyond the boundaries of society.

After a time of relaxing and feeling comfortable, begin to look and think beyond yourself. Anticipate the unknown, the unseen. Anticipate the mysterious! Expect miracles! Look out around you, taking nothing for granted. These trees are master-works of nature. Listen to them. Their silence speaks....

Alone, receptive, sensing. This is the posture of Communion. You have come to nature seeking the significant, the exhilarating, the expansive. Seeking the soothing, the humbling, the harmonizing. Seeking the real self. Through little things: touch of bark, smell of fungus, sound of wind among the sedges, play of light among the pines. Sense of forest, sense of earth, and a willingness to be—for a little while—a new you.

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Stand aside. Be not your own shadow. Let your soul live and act, unimpeded. Approach nature humbly. The Great Mother awaits you.

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Can you remember when the world was all new? When you had the infant's eye? When everything was fresh—because you were fresh?

—Icicles on your skin, born blood-hot from the womb

—Soft pink roses in your eyes, delivered out from the uterine dusk

—Hot peppers on your tongue, new-weaned from your mother’s milk

—Rumble-banging traffic in your ears, once resonant to maternal heartbeats.

From its first day, the child’s eye is the new eye. And we? We have forgotten. We have become the lazy-blind, the lazy-deaf, the lazy-dull.

Hey, listen! Nature is pleading with us: “Be greater than the child. Be young/fresh...*and* be old/wise!”

Come, lie down in tall grass and smell the tall grass. Roll in this windy tall grass and hear it sigh. Thrill to stalks rising skyward, and shout, “Hi, Beetle!”

Or stand silently in the shadow of firs. Let your mouth drop open...but with sounds rushing in, not out. Quiet the mind...and with luck you will hear again your own wordless voice.

What does it take? The conventional eye...and the unconventional eye, too! Climb trees, search among rocks, touch stones to your skin, run through the forest, squish mud with your toes, and have no inhibitions about lying down in tall grass and shouting, “Hi, Beetle!”

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Approach nature in a sensory, not overly-intellectual way. Minimize names and explanations. Stop asking, “What is this?” and “What is that?” Instead, let nature be! Don’t ask for something symbolic or ersatz.

In short, approach nature as little children do. Discount your preconceptions. Discount your past experience. Simply be innocent and open.

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If you would Commune with nature, go in a mood expectant, and out of mystery will be made manifest nature's potentials: perhaps a wary, creeping mammal, or a swiftly scudding cloud, or a shady glade beside a mountain stream, or an ancient juniper perched on a canyon rim. And each of these, when encountered with anticipation, will infuse you with emotions of joy and awe and reverence—and emotions beyond even these, emotions unique to the mystery at hand. The mood expectant is the mood of exploration, of confidence, of delight. It is the mood of childhood, one that adults must keep polished, lest mundane life tarnish it to dullness.

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### “The Sun Is Much To Me”

I worship the Winter Sun. It shines upon me and I accept it with gratitude. It gives me life, comfort, inspiration.

To be chilled and nipped by wintery gusts, and then to square my face and hands before the Sun's bright warmth—what a pleasure! Absorption! A rite of solar adoration widely celebrated by squirrels and fluffy round birds. I close my eyelids and commune with solar fire.

My companions, leafless trees, have lost their Summer verdure. Green growing organisms, in July they, too, were absorbing sunlight—but for a different purpose. Then, each leaf was blending bits of water

and carbon dioxide and minerals to yield—oh miracle!—living, organic, nourishing food: sunshine condensed into sugar and oil, into protein and starch. In Winter I remember this miracle and give thanks. Each nut, each apple, each bean, each potato—for all these I am thankful. And likewise for the flesh of animals, they whose nourishment comes from green plants: the sheep, the cattle, the chickens, the deer, the ducks, the fish.

Oh, yes! The Sun is much to me. It is energy to warm me: sunshine absorbed. It is energy to feed me: sunshine stored in the plants I eat. And it is energy to inspire me: Sun brilliance glancing through my pupils, striking, glinting upon divine potentials. As the rabbis say, “Light is the symbol of the Divine”. So...let the Sun shine in!

Some say I am pagan to worship the Sun, but thereby they reveal their own inner darkness. The Sun’s goodness self-evident, is it not? I partake of that good; I am part sunshine. I live suspended from the solar orb. Thus, I worship the Sun for good reason. I worship *it*, not a pagan deity. I worship the Sun and confirm my oneness with the universe.

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To commune with nature, just go to nature. Discover yourself there. Sitting quietly in the forest, feel the earth beneath you. Be alert to it. Touch the soil and look down at your sensitive hand. Then, recalling Ram Das, say to yourself, and to the whole universe: “Who is here? It is I! I am here, now!”

Climb to a windy summit. Or run upon a sandy beach. Or look up at the night sky, wondering at the stars. Then affirm again to all existence: “Who is here? It is I! And I am here, now !”

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Sometimes, when I am alone in the forest, I get a feeling of pure, animal wildness. I soak up the forest's serenity. I thrill to its beauty. Then I want to shout with joy at the sight of every tree. I want to run, and keep running, and run forever. I want to lose myself among the foliage. I want to merge with nature, to become a citizen of the forest, a denizen of the forest.

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We need to discover the many faces and moods of An Other Place. We need to savor a pebble, a tree, a turtle, a mountain: at all times of night and day, under all degrees of light and shadow, wind and calm, temperature and moisture. We need to witness nature throughout the four seasons, to see its infinite range of hues and lights, to hear its pleasant sounds and harsh sounds, to feel it upon our hands and skin, to taste and smell all its odors and fragrances. To commune with nature, we need to participate in nature.

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### “A Day On Pacific Shores”

Our car pulls to a stop. Sea beach and bold cliffs frame the Pacific surf below us.

“Down to the beach! Down to the beach!” And down we go—tumbling out of cramped car seats, dashing seaward with arms spread almost in flight, faces cutting the brisk sea wind, hearts thrilling and filling with exhilaration.

“Down to the beach!” First we hurry along paved walkways, then through dry dune sand, then across scrunching gray-blue shingle stones,

then out upon hard, wet beach sand. And at last we are running and jumping and dancing in swishing Pacific foam, white foam swishing up to greet us.

We face the open sea. Great white breakers, one after another, roll over and over in long, thunderous cylinders, pounding our ears in continuous rhythms of fizzing, foaming, collapsing crashes. Surf swashes up, chilly upon our toes, bearing gifts of glistening algae: some of it long, tough bull kelp, some of it tender shreds of green sea lettuce, some of it frilly red algae feathers. Gray-and-white gulls wing by us, crying shrilly, coursing down the beach on rigid wings, as if sliding along transparent cables.

We look up. We lean back. We fall down. We laugh and laugh and throw sand to the wind. We climb atop huge tree roots, sea-silvered wrecks from Winter storms. We wave our arms and shout to the sea, “Hurray! We’re here! We’re here!”

We have come for a day’s visit. Time to shout with ecstatic exhilaration, time to explore the entire beach, time to wander alone in quiet contemplation and introspection. Here we can run with endless abandon or pause for thoughts of self, society, and the universe. Time to be both wild and relaxed, both playful and reserved. And every moment will be suffused with sea and shore, enveloped in the pummeling crash and fizz, this perpetual crash and fizz of foaming sea beach breakers. A day on Pacific shores.

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To know nature best, we need solitude. Other persons can remain nearby, but we need to turn ourselves away from them. We need to feel alone, *unobligated* to anyone, to everyone. We must feel unfettered by the ties that bind us to society and to the everyday world. Our occupa-

tions and preoccupations need a chance to fade away. Only then are we prepared to Commune with nature.

Then, at last, we can resume our intimacy with the universe...and with ourselves. There, in nature, we can introspect, re-acquainting ourselves with ourselves.

Solitude feeds the soul. I find I am most myself when I am alone.

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To attain solitude, one may have to be assertive. Because of our personal inertias and because of our preoccupations with daily life, we have to be disciplined about seeking solitude. We may have to schedule times and places for it. And given the demands of our society—its indifference to the private life—we may have to be a bit ruthless in demanding that we actually have time alone.

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Solitude in one's room is not the same as solitude in the wild. A room holds us in solitary confinement, whereas the wild frees us for solitary expansion. The room is merely society without the crowd, whereas the wild is nature with an open soul. At times just one person can so distract our sensitivities and arouse our defenses that Communion is impossible.

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Ultimately, of course, each of us is silent and alone. The voice and pen may speak, but our speech is not the soul. It is only a symbol for it. Seek to hear the soul itself, not its symbols. One who is never silent and alone is never wholly himself.

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“A Communion Service”

Opening Poem:

“There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society where none intrudes,  
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar.  
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,  
From these our interviews, in which I steal  
From all I may be, or have been before,  
To mingle with the universe, and feel  
What I can ne'er express, yet can not all conceal.”

Lord Byron, “Apostrophe To The Ocean”

Invocation:

We have come to this special place to fill ourselves with nature, that we might be glad and worshipful. We have come to shift the focus of our souls, to alter our Perception. We know we seek but a temporary exaltation and joy and awe. For we know—we can remember—that another world, a world of culture, still exists somewhere, elsewhere. Yet

let us not dwell upon that world. Instead, let us fill ourselves with nature, with the here and now. Though the sights and sounds of culture may from time to time intrude, let us not attach to these: let them pass us by. We have come to An Other Place that we might fill ourselves with nature and thereby feel a gladness that we “can ne’er express, yet can not all conceal”.

Teaching:

When you come to An Other Place, stop. Look around. Then begin a search for beauty.

Perhaps it is Winter and you find only a few dry leaves still clinging to gray twigs, or some rattling, dry seed pods, or a net of barren branches overhead. Thus, perhaps beauty is scarce at first glance. If so, try this: *Pretend* that the plain or ugly things around you are actually beautiful. Say, “Yes, even these ugly things are beautiful”. Pretend this way even with regard to drab, gray tree trunks, Winter-dulled foliage, sodden mud, misshapen branches, or patches of dirty, melting snow.

With luck your pretending will surprise you. You may find many things now appear beautiful, where none had pleased you before. Finding beauty will then fill you with good feelings. Finding beauty is a tonic, always, at any season.

Processional/Recessional:

Let us take a walk in nature.

As we begin our walk, think of one or two things in nature about which you feel deep gratitude—something that has fed your body, delighted your senses, or thrilled your spirit. As we proceed, keep this thing at the center of your thoughts.

Stop, now, and search around for a symbolic reservoir for your gratitude, an object to carry the full weight of your feeling. For this purpose, find a small unattached object: a twig, a stone, a cone, a leaf. Grasp it in your hand. Silently pour into this object all the gratitude you can muster! Then, holding your symbol securely, carry it with you.

As we proceed, walking in silence, meditate on your object and on the grateful feelings you have poured into it. When we reach our destination, we will cast these symbolic reservoirs into the Great Surround of nature, giving back our gratitude for the benefits we have received.

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### Communion: Why Do It?

Henry David Thoreau was forever trying to get Concord and Massachusetts and America out of his head. Peace! Clarity! Simplicity! Give me equilibrium, he pleaded. Though all the world be giddy and insane, give me a calm, clear, serene point of view. So he went to the Maine woods and to Walden Pond. Or wading waist-deep in Concord swamps.

Even more than Thoreau, we, too, are entangled in culture's web. It has netted our wings, and we are forever straining to free ourselves. We are caught up by it—preoccupied by buildings and cars and smart phones, by taxes and politics, by loves and hates and jokes. To these we are subservient; by them we are oppressed. To rediscover Thoreau's serenity, we each need freedom from preoccupation—freedom to be the open-souled, free-willed, fresh-seeing, re-created being.

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We need so badly the illuminating perspective of nature. Ours is a world of runaway population, of environmental pollution, of violence and discontent, of artificial food and artificial joys. We seem hell-bent. Culture feeds on culture only; humans feed on humans only. Too little do we see ourselves from a distance, we are so ingrown. Must we always be a blind and staggering beast?

Now and then we need to gaze in the subtle mirror that is nature. The natural landscape offers us a much-needed contrast to our cultural landscape. For our yang it is a yin.

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“The world is too much with us...” as William Wordsworth opined. People and the works of people fill up our lives. We are obsessed with ourselves, only. Whenever I stand back and view the world from outside the human sphere, I witness vast selfishness, vast self-centeredness, vast indifference to nature. We lack consciousness of ourselves as citizens of the planet; we seem unaware of ourselves as the dominating species we have become.

Attainment of a broader, less human-centered perspective is one of the great benefits of Communion with nature. For in nature we are released from this blind obsession with humanity. As our Perception grows, our consciousness grows, and our anthropocentrism diminishes.

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It strikes me that this world is mad. Insane. And it also strikes me that Communing with nature can help us cure this madness. Human beings who have no “other”, who rely solely on themselves, go mad. And as they interact with one another, madman with madman, they compound their madness.

Where and who are the sane ones, the quiet-minded ones? I believe they are those who know an “other”. For some people, this may be a supernatural god or goddess. For some it may be the silent inner realms of deep meditation. But for me it is nature, An Other Place. There I am confronted with an outer reality, a not-self standard, beside which I can compare myself—a touchstone and a cornerstone for my life.

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My deep desire continues unchanged: to commune with the beauty that is given us, beyond the beauty that we can make. When we become sensitive to beauty everywhere, even in tiny things, then we become awe-struck, inundated by the beauty of the universe.

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### “Spirit Of The Woods”

The Spirit of the Woods—is it real? Do you believe it exists, they ask me. Well, yes I do. But I will have to explain.

It is true that I feel a mystery in the woods, something that lurks there, something that springs alive when I arrive and subsides when I leave. It may be my own spirit—gliding through the shadows, rejoicing in worship, splashing sunlight and color everywhere, sinking deeper into blue horizons, echoing as the woodpecker whacks on wood—just me, soul me, the inner sylvan deity.

But then...sometimes I feel the same mysterious Spirit outside the woods, too. Turning pages in my books about trees, reading their scientific names, and which regions they prefer, and when they blossom, and

which wild animals eat their seeds—sometimes the feeling of mystery is there, too. Just a hint of it. And I often wonder, did the book's author feel as I do? Has he or she felt the Spirit, too?

I also feel it in paintings by artists of the Hudson River School. Gaze upon those nineteenth-century landscapes by Cole and Durand and Church and Bierstadt. They portray the woods with an ecstatic sensitivity. In an opaline mountain haze or a blush of red sunset, the Spirit is there. It glows in the trunks of trees. It ripples in dark waters. Clouds and shafts of light are full of it. The Spirit of the Woods invites us in, draws us in, seeks Communion with us.

Sometimes those old paintings can even be better than real woods. Better, I mean, than being in the woods with distracting, unsympathetic company. For sometimes people who mean well may not sense the Spirit of the Woods. In their ignorance they may trample the Spirit. To be with them is defeating, almost criminal to oneself. The woods is a natural temple. Some people enter their temple quietly, proudly, reverently, seeking meditation and prayer. Others enter gaily, noisily, seeking fellowship and sermons. And the woods-temple can meet all of these needs. But whenever I seek to encounter the Spirit, I know I must enter quietly and alone. I must not have too much fellowship.

The woods-temple offers refuge from social stress. Its green halls relieve me of strains and distractions, relieve me of tugs and pulls and pretense. There I am confronted with nothing but the woods...and the Spirit. There I am free to listen to an inner voice, to the voice of my own soul. All nature becomes holy—all its colors, sounds, shapes, smells, patterns, textures, temperatures—all becomes holy, as the Spirit of the Woods sweeps through and around. Waves of solitude. Waves of reverence. Waves of joy and mystery. Therefore, yes, I say it really does exist: the Spirit of the Woods.

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In nature we experience joy, serenity, elation, excitement. Our whole being is aroused. The breaking of dawn awakens joy in the heels and heart. Fresh air and physical exercise restore tone to mind and nerves. Quietness and the absence of petty fears and tensions is good medicine. Communion with nature restores hope.

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We come to delight in nature, not knowing just why—calling it beauty, pattern, sublimity, and so on—but we do know that something about nature strikes deep, strikes home. It is exhilarating, something that language cannot share with those who have not first felt it. Somehow, the contours of nature fit us. They feel comfortable, like old clothes that have adjusted to our bodies.

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If I say: “I love nature, I care for all things”, does this mean that I have personified or deified nature? Yes, I would say I have, though only in a limited sense and to a limited degree. I confess my idolatry of the Sky and Earth.

But I do not repent. For I see nothing irrational, awkward, or embarrassing about loving nature. I enjoy the good feelings I have there. I like to love the not-self, to feel bonded with it. I seek to love nature and to care for it. Could I do anything more than this for the people in my life? Is not the main difference between people and nature merely this: that people can talk back?

Sometimes I may even love nature more than I love human beings. Is this immoral or abnormal behavior? No, I think not. It flows very naturally from the springs of love. Mere humanity is not my God.

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Thus, I desire perpetually to commune with nature, to indulge in an oceanic experience that floods my being and sweeps on, leaving me the satisfied kelp in its wake. This is the only tangible reality—how I perceive, how I feel. I pray, keep me not always shielded behind my culture. Coerce me not always to attend to others, but let me attend as well to myself and to nature. Culture should be a tool for fulfillment. It should never become an oppressive master.

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### “Transformation”

You have been out walking under dark and clouding skies. A day in Winter, deep in January. Eons will pass before Spring can reassert its power. Night soon approaches. In the west, thick, snow-filled clouds suffocate a feeble, late-afternoon Sun.

Beside the stream, nothing has disturbed the snow. Not even rabbit paws or junco feet. Dusky trees stretch skyward, motionless. Delicate ice blades fringe the entrance to a mouse tunnel. The waterfall, a former cataract, gurgles feebly within its frozen shell.

From rock ledges hang rigid rows of sharp, blue-white icicles. You draw your mittened knuckles across them, hoping to hear the sound of organ pipes. Instead, they give out a “thuck, thuck, ruckle thuck”—

more like bars in a gnome's prison. And who knows what may hide beneath, behind, among their shadows?

A foreboding spirit gathers. Now and then you glance behind...lest Old Man Winter sneak up from the shadows, shaking his shaggy beard and casting ice at you in a cold rage. More than chilled feet keeps you in motion.

Through the fading light, trees and hills merge into masses of gray and black. Shapes and angles that were so warm and alive at Summer's height have become cold, sinister, dead. Fallen black branches scribe mystical marks upon the snow. The sunny Summer log where you tamed a chipmunk has become an ominous, frozen hulk. And Summer's gentle boughs, dipping down over green slopes, now cower in their nakedness.

The silence is isolating. No one around. The whole Earth feels bereft of life, desolated. Far, far away a crow caws, but its thin voice is cheerless, like the lead-gray sky above.

In the east a murky Moon struggles to climb above snow-encrusted shrubs, and darkness slowly rises from an unreal earth to meet an unreal sky. You pause beside a snowy mass of rock, thinking, pondering: Do the moods of nature change from season to season? Or only the moods of me? The oriole has gone. Had she stayed, would she be disconsolate, too?

Finally, you cease to ponder, defeated. The Winter landscape reveals no answers. You have failed to Commune with this cold and snow, this darkness and loneliness. A shiver runs up your back. It is time to leave. A lone snowflake sifts down before your eyes. You gaze out across the icy earth, toward the Moon...watching...listening....

And then it happens! The sudden transformation! Inwardly something rebounds, something reaches out to harmonize with Winter. Suddenly the Moon, the hills, the trees caress your eyes, a poem of Winter Harmony. At once the air is alive, holding you motionless—engrossed, absorbing—eyes, ears, nose, skin, your whole being alert. You embrace this hill, this stream, this log, this Moon as yours...and you delight in the frigid warmth of Winter!

At last: Harmony with nature and with yourself. You *can* commune with Winter, after all! And nature, the mirror-mother of us all, surely feels contentment, for her child has come once more to wholeness. With ancient bonds restored, you will return to your dwelling, renewed.

You search the dim earth for a path. You exhale a white cloud, smiling. And the last crow caws from far through the woods.

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### Communion: Concluding Views

...and there in a daydream I heard a voice, singing in the wilderness, pouring out its whole heart. Was it myself I heard, worshipping deity *by being deity*? If not myself, then why so familiar? Have I ever sung or shouted from atop a rocky precipice? I can't recall, save a few echo times. But it seemed so familiar. Who was that voice in the wilderness?

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How shall the soul be heard? We need to hear it and heed it throughout our lives. In the heights of our elation, in the depths of our despair, throughout the business of daily life—we must help the mute soul express itself. To hear it clearly, we often need solitude: the stillness of hilltops, the verdure of forests, the storm-surge of the sea, the desolation of the desert and its winds. In nature, in solitude, we can hear at last the voiceless voice within.

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Too often we are a mantle over the Deity Within and a scene of war with our world. We neglect the superconscious. Therefore we must hasten into nature: there to worship, to rediscover our greater selves, to reclaim the more perfect, balanced selves we were as children—voiceless souls behind our faces, yearning to be manifest. Truly, the divine is not dead; it is merely stifled.

Among the highest experiences I enjoy are those in which I exalt the divine through contact with nature. Every expansion of soul in the presence of the wild is an act of worship. I do not intend to give this worship; I simply cannot help but give it.

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Sometimes we refer to a place as having a personality—the “genius” of the place. Upon consideration, we realize that this “genius” is largely a reflection of our own deeper selves, an outwelling of our fluid, oceanic souls. We fall in love, deeply, profoundly, even painfully at times. And the soul is sown in such places. We invest ourselves there. We cherish these as ours, even public places, legally owned by all.

Yet I am sorrowed by many of our public places. In fact, most are not truly public, for they are not first private. I am sorrowed because in-

tuitional investment in much of the world has been discouraged or inhibited. Places go unloved. They remain not only legally non-private; they are emotionally and spiritually non-private as well. Much—too much—of the world today lacks personal, spiritual investment. We have cut ourselves off from the genius of place. And for this I am deeply sorry.

For it is not nearly as tragic that we have mocked the sacred places of other cultures and other times, as that we have not yet acknowledged manifold sacred places in our own times. We shall remain incomplete as a nation until we have found our own holy lands and sacred places, everywhere.

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Those who are nearest to nature, those who identify with it most fully, are among the most fortunate of persons. By contrast, those whose lives are limited to the cultural world are—in my view—the trapped, the deprived, sufferers of spiritual malnutrition. For in communing with nature—from its most insignificant parts to its most awesome parts, from its most beautiful to its most ugly, from its most ordinary to its most sublime—one communes with something divine. One feels a oneness with the infinite and the timeless. One senses the immediacy of reality.

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I need to feel cradled by, or immersed within, something greater than myself. Something womb-like, something fundamentally good and harmonious, something toward which I feel gratitude. For me, this need is often met by nature and my Communion with it.

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I believe Communion brings us great wonder, great joy, great enlightenment. I believe that oneness with nature yields contentment, security, and deep gratitude. I believe that our scientific study of nature should prepare us to live harmoniously with it, not to exploit it and cause its ruin.

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Communion is reunion: of oneself with one's world, of one's soul with nature. It is a pilgrimage back to the Garden of Eden, a brief return to the Womb. Communion brings us Harmony.

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Some of us live within our Mother. Others live outside Her. Some of us are supremely content with our Mother, seeking never to bruise Her, but to love Her. Others abuse Her, until She is exhausted. Then they die—inwardly, if not outwardly also.

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Worship in nature is exercise of the spirit. Daily the soul cries out for exercise, for spiritual activity. We need to worship: to commune, to wonder, to be glad, to feel humble, to give thanks, to join in oneness, to do and be that which gives us deep expression and deep contentment. To do this, surprisingly, we need not believe any particular creed or dogma. We need only be open to the presence of the divine. And for me, as for many other “nature persons”, the divine emerges best in the solitude of nature.

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Have I ever said it this explicitly—that in order to *worship* we do not have to *believe*? I think religious skeptics and religious zealots both overlook this distinction. Belief is an *intellectual* act, based on facts and/or faith, and it has its deities and laws and theology. Worship, by contrast, is *intuitional*. That is, it consists of Communion and veneration—sometimes assisted by Intellection, but not dependent on it. Thus, whereas our beliefs are always open to skeptical attack, our worship is authentic and spontaneous and beyond criticism. Worship does not require belief. Worship asks participation only.

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What am I living for? One thing only: to worship, to harmonize, to love.

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I can make only one genuine profession, drawn not from thought or belief, but from my own direct experience of nature: Peace, calm, serenity, solitude, quiet, contentment, gladness—I feel all of these in nature. There is no better place in which to meditate and muse and ponder. Such silence, such beauty! Such an indescribable feeling of contentment and love of life! I am glad.

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## “Wilderness Prayer”

I pray that I may come to know  
The Spirit of the Wilderness.  
I pray that beauty and wildness  
May steep my soul.

Oh, cast me forth where awe  
And delight and wonder and exhilaration  
May sweep away my breath  
And leave me humbled.

This I pray.

Vast mountains, deep forests,  
Hear my cry!  
Where sunshine yields to furious storms  
And then shines again—  
Make this my home.

Lift me up and make me strong,  
And give me the power  
To understand, the power to love,  
The power to rejoice.

This I pray.

O Wilderness:  
I would be a withered branch  
Or lonely rock  
If so being should bring me  
To your temple.

This I pray.

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### **Chapter 3: CONTEMPLATION OF NATURE, A TEFIST PATH OF THE INTELLECTION SECTOR**

In Chapter 1, I described ten Sensory Techniques for relating to nature. These paths emphasized the Sensation Sector (L.1) and the sensory channels. In Chapter 2, I presented seed thoughts from the Tefist path that I call Communion with nature, a path to Harmony that merges the Sensation Sector with the emotions and empathies arising from the Intuition Sector (L.2). Now, in this chapter I will explore some seed thoughts, poems, and short essays from a Tefist path that makes greater use of the defining and form-giving powers of the Intellection Sector (L.3). I call this path Contemplation of nature.

Earlier, I called nature “An Other Place” to emphasize its contrast with human culture. Contemplation of nature sharpens and deepens our consciousness of the Other Place. Through Contemplation we can come to appreciate that nature is actually our home after all, that in fact we still depend upon it both materially and spiritually. Nature is our “original” context. Though it has been partly transformed into culture, which is our newer, “additional” context, still we cannot live our lives fully without honoring and protecting that “original” Other Place.

This chapter explores many aspects of our relationship with nature. To get the most from it, *you may need to read it, reread it, ponder it, and challenge it*. (By intent, these Contemplations are somewhat randomly presented; do not expect a formal, linear development of ideas here.) As you react to these Contemplations, whether positively or negatively, try to pinpoint what impresses you about them. Do they ring true? Have they any relevance in your life? Are they half-truths? Can they be improved? Are they biased, mean-spirited, or embarrassing? Or are they pearls of wisdom, cast freely upon a yearning world? In any event, try to see how your life is enhanced, or may yet be enhanced, by Contemplation of nature.

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## Deep Within Labyrinthine Culture

Here, deep within labyrinthine culture, we burrow like blind termites. We are thoroughly culture-bound.

Yes, nature still lies all around us: rivers, mountains, lakes, deserts, the sandy shore. But what is our immediate, tangible environment? What fills up our thoughts and hearts?

Consider how much our lives are consumed by artificial things: mobile phones, computers, televisions, movies, newspapers, highways, cars, houses, offices, classrooms, shopping malls. Consider how our thoughts and hearts are preoccupied with texting, taxes, profits, expenses, forecasts, work assignments, sports, and misplaced shopping lists. We are lost in culture, locked deep within the labyrinthine dungeons of our daily affairs. More than two hundred years ago, the English poet and nature lover, William Wordsworth, had it right!

“The World is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;  
Little we see in Nature that is ours....”

Not that we seek to become wild primates again, or even nature mystics living in retreat. We are technology-dependent citizens in a crowded, unstable world. Very few of us seek a full return to the wild. But our dependency on culture does not mean we are wise to completely ignore nature. No, exactly because we are more and more creatures of culture, more than ever we need contact with nature.

We have broken our bonds with nature, gradually modifying both it and ourselves to create the artificial lives we live. This process is not complete, however. We still depend upon nature for the material basics: light, air, water, food, fuel, building materials, a place to live and work and play. It is the planet we live upon and therefore an ecologic and economic necessity.

And we still need nature for all the psychic benefits it offers. Nature is neither us nor the artificial world we have created. Rather, it is “An Other Place”, a contrast. I believe that only by contrasting ourselves with something other than ourselves, only by drawing upon such a contrast for perspective and insight, only by seeking to relate to nature, emotionally and intellectually—only in this way can we know who we are, what we are, where we are, and where we ought to go next.

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For many centuries, nature—wild nature—was regarded as a source of evil. Those days, I hope, are gone. Now nature can become—needs to become—the great civilizing influence in our lives. We are

yang; it is yin. Without it, we cannot live life fully, we cannot love life fully.

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We humans are sight-dominated creatures. Visual experience is our dominant sensory channel. Hearing, savory, tactility and other sensory inputs are all secondary to experience of the eye. Our images are mostly visual ones. But although vision dominates, it is not alone. It needs corroboration. Filling this role especially is tactility, our need to touch. The hand confirms the eye.

No baby is content with merely seeing. Babies want to reach out, contact, fondle, manipulate, experiment. And adults are much the same. Thus, many people seek to confirm the beauty of wildflowers by picking and holding a bouquet. Others blast away with birdshot, seeking to confirm the wild reality of ducks in flight. Some pry loose flakes of pine bark, just to be sure the tree's immensity is not an illusion. And we humans meddle: stepping on ants to see what happens; pushing against balanced boulders to see what happens; damming up streams to see what happens. We are cool to the prohibition, "Look, but don't touch".

Tactile and manipulatory interaction with nature is basic to our species. We love to touch. But too often this basic need brings harm to nature. Sad to say, we can simply "love" nature to death. Thus, we have a problem: how best to manage our human need for touch and manipulation. How can we handle the sacred vessel without breaking it? What shall we *do* with nature...and yet keep it whole? Which means, in the last analysis, what shall we do with *ourselves*?

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## “Forbearance”

Have you ever found lavender Shooting Stars  
And delicate, soft-yellow Violets  
Blooming in the moist Spring air,  
Perfect companions for a Larkspur bouquet,  
But knowing how they wilt, left them untouched,  
Sacrificing impulse  
For the preservation of beauty?

Have you ever seen white Toadstools  
Legislating in a woodland Congress,  
Been tempted to push them all over,  
Thus to acknowledge their existence,  
But felt guilty at the first torn mycelium,  
And quietly stole away,  
Amazed by such clumsy compulsions?

Have you ever spied a Wren  
Braced sideways on a stalk,  
Some sharp-billed little jack-snap  
With an over-starched tail, screaming  
And scolding and much too bold for its size,  
And flexed your muscle,  
Yet held the stone, unthrown?

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Sometimes I find myself feeling self-conscious—even guilty—about seeking solitude. As if briefly straying from my society were a betrayal, a near-treasonous act. Of course, I know there are many reasons why people do not seek solitude: preoccupation, fear, unfamiliarity, ignorance, lack of suitable sites, avoidance of self-assessment. But should guilt ever be a reason?

Fair and cautious scrutiny tells me the problem is not mine alone. I note that our society rarely encourages solitude and the independence of mind it nurtures. When did you last hear the President or the Mayor or the Clergy wish you a happy day of solitude? We rarely read about solitude in the newspapers—only stories about social and antisocial events. Why is solitude never openly and sincerely encouraged? My best guess is that solitude is seen and felt as a threat to the order of culture.

Hermits are rarely idolized in American society, at least not for pursuing their personal quest. Thoreau's two-year experiment at Walden Pond, while admired by some, is still generally regarded as peculiar behavior. Only when the hermit returns, penitent or full of wisdom—useful to society—is approbation given. And then guardedly. We fear, I suspect, that the hermit may return with too much wisdom, with insight that may challenge or subvert the reigning order and the status quo.

How sad! Solitude—the solitude of nature—is essential to the future of our kind. The more we encase ourselves in culture, the more we actually need to get outside of culture, into nature. Solitude is essential for such extra-cultural journeying, for until our social links are broken, we cannot hear our own soul or merge deeply with the wild. Society, unfortunately, does not seem to like broken links, not even for a moment.

How sad! Rather than discourage our truancy from culture, we as a society should honor our real needs. I say we should openly encourage such truancy. For we cannot save ourselves wholly from within our culture. We cannot exist—emotionally, spiritually, philosophically—without nature. Should I ever feel self-conscious for seeking to restore my bonds with nature, bonds that can nourish a sane, enlightened, happy existence? No, I should not. Rather, I should feel—and enjoy—society's clear, strong approval.

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“Woodland Experience #3”

Each tree

Mute trunk attached to earth

You can really trust a tree

Each tree

Feelings of quietness

Of unfeigned gentleness

Feelings of great time

Great Harmony

Great Tao

Each tree

A thought

Not manspun

An order

Not willed

Unordered order  
Unharmonized Harmony  
Softly sweeping boughs

Each tree  
Mute bole of hope  
You can really trust a tree

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We humans seek control. Never satisfied, we meddle and manipulate and transform and reorganize. We impose ourselves upon the world.

Note well, however: When we gain control over things, we gain it for better or worse! Prior to the wholesale imposition of our will upon nature, our excuses for unpleasantries in life were “luck” or “fate” or “providence” or the “whims of nature”. But as we actually gain control over nature—as we assume real power and become the key cause of events—now the outcomes of our actions become primarily our own fault. Thus, more and more, our control of nature saddles us with a crushing responsibility. From this time on, regarding the outcome of our meddling with nature, good or bad, we can praise or blame only ourselves.

Is this really what we want? Are we willing to accept—to burden ourselves with—responsibility for the whole of nature? Do we really want to become nature’s dominating symbionts? And risk becoming its lethal parasites? Whatever happened to the reverential attitude: our *trust* in nature? Nothing now so marks our species as overbearing self-confidence...arrogance...hubris.... Is our physical domination of nature worth its psychic cost? Does anyone even care? Does anyone even know? I think we may have grabbed Tyrannosaurus by its tail!

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### We Are Unspeakably Wealthy

We are unspeakably wealthy, we who live here in Southern Oregon. We are rich, very rich. Credit cards cannot buy the majesty of our mountains, or the rich green of our forests, or the evening home-flight caws of our crows. We Oregonians are more blessed than we seem to know. Our whole landscape is precious, sacred. Let us pause to take stock, to acknowledge our dependency upon this land we inhabit. We are very rich.

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“Spiderwasp”

There it was upon the sand

A miniature carving

Cut from living sapphire

Its flitting wings

And nervous legs

Glinting deeply

Sparks of indigo

But away it went

A zig

zag

in the sun

Receding to the sky

farther

gone

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I stroll down a hill path with trees on either side. Looking up at trunks and boughs, I realize the relativity of things. These lofty green crowns—Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine—set the standard by which I perceive the size and location of all else. Well, almost all else, for of course the highest of high is the celestial sphere, showing through the boughs by day as rich blue sky and white clouds, by night as starry darkness and a yellow moon. But the trees establish the standard for this place right now, this green forest, at this moment. They are the loftiest of earthbound things within my view, so high almost I can't say how far, almost merging with the lowermost clouds. The tallest trees are the big upness here; elsewhere they might appear ordinary, maybe even puny. Within limits, it seems, the impressions of nature are determined by contrast, rather than by absolute measures. Indeed, I know that many other of my perceptions are not wholly rational or predictable. Yet they are always true.

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How to see the world? If we think about it, we realize the world is both what we see—our Sensation—and what we add to our seeing—by way of Intuition and Intellection and Memory. But parts of our world do entail mostly Sensation. And much of this is visual.

Here are six levels of visual percepts:

(1) The Landscape—This is an entire vista, an area much larger than one can immediately use, such as a mountain range, a canyon, a broad lake

(2) The Locality—This is the neighborhood, sacred precinct, work zone, or an vicinity suited to living, such as a woodland, a small hill, an oasis

(3) The Room—This is the human body’s immediate surroundings, such as a cabin, a cave, an open glade, or a small grove of trees

(4) The Body—This is the human body’s own space, a volume roughly 2-7 feet high and 1-4 feet in diameter, mid-way in the scale of things

(5) The Big Object—This is something smaller than the human body, but larger than a fingernail, such as a ripe pumpkin or a moist frog

(6) The Small Object—This is something smaller than a fingernail, but visible without aids to vision, such as a red mite or a wheat seed or a grain of sand.

Two additional levels of perception, however, entail not merely Sensation, but also great amounts of Intellection (idea and/or imagination):

(a) The Macrocosm—This is the big world, partly inferred or imagined by the mind and partly observed using telescopes and satellites: geographic regions, continents, oceans, planets, galaxies, the entire universe; in other words, the telescopic world

(b) The Microcosm—This is the tiny world, partly inferred or imagined by the mind and partly observed using microscopes and particle accelerators: spores, microbes, molecules, atoms, subatomic particles; in other words, the microscopic world.

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Landscape architects are aware of the kinesthetic impressions we get from trees. Indeed, who has not felt at some time an almost physical force in the presence of trees, sensing them as, say, “uplifting”, or “soothing”, or “majestic”? Professionals who plant trees for aesthetic

purposes are influenced by this sense of motion and power and personality of trees. These kinesthetic impressions are reflected in their decisions about what to plant, how fully to prune or thin, where to locate viewpoints, and which native species to encourage.

When I hike among Oregon's Siskiyou and Cascade Mountains—uplands dominated by coniferous trees—I always receive strong kinesthetic impressions, especially from young white firs and red firs. These young fir trees are often quite trim and symmetrical and draw my attention immediately. Of course the effect is partly due to their rich, green color, partly to their balsamic aroma, partly to the exhilarating mountain air and scenery that go with them. But in large measure, their impression is due to the kinesthetics of their natural form and “motion”.

First, these fir trees liberate us. Their pencil stems point skyward: their up-reaching branches, at mid- and upper-tree, draw our eyes heavenward. Their conical, spire-like crowns lift us upward toward infinity, freedom, and ecstasy—hinting at Sky Deities.

Second, the fir trees center us. They subordinate everything to a single main trunk, radiating whorls of side branches at regular intervals up the stem. Thus, they are organized with formality, simplicity, and symmetry. Moreover, the trunk is rooted firmly into the earth. To me, these characteristics suggest connectedness, fixity, location, home, security, and centeredness—hinting at Earth Deities.

Third, the fir trees calm us. Their dark green or bluish-green boughs protect and soothe. The mountainsides are softly furred in fir. Their verdure wraps around us, protecting and comforting and hiding us. And the lower boughs of fir trees sweep downward and outward in a benediction that is murmured visually: “All is well. Rest in joy. Rest in peace.”

Finally, the fir trees integrate us. That is, they admirably combine all their kinesthetic miracles within a single object: They inspire, liberate, connect, locate, protect, and calm—all in a single tree. They offer to the eye a gestalt of integrated wholeness. In this sense they function much like stupas, pagodas, and steeples: religious architecture.

Given these kinesthetic impressions of firs, is it any wonder that nature persons often get “hyper” when loggers clearcut the forest? Who can watch without flinching while acres of sacred shrines are cut down with chainsaws? I agree that the aesthetic and spiritual values of trees are not their only values: I, too, use wood. But still, when one’s first reaction to trees is a strong, positive, kinesthetic, and spiritual one, is it any wonder that the second reaction is shock and outrage at their destruction?

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“O Dandelion: Greetings! Though my friends may scoff at me, I speak to you out loud.

“Again, O Dandelion: Greetings! Why do I speak to you, O Thing of Green Leaves and Yellow Flowers, Vegetable Thing, incapable of reply?

“I speak because I wish to acknowledge you. Whenever I speak your name, as if you were a person, you become to me, not more human, but somehow more vegetable. Speaking your name, I acknowledge your concrete, tangible existence. You take on greater reality, greater depth—not in the name itself, but in my act of speaking it in your direction.

“And more, O Dandelion: As you gain depth from my voice, I gain depth from you. Your existence expands my existence. O Dandelion, you help create me ! And for that I thank you! Yes, I thank you!”

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Common, everyday things: robins on the lawn, shrubs on the hillside, clouds in the sky. Common, everyday things that go unheeded, almost invisible to us. We look right through them.

Our sight fails us. We lack eyes for the ordinary. Is there anywhere an ophthalmologist who can cure *this* sorry blindness? How can we learn to see again the common, everyday things, the miracles?

We can! We, the common, everyday people.

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### “Orange Setting Sun”

From an urge to write

Beautiful things

I wrote

About the orange

Setting sun

On dusty pine needles

And the irrigation ditch

Where grass plumes

And little blue flowers  
Held root in bottom sand  
Water-smoothed  
By soft ripples

And I wrote  
About the air  
Full of bird sounds  
Nighthawks in power dives  
And swallows in bug maneuvers

Cool caressing air  
Tempered  
By fields and meadows  
And ditch-water  
Where skippers skittered  
In ripple centers

But when I had written

Beautiful things

I found

Only pine dust

In my book

The beautiful trees

Had been but gently

Touched

By the orange setting sun

And my pen

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Here I stand, surrounded by flat, featureless turf, in one of our city parks. This is a place for exercise and play, for both the body and the imagination. This smooth turf is an ideal, cultured space in which to act, to manifest my potentials. Nothing—no thing—has been left to block my way, not one toe-stub to interrupt or annoy me. Just smooth, green grass.

We like these simplified green places. We even surround our houses with them. When we create our parks we often take a natural plant community, level it somewhat, rearrange it, and “improve” it into

a lawn. Something in us seems uneasy about too many shrubs and weeds and trees. Are we afraid of hidden dangers: slithering snakes and stalking lions and sneaky, ravenous baboons? And would we, in our heart of hearts—full of fright and full of ego—would we level *all* of nature, entirely? Would we have all the land—the whole world—be as bald as this city park? Or do our parks reflect only the mental profiles of a specific minority of human beings: professional park designers?

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The forest gives us shelter, security. The grassland gives us space, opportunity. So, we seek adventure out on the grassland, whereas we retreat back into the forest. Yet the forest, though safer, is limiting and crowded, whereas the grassland, though wide-open, is exposed and risky. Our psyches oscillate between forest mind and grassland mind—not at all surprising for primates who evolved at the forest fringe.

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Exploring new and *seemingly* untouched country, “land where none has gone before”, stimulates fresh and thrilling psychic relationships. Any place lacking a known history or existing culture or other human associations invites our exploration and welcomes the blossoming forth of brand new psychic potentials. We can freely invest ourselves there, flowing forth our minds and hearts, merging our intuitional creativity with nature to generate sparkling new worlds, new mythologies, new dreams, indeed new ecologies of self and place.

Wilderness areas and other wild lands are excellent candidates for this, but we can dream new ecologies into even the tired and culture-laden lands around us. We need only the freedom to wonder, to imagine, to love. Managers of land and natural resources will do society a great

service by striving always to preserve our opportunities for exploring “new” and *seemingly* “untouched” country. Their task becomes an art.

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The human body can be played like a fine musical instrument. Taking ourselves into nature, we can let sunshine, stream water, wind, bird-song, and hums of insects play through us, stirring our strings at their resonant pitches. A walk in the woods, across a desert, or along the shore can make of us a Stradivarius—at least in a bull market!

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Those who set the human person at the pinnacle of value—far above any and all else in creation—have surely never felt humbled before nature. For I am certain that anyone who has ecstatically communed with nature—with An Other Place—can nevermore hold themselves or their kind in overweening regard. Transcendence of self shatters our shell of finitude and opens us to the entire universe. We settle down from our lofty esteem of self and species, extend welcome to the “other”, and thereby mend a deep rift in reality. We mature.

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So much of life requires the active mode. We feel compelled to act, that we may eat, and clothe our children, and have sex, and keep the world secure. It's all busy-ness and talky-ness.

How refreshing, then, to find a setting just for silence! In nature we can listen. We can open outward, relaxing into the receptive mode, letting things influence us as they will.

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“Star Prayer”

O Night-Star, Arcturus

I give to you

A dusky bough

A foggy valley

A dying moon

and

A barking dog

Watch over all these

O Night-Star, Arcturus

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Those who appreciate the beauty of our universe discover the divinity of nature. Those who perceive nature’s beauty fill a deep inner need. They affirm the goodness of living.

Who among us are the champions of natural beauty? Who are the clergy of pantheism, the professional guides to rapture in nature? Who among us know the beauty of minerals, insects, wildflowers, storms, and stars—and can guide us and help us to more fully share in this beauty? Who in our culture have the noble calling of leading us back to Walt Whitman’s “costless average, divine, original concrete”?

Not scientists, for their chief goal is intellectual: the creation, refinement, and dissemination of conceptual truths. Their concern is neither with sensory depth nor with feeling and sentiment.

Not artists, it seems, for many artists appear preoccupied with social commentary and psychological probing. And usually they end up altering the face of nature through their art.

Not educators, regrettably, for our school curricula are skewed toward urban life and cognitive learning.

Not even recreation leaders, for appreciation of beauty is largely receptive and inward, whereas most recreation is oriented toward outward, physical activity.

A few religionists, perhaps, but most of these are hobbled by the notion that to be sensuous is to be sensual—and besides, they tend to be preoccupied with sin and the agonies within our culture.

So who shall speak for natural beauty? Not many professionals, it seems. In my experience, the champions of beauty are mostly amateurs: field trip guides, scout leaders, home gardeners, obscure poets, and assorted sentimentalists. These are all fine people and I love them. Unfortunately, our society gives them little money or esteem for their gifts to the world. We seem to regard the whole area of beauty as either too individual and subjective for effective leadership or too superficial and light-weight for professional attention. Too bad.

The slaking of our thirst for natural beauty must not be bypassed as merely subjective, superficial, or insignificant. Beauty is basic to our humanity. We need to face this fact and actively promote the aesthetic life of all our citizens. I am biased, of course, but I say we need more Tefists!

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Why is nature such a precious psychic resource? Many reasons, of course, but certainly one of the greatest is that nature helps us to transcend the self. It is an antidote to egocentrism. We recognize nature as not-self, as “other”, and when we give it our attention, we realize that we *receive* it. It is *given*. Instead of coming out of ourselves, as culture does, it comes *into* us, rather like a gift.

Having received this gift, and having acknowledged it, we feel gratitude and even love. Our expression of this love and gratitude, because it is love of an “other”, is not complicated by the intricacies of human love. It is free: Our love toward nature is “free” love, unre-served and sincere. However, I like to believe that in receiving nature’s gifts, and thereby transcending the self, and in giving our “free love” in return, we gain experience that is useful in the greatest of all human so-cial challenges: how best to love one another.

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The Body is our interface with the world. Here mind engages its surroundings, and soul meets environment. Through the Body we plug into the world. We cannot easily and consistently point to the boundary between self and not-self, but we can see that the Body brackets this in-definite line.

Therefore, to ignore or suppress the Body can only lead to isolation and alienation of the self from the world. We risk a schism in an other-wise integrated system. The Body needs, instead, to be fully engaged with its world, both natural and cultural, both in the active mode and in the receptive mode. Any and all re-integration of the human being with nature involves this interfacing zone, the Body.

Sad to say, however, the current trend seems toward making the Body obsolete. All manner of tinkering, from egg to grave, alters the Body: drugs, mechanical parts, electrical stimulators, transplanted animal organs, eyeglasses, hearing aids, and so on. Will the end result be the transplantation of the human brain, a la Frankenstein, into a robot or an interfacing mechanism? What would prevent this trend from its consummation? Why *should* we prevent it? I really can give no reason, save this: some deep intuitional *hunch* as to the rightness and fitness of the evolved organism within its natural, evolutionary setting. For some reason, that I cannot explain, to me the whole, unaltered organism is good.

And if such a human-to-robot transformation should come to pass, how would we—as robots—set about objectively evaluating our lives? That is, lacking any remnant of real, organic, natural Bodies living harmoniously in real, healthy, natural habitats, what standard would we, as robots, have for judging our transformation? How would we know that we had made either a great, historic mistake—or a great, historic advance? Our perennial desire to be free of the confining, vulnerable Body seems, to me, simplistic, premature, immature, and probably dangerous, at least if value—the affective quality of our experience—is our final criterion.

By the way, what is *your* final criterion in life?

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Most of the time we are trapped within—and limited by—the cultural world. When we do cross over into nature, we experience a cross-fertilization, creating a whole that is greater than either culture or nature alone. This is one reason living in the country—in between city and wilderness—can be attractive: By living near the *physical* boundary be-

tween culture and nature, we can more easily and frequently cross between them *psychically*. We get the advantages of both places: our usual place and An Other Place.

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Are Not Fossils Due Respect?

Are not fossils due as much respect as our own dead? Are not slabs of preserved leaves and beds of fossil bones due just as much care and reverence as our own tombstones and graveyards? They, too, lived and died! They, too, were our ancestors!

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Sooner or later, one way or another, on Sunday or on Monday, we need to express our indebtedness and our gratitude to nature. We need to express our wonder and awe, our joy and exhilaration. We need to worship.

I know, of course, that believers of some religions instruct us to direct our gratitude toward a single deity, a spirit that they believe transcends both person, society, and nature. For them, the honoring of nature risks idolatry. Yet surely their objections are too strict, for even by their own creeds, nature is the handiwork of Deity. Honoring the handiwork honors the Handiworker, does it not?

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One: "I can't worship well in temples, so I worship in nature."

Two: "Which deity do you worship there? The same one—the deity of the temples?"

One: “No, only rarely at most. Usually I do not worship any deity. Worship does not require an object—did you know this? We invent and invoke deity because the intellectual mind wants a focused object, whereas our intuitional worship does not need an object for its gratitude. Deity serves to hold the mind’s attention, keeping it distracted and satisfied. This allows the heart to worship without interference.”

Two: “Worship without an object, without a deity? I can’t believe it!”

One: “Well, can you believe loneliness without an object? Or playfulness without an object? Or sexual desire without an object? Or good will without an object? Why not worship without an object? Call it ‘recreational worship’, if you like! Why limit our worship to *deity*-worship? Must *everything* in life be turned into a *social* transaction?”

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Summer has come to Southern Oregon, and at this season I attend to the land and its life. For many months my debt to Earth has been building: during July and August, with their long weeks of heady heat; September, with its ripening harvest; October, with its red and saffron leaves; November, with its lingering blossoms of thistle and chicory; December, lying quiet under fog and snow; January, gestating beneath star-spangled skies, at the bottom of the year; February, with its lengthening days and greening grass; March, glowing with daffodils of heart-piercing freshness; then April and May, surging with warmth and growth; and now June, at high summer’s threshold—during all these months I have been building a debt, storing up gladness and gratitude toward nature.

Now, with Summer, I come to a time for expression. I invite people everywhere to join me in worship, in their own way, in their own place. Let us neglect theology, neglect science, neglect our daily preoc-

cupations—turning away from these in order to feel deep gladness for our life in this grand, phenomenal world to which we are born. Let us worship.

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“Deep Summer’s Ecstasy”

White-starred daisies waving in the wind,  
Bending in unison,  
Exhilarated by each Summer moment,  
Wishing no more than the joy of Sun and breeze...

And overhead, the high blue Sky, scattered  
By passing patches of brilliant gray and white:  
Fluffy clouds floating and floating  
In a ceaseless Summer pageant.  
Time is endless, or so it seems,  
And the whole Earth basks  
In a trance of joy—  
Deep Summer’s ecstasy.

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When I was a little boy, the trees were tall. We lived and played among the trees—my brothers and I—and I remember how high the trunks reached up, way up, with big dark branches and evergreen boughs.

It was Western Oregon, land of Douglas-fir and bigleaf maple; land of plums and raspberries and string beans; land of rain. We lived there for seven years; I was almost nine when we left. Now, years later, I realize how much that place affected me. Those trees, the hills, the rain, the flowers, the freedom to explore—those things molded my early life.

Nature continues to mold the lives of children who chance to live in it or near it. This is the influence of Communion with nature, that inner rapport with An Other Place that all ages can share. It is primal worship.

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Each environment has its “genius”, or spirit, but I know that that genius is only partly the environment itself. Part of it is me. Thus, when I wish to experience broadly and deeply, I seek out environments that both speak *to* me and evoke *from* me. In a sense, my Communion in nature is both statement and query, and I am both giver and receiver. Thus, an oak grove is at once both a unique physical place and a site for expression of my body and psyche. So also is a rocky bluff. And a lake shore. And a fern field. And a shady forest.

If I am to have a rich and healthy inner life, I must have a rich and healthy outer life. A monotonous setting encourages a monotonous soul. I need oaks and rocks and lakes and ferns and firs. Without them I am stunted and malnourished.

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Here in the woods many sounds come to me. They pass right through me. Wind in boughs, birds in the air, creek in its pebbly bed—all these sounds wash right through me like surf. I let them in; I let them ripple through me; I let them go their way.

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### “Southern Oregon Summer”

Once again, Summer settles over and around and through us. The mountains’ stony thighs have tanned to a dry dun beneath hot skies, their heads cool under mantles of green fir. Daily the raw Sun traverses a cloudless blue dome. The air reaches 100 degrees Fahrenheit. On occasion, a thunderstorm follows, gathering above us and jolting the sweaty afternoons with gastric rumblings and jabs of yellow lightning. Nights are asong with cricket lyrics, assuaged with cooling air.

By day: Sun, heat, and a spot of shade. Hay fever. Squinting eyes. Athlete’s foot. Sharp cheatgrass seeds that sneak through sock-tops, damn it! And lusty birds calling “Quick, Three Beers!” from tall fir to tall pine, from flycatcher to rival flycatcher. June’s tiny fawns hide in secluded bracken beds, evading big-booted humans. July’s madrone bark splits up and down the trunk, peeling back Clark Kent ribbons of red-brown paper—exposing smooth, bronze-green muscles underneath: Super Madrone! August is a dry and mature month, embellishing high mountain meadows with sneezeweed, monkshood, false hellebore, and senecio—all leading toward September and its fulfillment of goldenrod, rabbitbrush, bursting seed capsules, earliest Autumn leaves, and the Equinox.

Summer nights: dusk, silhouettes, cooling drinks, and rest. Bats flitter by, snowy tree crickets chime the temperature, people lounge beside tomatoey gardens and wait for Capella to rise. Young raccoons run wild, learning from their mothers.

Summer is not a good season for inner reflection; the mind-sharpening chills of Autumn are better for that. Nor is it a good season to begin new projects, for the brain is too hot, too tired, and the Body too engaged with growth and sweat and work; Spring makes better beginnings. But if Summer is not for either contemplating or initiating, it is definitely a season for wallowing in the world: in cool creek water, or in green-boughed forests, or in Sun-glinting granite cirques way up in the mountains. In Summer we consume the world, eating its joy and growing fat with impressions. Later, in Autumn and Winter, we will recall it, reflect on it, chew the cud.

Just now, we are engrossed. Summer moves over and around and through us. And for the time being—seemingly endless time—that is enough for us.

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When you are in love with the world, you worship—not because you are told to, not because you ought to, but assuredly because you want to. Worship is not compulsory, cannot be demanded or commanded. It is spontaneous. It simply happens, emerging from us organically.

You worship because it feels good. You do it for yourself, even when the object of your love is an “other”. When you love the world, you can’t help it.

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The womb and mother's breast are surely foundational memories. As fetus and infant we did not know these experiences with the mind, but with the body. And emotions of gratitude and reverence must have been our natural response.

I hold it far more likely than not, that we human beings are innately good, and this in part because our earliest memories are good. We are fundamentally thankful for life's gifts. Therefore, our tendency is to worship, to Commune, to feel gratitude toward womb and mother, and, by extension, toward community and nature. At birth we emerge and enter into a New Womb.

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## We Smart Primates

At first, we smart primates took for granted that the world was fully inspirited: Everything was more or less "alive" and willful. At a later time, we took for granted that the world was not inspirited: Everything (except ourselves) was taken to be mechanical and spiritually "dead". Now, today, we are engaged in a search for a new paradigm, one that seeks a greater sophistication than either "alive" or "dead". We seek a new and better way to take the world for granted.

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What is this "polar reversal" that happens in me? How can a pine cone appear so different from one time to the next? One moment the cone is dead, inconsequential, mere trash from a pine tree, yet the next moment it is a remarkable sculpture, delighting my senses and evoking my gladness just for the chance to touch it and clutch it!

Whatever the reason, at least I *can* reverse myself; I *can* perceive differently. I grieve for those who are stuck in only a single means of perception. How to summon one view or another, when needed? How to understand and integrate diverse ways of seeing?

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Things around us that move or change seem to be alive. We suspect they harbor spirit. Or so we jump to assume:

An Autumn leaf falls and

We feel blest by a nod from nature

The earth rumbles and shifts and

We sense an Earth-god rising

A lab chimp signs to us and

We acknowledge a kindred mind

Branches snap or sway and

We search instantly and anxiously for eyes

Whenever objects move

We seek cues to confirm them as conscious beings

Ho! I saw motion. Ho! I heard a sound. Ho! My suspicions are confirmed: I spy an eye, and it spies me. This was not mere shifting stones. This was not mere rustling wind. This is an animate being. And it may have an inner self, like my own! My animism runs easy and deep.

Anything deemed to be alive is also deemed capable of acting on its own. This is true of people and animals and plants, and even of streams and mountains. Volcanoes, for instance, have a certain life within their throats. We cannot control them. We cannot even fully explain them. Thus, they retain a potential for doing things beyond our powers of mind or technology. They are mysterious and autonomous. And therefore entrancing!

Other things, deemed essentially dead—mechanical—simply behave according to blind, soulless, natural law: the wind, the ocean currents, the creep of continental plates. In principle, at least, we can define and explain and predict such things. We may even be able to control some of them—if not now, then eventually. Using our powers of explanation and control, we strip these things of their mystery. They no longer have any true potential: no uncertainty for us, and no autonomy for themselves. They will have almost become a part of us.

So what? Why be concerned about this? Words fail me, but I believe that how we look at things, as dead or alive, affects their meaning and value and significance. A mountain stripped of its mystery is somehow less valuable to me. It carries no excitement, no wonder, no “otherness”—just as a cadaver has scant value as a person. Not that we must always perceive everything in the world as inhabited by animistic spirits or by fragments of our own psyches. Rather, I mean that those things we can celebrate for their *otherness*, for their ability to act on their own, retain an integrity that is entrancing. But, as I say, words fail me here.

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Things that can generate—evoke, instill, nurture, inspire—feelings of wonder and awe and humility are surely special, surely powerful. Great mountains, great canyons, great trees, great ocean, great sky these

things are easy to deify because they make us feel small and because they stretch our horizons. They are extra-ordinary in their effects upon us. They overwhelm and diminish us, trim us of our pride. It is no wonder that these “stretchers” and “overwhelmers” are widely regarded as powers, as spirits, as gods, for they actually do alter our Perception.

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Pantheism promotes one’s connectedness with the natural sphere: soul with nature. Humanism promotes one’s connectedness with the cultural sphere: soul with society. Both ism’s help us to integrate ourselves with reality. Both are needed. Yet their very biases imply the possibility and need for a greater synthesis. Tef Theory and Tefistry, perhaps?

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We do not need more ideas about deity. Rather, we need to treasure our primal memories and our innate sensitivities. We need natural depth of character to match our cleverness of mind. Our ideas of deity—all our theological explanations, all our intellectual contrivances, all our grand inferences about the divine—yield only pantheons of gods, and the Goddess, and the one God. These cultural artifacts, however, are not our first priority. With regard to worship we do not really need them. Deities are metaphors, mediators...and ultimately meddlers. We need to get beyond them, or at least to use them with care, for they too often lead us into error and confusion and even evil.

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## “Bird Voices”

I wish to celebrate the voices of birds, for they evoke memories of special places and choice times. For me, one note, one strain, one two-syllable fragment can evoke fragrant forests, chill peaks, crashing waves, or still and empty desert days. Many of my best memories glide on wings of avian music.

One instance is the Townsend’s Solitaire, calling its lone, sharp “eak” from the tops of Central Oregon’s junipers, bird-tipped trees of my teen years. It is Autumn, the deer are furtive, and hunters roam. I savor those dewy, quiet mornings in the juniper, pine, and sage of Oregon’s Blue Mountains and high lava plateaus. Kinglets twitter at high pitch, jackrabbits dart from bush to bush, and long bright rays pierce the cool air. Solitude: the Solitaire is a bird of solitude. Its single “eak” is solitude’s voice, whenever heard.

Another instance, up high in Oregon’s Cascade Mountains, is the coarse “kraaah, kraaah” of Clark’s Nutcracker. Can the Summer peaks get by without that voice? Impossible! It is the voice of high places, of thin air, bare rocks, sparse pines, and awesome vistas: the voice of freedom and exhilaration and upness. I love that voice. I need it!

Likewise, the avian evocations of many other times and places. A dusky Pacific Wren chatters and sings, down deep in mossy darkness under lowland forests. An American Dipper warbles and pipes beside wild and splashy streams. Cries of Western Gulls attend the sandy beach, while the Wrentit’s accelerating notes best recall the nearby brushy coastal edge. Far-sky honks of Canada Geese evoke our open wetlands, and so, too, does the Red-wing’s warm, contented “conk-laree” among tall cattails and tules.

Bird voices. Evocations of special times in An Other Place.

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Simple Question: What is a bird on the wing?

Typical Answer: A bird is a feathered, two-legged, warm-blooded, egg-laying animal, most kinds of which can fly by use of two wings.

This sort of picture draws us easily into the erroneous notion that a bird is a collection of parts—feet, feathers, body, beak, wings—all functioning together as an integrated whole, or even as a sum that is greater than the parts—but, nonetheless, a collection of parts. We must readily admit, however, that birds cannot survive without their parts; to remove them stretches the meaning of “bird” (not to mention the bird itself) to or beyond the breaking point. Most of the so-called parts of a bird are not really detachable; rather, they are concepts or even figments of the imagination. Of course, no harm is done by concepts and imaginations—unless we can’t distinguish them from the realities they have supplanted!

Just for interest, now that we have described a bird on the wing as a feathered body having two flight appendages, why not turn the description around? Thus we might say: A flying bird is two flapping wings that share a body. That is, a bird is two wings operating in coordinated motion adjacent to a single body that is the metabolic system that serves them both.

Or, consider this idea: A bird is an organism, comprising two wings and a body, that draws upon a vast resource—the Earth ecosystem (or even the whole universe, if you wish). That is, instead of the wings flapping relative to a stationary world, think of the world as flapping (just a tiny bit) relative to the stationary wings! In this view, the whole universe is dedicated to the support of those two wings. The world is everything that is necessary to produce a bird in the air. Thus, we might think of a bird as the end product, the whole “purpose”, of evolution and

of the ecosystem. (If this thought seems preposterous, consider that some people see *Homo sapiens* as the pinnacle of history, the reason for it all, the crown of creation—the whole “purpose” of evolution and of the ecosystem!)

Thus, we can picture a bird on the wing either as a collection of bird parts relative to the whole of nature, or as all of nature relative to a set of bird parts. Or, we can think of a bird as neither of these pictures. And both pictures. And herein lies a hint for transcending our ordinary perspective on such matters.

What this kind of mental play reveals is that no amount of thinking, no amount of intellectual (L.3) effort, can ever do justice to a bird on the wing. Or to anything else, for that matter. All we get from thinking is parts, be they separate parts or coordinated parts, but nonetheless parts. Pieces, or collections of pieces. Saltating snippets of experience.

Only when we stop thinking and return to firsthand looking (in the Sensation Sector, L.1) can we possess a whole bird on the wing. Only then does the bird regain its unity. Therefore, the best answer to the question, “What is a bird on the wing?” is simply “Look! Respond!” And this is, I surmise, one of the lessons Zen has tried to teach us. It is part of what Communion with nature gives us. Knowledge of this fact is one fruit of our Contemplation of nature.

Indeed, all questions of the form “What is X?” must be handled with care, for they beg a reply consisting of terms of the same kind as X itself. However, these very terms have been “ripped loose” from the unity underlying the question. Therefore, remember this: Ultimately, the world is one. Reality—*It*—is a seamless continuum. *It* remains continuous until, by thinking, we perceive it as a collection of entities. Therefore, we need always to be aware of the intellectual “ripping”

that we do...lest we unwittingly mistake a collection of bird parts as a whole bird!

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Ah, that the universe might be as simple as starry skies! O Socrates, Newton, and Einstein, too: You would have sold your souls to discover that the universe is as simple and rational and lawful as starpoints on the celestial dome. Mathematical and mechanical. Elegant and formulaic. Who can fail to share that beckoning ideal?

But yours was a dream: a dream of Intellection, a dream in the Idea Other World. And, dreaming with that part of your being, you marginalized Intuition and the Story Other World, the part that participates in events. The universe of firsthand experience—of sensation and event and personality—not the secondhand abstractions of mind—this firsthand universe is not well modeled by glittering starpoints on the celestial dome. I'm sorry, quite sorry. I do wish your dream had been enough. But nature is much more complex than this. We need to find some better analogy than the cool, eternal simplicity of the night sky—perhaps one drawn from biological systems—to serve as a model of the universe.

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Travel To The Moon?

Travel to the Moon and planets? Colonize space? Have we no sense of propriety? What dignity and grace and wisdom can we hope to carry out *there* with us? After all, we are failures at living *here*, on Earth!

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Humankind has emerged from brush and stone shelters, devising an complex web of agriculture, industry, urbanization, and social institutions. We have civilized ourselves and we have transformed the planet. In doing so, we have become parasites upon the planet—leeches sucking its blood. We have become creatures of both need and greed.

And nearly all our work uses “free” energy: beasts of burden, firewood, coal, oil, gas, uranium. Very little of our affluent modern world is built and run directly with human energy or with ambient energy, such as sun and wind.

This places us far beyond our natural capabilities. We are dependent for our very lives and health and happiness on energy sources that are not our own. Here we dangle, far, far out on a limb. I only hope the limb is sound.

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Some organisms—notably the green plants—are autotrophs. They can synthesize their own food. The rest of us—humans, mammals, birds, fish, fungi, protists, and so on—must eat other organisms to stay alive. We are heterotrophs. Thus, we must consume other organisms in order to sustain our own bodies. For modern humans, the necessity to kill often creates anxiety and guilt, for our own inner drive to stay alive overflows us and is projected onto other life. As we shun our own suffering and death, we therefore can’t bear to kill them. Those creatures with the strongest pull on our heartstrings—furry, immature, friendly mammals having big eyes, or impressive plants such as giant redwood trees and lovely, endangered wildflowers—we are loathe to harm. Yet to desist from eating or consuming these organisms does not exempt us from the need to eat or consume at least *some* organisms. Are we, there-

fore, fated to live in chronic anguish over the eating or consuming of other life?

Probably so, were it not for self-absolution. We can relearn the wisdom that primal cultures have always known: how to honor our food organisms, even as we eat them. We can relearn how to cause our food organisms the least pain or harm. We can relearn to express our tenderness and respect for them through prayer, ritual, and conservation. That is, even as we eat them we can behave courteously toward them. And finally, we can forgive ourselves for our necessary deeds, knowing that we have made the compensations that conscience demands.

Thus, my anguish over heterotrophism comes neither from a belief in the inherent worth or inalienable rights of other organisms nor from a command to obey some divine law, but rather from felt offenses to *my own* sensitivities. If I value a life full of peace and joy and comfort for myself, I cannot help automatically extending this value to other organisms, especially to those most like me. I cannot help my overflowing empathy. To transgress this feeling is to bring spiritual pain upon myself. I need, therefore, ways of compensating, mitigating, and absolving my misgivings about eating other life. In short, I must face my subjectivity squarely. I must acknowledge that this—and nothing else—is the source of my ethical imperatives.

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Ethics asks: “Why act one way or another? How to choose ethical behaviors?”

Tefistry replies: “Choose so as to most fully obey your innate imperative—which is your thirst for Harmony.”

Ethics says: “Then we must learn to relate to the world in a way that expresses our deepest values?”

Tefistry replies: “Yes, we must learn to worship and to love, to do good works and to live harmoniously.”

Ethics asks: “So, to act rightly is to heed the call to worship and to love. Shall we love even those things, such as stones and clouds, that are starkly ‘other’, that are not even sentient, that do not communicate with us?”

Tefistry replies: “Yes, we can do all this. We thirst to do all this, we must do all this, and it is in our self-interest to do all this. Foxes bark and are not called self-centered for doing so, though barking is in their self-interest. Human beings seek to love nature, but must not be called self-centered for doing so, even though loving it is in their self-interest. I believe ecocentrism is ultimately anthropocentrism (human-centeredness). All creatures act because they benefit from Action. If we choose to act as if we are ecocentric, fine, but let us concede that ecocentrism, at its fundamental level, is actually an expression of our own self-interest. Do what you must. Only seek to worship and to love.”

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When there is but one power, and only one power, both ill fate and bright hope have their sole source in that one power. God is said to be such a power. *Homo sapiens* can be seen as such a power.

Creatures of Earth: Could you but know it, your oppressor has to be—has to become—your savior!

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Monocultures are attractive because they are easy to manipulate. Easy to understand. Easy to control. Adolf Hitler sought to breed a monoculture.

But we are slowly learning that complex systems, whether of culture or of nature, are better in the long run. Extreme complexity may not always be our goal, but plurality does seem to be an asset. We are having to learn that monocultures are unstable and boring. Apparently we were not born with this knowledge—or we have lost it. Perhaps we need another Commandment, standing beside the original Ten: "Thou Shalt Prefer the Plural".

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I oversimplify, on both sides of the Atlantic. But the difference in attitude can be seen as concrete versus abstract. For Native Americans, place was *this* place. They had only one: the tangible place that nurtured them. For Europeans, by contrast, place was *any* place: places were concepts, "land" to be "improved" using their skill and cleverness. Places were not one-of-a-kind, but interchangeable, like auto parts. Thus, whereas for Native Americans place was ineffably real, for Europeans place seems to have become somewhat a matter of mind.

Be this as it may, rather than engaging in whipping European culture and idolizing Native American culture, I would prefer to ask whether both views may be useful, each in its own way? True, my leaning is toward honoring the integrity of concrete place, but I also know that I am a descendent of European culture and am not so foolish as to discard that heritage without caution. I wonder: Am I "man enough" to contain both worlds, or the best parts of both, without choosing sides out of narrowness or reaction?

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John Burroughs (1837-1921, noted American naturalist and at one time this country's foremost nature writer) has been evaluated as less profound, lighter in intellectual weight, less significant historically, than other noteworthy environmentalists, such as Henry Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold. His major fault: not leaping into the *battle* for the conservation of nature.

John Burroughs admitted his aversion to public strife, admitted he was not a fighter. And this peaceful temperament, in America at least, is an admission of weakness. Clearly, Americans have a hard time cheering their more retiring, unabrasive souls. Contest and competition appear foundational to the American character. I think, however, Americans should take a second look at those, like Burroughs, who, though not first among our heroes, nevertheless offer us worthy options about how to live.

For, if I read Burroughs correctly, his first objective in life was not to strive against the world, but to live in it gratefully and fully. His message pointed toward cooperation with nature, love for neighbor, and richness of soul. His many writings affirm a way of life that he had known from childhood: a rural, nature-atuned economy where values clustered around home, landscape, agriculture, and the simple life. He tried to live *in place*, feeling reverence for nature and showing respect for the natural laws he thought governed it.

Indeed, John Burroughs, though very friendly and sociable, was nonassertive and pacifistic. He was not a Thoreau, the social critic, not a Muir, the eco-activist, not a Leopold, the environmental theoretician. Perhaps his affinities were more with the Taoist Sages or with the Celtic Druids (indeed, his ancestors were Scottish). He reveals a deep inner contentment with nature and the simple life, a centeredness and a sanity that is enviable today. I prefer to call him a "nature person", a per-

son who savored balance and integration, a person for whom nature was both material context and spiritual wellspring.

Burroughs' attitude may be placed somewhere midway between Baconian power over nature and today's trendy ecocentric egalitarianism. He was transitional in his lifestyle, but way out ahead of us in his vision of how we should relate to nature. In terms of environmental defense, Burroughs may be judged as short-sighted by our educated hindsight and as timid by our growing desperation, yet he instinctively knew ecotopia when he found it, and surely he cannot be faulted for savoring it and championing it. He lived as any of us would live—were we not afraid that environmental catastrophe could end the world tomorrow. Burroughs stands ahead of us, almost mocking our frenetic search for a way out of our environmental and social mire. Burroughs provides us a model of the good life.

Of course the world needs all types—both its contented, smoothly turning wheels and its screeching, assertive ones. We hear much from today's shakers and doers. Yet, in our quest for Wholeness, Home, and Harmony, let us keep the gentle, sane John Burroughses of the world among our heroes, too.

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### “A Thousand Greens”

A thousand greens

Hang by countless stems

Robin sings to a glowing twilight dome

Four minutes past

A lone goose honked

Though trees were in my way

Come heart rest

Among the greens and

Countless stems

Robin songs and a hidden goose

Will dissipate your

Day of heat

The Moon already glows

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Is heaven our destiny? Or is hell? Of course, if there be a heaven, we are anxious to get into it. And if there be a hell, we are anxious to stay out of it. In any event, they say, both heaven and hell differ greatly from our present earthly existence.

But suppose, for a moment, we have been informed that this earthly life really is our final destiny, that already we have received our just reward. What might be our response to such startling news?

If told that we live already in heaven, we might well exclaim: “So this! *This is perfection!*” and proceed to live with reverence and veneration toward the world around us. And if told we live already in hell, we might easily accept our new career: “Well! *This is not so bad.* Surely I can live through this!” And if these might be our responses, then I wonder: Might we begin living in the here and now so as to transcend both heaven and hell? Might we begin living toward our *real* destiny?

These are thoughts that a long walk in the woods might clarify and amplify.

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What would I be? I would be a mirror of all creation. Why? Because nature is the light, the big light, while I am but a miniscule light. If I would partake of big light, I must mirror it. Let others sparkle of themselves; the greater brilliance is all around us. I would honor it with a gladful reflection.

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Beautiful big cumulus clouds are rolling above the hills today. I stop my garden work to watch them. Wish I could keep these clouds forever, to share with future generations.

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## Keep All The Parts!

Preserving ecosystems, species, and even individual organisms is in vogue among environmentalists. All members and parts of the ecosystem are considered important and worthy. All are to be preserved.

Aldo Leopold said that those who tinker with nature need to be wise enough to keep all the parts. Some environmental ethicists even assert that organisms have natural rights and inherent value. As far as possible, they say, we should preserve and promote the self-fulfillment of every part of nature.

This attitude mirrors quite nicely the specific political view that every human individual and group is important, that each has rights and bears inherent value. Indeed, if I understand correctly, the democratic ideal is to preserve each person, each part of society. In the ethical society, power is to be shared, and minorities are to be respected and protected.

We like this kind of politics, for it gives us a sense of personal security. We fear being left out. We want to be valued and needed. If we assert that another person is not valued, we risk not being valued in return. We therefore become biased in favor of egalitarianism. This view seeps easily into our attitudes toward nature, to our assignment of rights to nature, to our preservation of habitats and species and individual organisms.

Thus, it is clear: We environmentalists are not in any way disinterested parties! We would do unto the natural world as we would have the social world do unto us.

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How could value possibly be inherent in living things? I assert instead that value is never inherent, never an original property, but rather, an added, prescribed one. I see value as a product of the human heart (i.e., of microscale Evaluation), not a command or gift or phenomenon existing “out there”, as part of the not-self. Value is not part of nature; value is distinctly human and distinctly subjective. Indeed, if value were

truly inherent and truly independent of us, how could we ever detect it? Show me the sensory organ that detects value!

Yet some environmentalists firmly insist that nature “has” inherent value. They say that living things have value “for their own sake” (which, to me, is an empty and meaningless phrase). Whenever they firmly assert this view, I feel the prickly hot breath of coercion. For they seem to imply that I *ought* to value nature because nature is inherently worthy, independent of my own values. But of course their “ought” flows from an “is” that is asserted only. In fact, I do value nature—obviously. But if I sincerely did not value it, how could I be held blameworthy? I resent the implication that I am in error and morally lax if I do not value things for the reasons that others assert.

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There is no sacredness in this world—until we invest it there. Through microscale Evaluation and megascale Intuition we bring sacredness to—into—the world. Yet, it is true that only certain places, times, conditions, and personal preparations nourish it to life. Sacredness does not blossom from all soils.

### “Spring Race”

Spring began in January: Snowqueen’s purple blossoms.

Spring began in February: Lone treefrog’s croak and butterflies  
awoke—Tortoiseshell and Mourning Cloak.

Spring began in March: Swallows and Spring flowers and the  
Vernal Equinox.

Spring began in April: Oaks leafed out, and I found out no one can keep the pace.

May and June: Summer's now begun. The season outruns me once again. Faster, greater than I, is this world. The happy chase forever leaves me loser: winner!

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It is such a basic fact or principle: Psychic states are indicated, not shared. That is, detecting the existence of other feeling, or sentient, or conscious beings comes down at last to whether we can “read” the indications they present to us. This is true even in regard to one another, human to human. Our name for this “reading” is empathy.

Now, I take it seriously that I am novel, unique, and unitary—that is, solitary. I know my own pleasures and pains, thoughts and dreams. But as to yours, I know only your symptoms, symbols, and behaviors. To share with me, you have to somehow communicate with me. For without having read your indications—and then interpreted them in terms of my own experience—I remain ignorant of your experience. People can live in lonely agony—for want of another knowing, feeling person. It is empathy that leads me to treat you kindly, not pain or pleasure truly shared. I act upon the pain or pleasure that I can *imagine* in you.

And so it is with nature. How do we know that animals suffer, except as we *interpret* their whines and groans? How do we know that plants enjoy kind words, except as we *read* their better growth? And how do we conclude that dumb rocks are mere heartless, soulless stones, except as we *never hear* from them a single word?

How can we be sure of sentience? We can't! We can only employ empathy as best we know how. How, then, can we use empathy more wisely and accurately? This is a problem worth an all-out national effort—like curing cancer or landing on the moon. Yet we ignore it.

I am making no pitch here for panpsychism, or for animal rights. Nor am I claiming the opposite, that we cannot empathize with other life at all or that knowledge of other souls is impossible. I'm just saying that I know of no sure way to know about the sentience of other beings. The whole universe could be alive and sentient—and we might never know it!

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Interpersonal relationships preoccupy us. We are obsessed with people, the human species. If you need evidence of this, scan TV, magazines, and popular books. These fully reveal our preoccupation with each other, human with human.

By contrast, when we turn our attention to nature, as when we commune with it, we spring open our bonds of human-to-human preoccupation and redirect ourselves, away from each other, and outward toward the natural world.

Inner sensitivity forges strong bonds between people. However, the greater the sensitivity, the harder it can be to direct our attention away from other people. For this reason, sensitive people must actively seek solitude in order to relate deeply with nature. Sensitive people are sensitive for better and worse.

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In 1852 Henry David Thoreau wrote in his Journal: “It appears to be a law that you cannot have a deep sympathy with both man and nature. Those qualities which bring you near to the one estrange you from the other.” In 1853 he wrote: “I love Nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him... I have a room all to myself; it is nature. It is a place beyond the jurisdiction of human governments.”

A case might be made that we Tefists and other nature persons, we who go to nature for much of our psychic nurture, are people who lack adequate human relationships. We turn to nature as a surrogate for that which is lacking in our social lives. This may be true.

But what about the opposite tack: that those who lack strong bonds with nature compensate by seeking social relationships? Does alienation from Earth ecosystems find its compensation in preoccupation with human community?

Actually, I think both ideas have some merit. That which estranges us from community may bring us nearer to nature, and vice versa. The real challenge, as I see it—if we would be most whole and most fulfilled—is not to be estranged from either man or nature, but to draw near to both. If deity is actually Mother, and the Womb was paradise, then truly all of us have fallen (out), and both nature and society are surrogates for that Harmony which we left behind.

But I shall not apologize for my innate needs. Let nature be my New Womb and the human community be my many womb-mates. May those who feel as I do meekly re-inhabit and re-inherit the Earth.

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We have, it seems, a very considerable chance of death during our life. Given these odds, we ought to live with wisdom and sincerity and gracefulness.

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Here upon the mountaintop I pause among granite boulders, contemplating the scene below. A ridge of fir and manzanita sweeps away from me, down to mountain meadows. Brittle lichens, crisp and black upon the rock, shatter beneath my fingers. And yonder sits my car, my link with civilization in the valley below.

I am sensitive to the contrast: mountain and city. Nor can I ignore the fact that I arrived here today solely with the help of technology. For through technology I received my breakfast and my clothing and 21 miles of transportation to this place. Indeed, I am a regular user of technology: entwined with it, grafted to it. I am not a wild primate, even though, as anthropologists tell me, my ancient ancestors were. I have indeed become part robot.

Nevertheless, I came to this mountaintop because of a need for naturalness: I may be part robot, but I still need the pre-cultural world and its rocks, wind, trees, sand, snow, sunshine, blossoms, insects, birds, stars, sunsets, rainbows, thunder, silence. I still need these things exactly because I have not yet become *all* robot. Yes, I still need these mountains.

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Relaxing here beside the creek, in our city park, I am surrounded by beauty: stream, rocks, shrubs, trees, sky. I watch leaves tremble in the breeze and listen to the gushing stream water behind me. The odor of green woods is a subtle lullaby.

Here time does not exist. Not just that I have not noticed its passing; it really does not exist. Not as long as I attend fully to the sensible world around me. Only when I switch on memory or process my experience through inner reflection—only then does the past become actual. And the future exists nowhere but in my imaginations and predictions. I am here. Now. In the Herenow, engaged in Communion with nature. I know no time. I am timeless.

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Contemplation of nature is my intellectional play. Deeper and deeper grows my consciousness, my reflective recreation. Too, I hope, deeper grows my wisdom: how to live, how to love, how to hold the sacred vessel without breaking it, how to tread my Tefist Paths and sing the Poetry of Life.

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## **Chapter 4: TEFIST PATHS OF THE ORCHESTRATION SECTOR**

The foregoing chapters on Sensory Techniques, Communion with nature, and Contemplation of nature emphasized, respectively, three Sectors of Perception: Sensation (L.1), Intuition (L.2), and Intellection (L.3). This next chapter emphasizes the Orchestration Sector (L.4), whereby I will try to put a lot of the foregoing together. Of course none of the Tefist paths belongs solely to just one Sector, for Perception is a complex process. Moreover, Perception operates at three scales: microscale, mesoscale, and megascale. Here I seek to more fully integrate all the megascale Sectors. The following activities will therefore be multidimensional.

As noted earlier in this document, the practice of Tefistry is built on a foundation of Tef Theory, while also borrowing from NeoDruidic traditions. Tef Theory itself has been more or less a lifelong creative project for me, though I did not actually invent the terms “Tef” and “Tef Theory” until my twenties, some fifty years ago. Similarly, much of my love of nature and my search for wisdom began in childhood, but I did not begin practicing modern Druidry (or rather, my particular brand of it, which I call NeoDruidry) until my forties. In fact, *Tefist Paths to Nature* is a major revision of my 1996 book, *Druidic Paths: A Naturalistic*

*Druidism.* So, here I seek to merge Tef Theory and NeoDruidry into an orchestration that I call Tefistry. If these orchestrations of Tefistry work for you, wonderful! If not, you should, as Joseph Campbell might have said, “follow your bliss elsewhere”.

## **Five Tefist Rites For Honoring Nature And Life**

Rites are integrative activities. They assist us in many ways: in sensing, feeling, thinking, worshiping, venerating, and expressing gratitude. I encourage you to experiment with each of the five rites I have sketched out below. After you try each one, you might jot down notes about where you went, which rite you used, how well it “worked” for you, and any ideas you have for enhancing and sharing the rite. Instructions are given in some detail, but only by way of example. Once you have tried a rite, you are free to adapt it so that it works even better for you. You may prefer to do these rites alone, though having a reader frees you from the text and leaves both hands available for gesturing. (Of course, if you know their meaning, the gestures are effective all by themselves; you need not necessarily speak the words I have provided.)

### **1. Benediction Gesture**

The Benediction Gesture is imitative of White Fir trees (common evergreen conifers in the mountains of Southern Oregon). Many people remark about the graceful downward and outward spread of the firs’ lower boughs, which seem to whisper, “All is well. Rest in nature’s peace.” Benediction Gesture transfers these visual kinesthetics into your large arm muscles.

Stand before a White Fir, though far enough away to see the whole tree. Imitate the trunk and boughs by gesturing with your arms and hands. Keep your eyes on the tree itself. To imitate the trunk, raise your arms (kept near the front of your body) to high above your head, hands held flat and vertical, like “praying hands”. To imitate the calming boughs, sweep your arms down and forward, palms facing down. At farthest arm extension, let your arms come up a short way, pausing for a restful moment where your hands rise to a stop. Then reverse the arm motion, raising your arms back up overhead to imitate again the rise of vertical trunk, before doing the downward/outward sweep again to imitate the boughs. Repeat at will. The complete motion resembles the letter “J”. With each full down-sweep of arms, sense an effect of releasing and calming—like a benediction—a blessed pause just before you begin the upward arm raise again. Get your upper body as well as your arms involved in this action. Actually, you need not be present at a White Fir tree; I sometimes use this rite in my Tefist Sacred Circle as a gesture of blessing and as a closing gesture, wherever I happen to be.

## 2. Tree Link

Tree Link is similar to a Benediction Gesture, but its purpose is to mimic tree structure and to link Earth (the Tellocosm) and Sky (the Caecocosm) the way trees do. The downward arm sweep imitates the downwardness of trunk, but then it goes on to mimic the spreading of roots down into Earth. That is, you spread your fingers at the bottom of the sweep and extend your hands outward to the sides, imitating root structure.

The upward raise of your arms imitates the trunk and crown of the tree. If you are imitating trees that are apically dominant (e.g., our steeple-like young firs), converge your uplifting hands to a point over-

head (“praying hands”). Then repeatedly sweep your arms/hands downward and outward, imitating the multiple layers of branches on one tree. If you are imitating trees that are not apically dominant (e.g., our globe-crowned ancient oaks), lift your hands upward, but then spread them outward over your head to imitate diverging major branches. For the latter trees, the upward sweep and the downward sweep nearly mirror each other, your fingers spreading out both above and below. During the trunk part of Tree Link, your hands can be separated a little, imitating the thickness of the trunk.

### 3. Fetal Bow

At a comfortable and safe place, typically when facing a sacred site or a salient natural entity (e.g., the Sun, a mountain peak, a big glacial boulder, a favorite tree), get down on hands and knees and assume a fetal position, your back toward the Sky. Pull in your head, close your eyes, and place your hands over your head. Perhaps this position mimics the tightness of the womb late in gestation. (An alternative position is the same fetal position—hands or elbows on the ground, head down—but with arms and hands reaching out, forward, not clasped over the head.) Remain in the Fetal Bow long enough to assure increased blood flow to the head, to reach inner centeredness, and to see, touch, and smell the ground. If blood rushing to your head and face makes you uncomfortable or distressed, you should discontinue the Fetal Bow or save it for another occasion. Beware of fainting or discomfort when standing up too quickly. If you need help getting down or up, ask for it.

The Fetal Bow is similar to the prayer posture used by Moslems. I find it helps me return to my true inner self, to shut out the nagging world, and to express my childlike dependency upon the whole of na-

ture. It can be used for opening and closing one's rites or used just by itself. Some of the same effects can be gained simply by bowing forward from a standing position.

#### 4. Birth Of The Great Surround

Perhaps following other introductory rites, such as the Fetal Bow, this rite can be used to good effect. It uses the whole body to imitate the "birth" of our Outer (Sensible) Realm experience, specifically The Great Surround—including the materiality of both Nature and Culture—without necessarily mimicking physical birth, or awakening from sleep, or coming back to consciousness, or evolutionary speciation, or the Big Bang itself. Rather, this rite points to the commonality among all these "births". Birth of the Great Surround enacts many of the core themes celebrated at Winter Solstice, Imbolc, and Vernal Equinox, for at these times Tefists celebrate gestation, birth/emergence/creativity, and Spring growth. This is a good rite to do while facing the rising Sun by day or a bright Moon by night.

First, place your hands flat over your face so as to hide your eyes in darkness. Do not obstruct your nose or mouth. Glasses may be left on, at your discretion. Do not press upon your eyes. Close your eyelids and absorb the darkness for a brief while. This step imitates the time before the beginning. As you do this step, say (preferably aloud), "Before The Great Surround exists, its potential rests in deep mystery". Breathe deeply several times.

Then, very gradually, loosely spread your fingers and draw your hands across your face and back toward your ears. You are opening the "doorway of the womb", allowing the emergence of Sensation, which in this case is light. At the same time, very gradually open your eyelids to

behold The Great Surround. Keep your gaze straight ahead. Say something like, “The dawn of the world is indistinct, yet marvelous, bringing light and clarity and new life”. You may well feel a spontaneous sense of gladness and/or gratitude as the light replaces darkness.

Continue by opening your arms out to left and right, reaching to the limits of your peripheral vision on each side. Your wide arms imitate the vastness of The Great Surround. Say, “The Sensible Realm is vast. Behold, The 10,000 Things. Behold, The Great Surround”. On a horizontal plane, curve your arms forward until your hands meet to form a circle. Lower this circle to your waist or nadir, then raise it high over your head to zenith (or as high as your flexibility permits), then back down to nadir, then again high over your head to zenith, etc. Say, “The Outer Realm of Tef is a Monad, the Universe, the Great Surround.”

Slowly lower your arms and hands to your waist, then open them up and out wide, lifting your arms along the edges of your peripheral vision on either side. Bring your arms together at zenith (directly overhead), touching fingers, then sweep them back down to nadir. You will have sketched out a great circle, of which the lower half honors Earth (Tellocosm) and the upper half honors Sky (Caelocosm), thereby imitating the Major Dyad of Earth and Sky. Repeat this sweeping motion, and as you move your arms, say something like, “The Great Surround is a Major Dyad of Earth below and Sky above; Sky above and Earth below; Earth below and Sky above....” or “The Great Surround is a Major Dyad of Tellocosm and Caelocosm; Caelocosm and Tellocosm; Tellocosm and Caelocosm....” After repeating this motion and words two or three times, lift your arms to horizontal.

Next, outstretch your arms in front of you. Palms outward, point your fingers upward, toward the Sky. (Do not do the next part of this rite if you have a bad back. Instead, you can turn your whole body by

actually stepping to the left, and then back to the right, etc.) Rotate your torso to the left, bringing arms and head around leftward until you face somewhat directly to the left, then rotate all the way back around and to the right until you face somewhat directly to the right. Repeat this entire body rotation (or turning by stepping). Repeat a third time. During this part of the rite your fingers sweep across the Anthropocosm—the World Between, our Home Between. Your hands will be following the horizon, approximately. Say something like: “The World Between is the Anthropocosm, where Earth meets Sky. The horizon divides the Earth below from Sky above. The place between is our Home Between”.

Next, bring your arms back to your chest and raise “praying hands” to zenith, then sweep your arms downward, exactly as in the Tree Link described above, to mimic tree shapes. Repeat both up-raise and down-sweeps. Repeat for a total of two or three complete motions. This step imitates the way trees span the Anthropocosm. Say, “As known to the ancient Druids, sacred trees bind Sky and Earth, Earth and Sky, Sky and Earth, Earth and Sky....” (In the absence of trees, your motions will have to make an imaginary linking of Sky and Earth. Say something like, “By these Tefist gestures, Sky and Earth are bound together, Earth and Sky are bound together....”) Conclude the final downsweep by bringing the hands forward to a restful stop, as in the Benediction Gesture described above.

Conclude the Birth of the Great Surround by saying, “Thus, the Great Surround is born. Awen”. (“Awen” is a sacred NeoDruidic word from the Welsh language, meaning Flowing Inspiration. Here I have used it somewhat like “Amen” to conclude the rite.) You may wish to do a final Benediction Gesture or a Fetal Bow.

## 5. Ritual Procession

If you gather with a group to do ritual or other Tefist work, the group may need a way of centering, organizing, and beginning the event. Ritual Processions can help with this. When you lead a procession—typically, you will be walking toward a sacred site or other goal—walk at a slow or normal pace. Rather like watching the breath during breath-centered meditation, procession walking is a method of focusing on This Place and the Present Interval, that is, on the Herenow. Participants should to be spaced apart to avoid distracting one another; twenty feet between each person may be about right. Sensory (L.1) openness can be encouraged by asking participants to initially focus their attention on their feet and legs, on the rhythm of their movement and breath, on the sound of their footsteps/waters/birds/wind, on scents in the air, on the carress of the breeze, and so forth.

Then, if time and space allow, emotional response (which emerges via the Intuition Sector, L.2) can be encouraged by asking participants in the procession to introspect or to repeat a saying or mantra. Gladness and a sense of wholeness can be encouraged by asking them to attend to *both* their outer and inner experience as they walk. They can affirm this experience by repeating to themselves (silently or softly), “I am One with \_\_\_\_\_ [e.g., the autumn leaves underfoot; the trees all around me; the wind over the hilltops; the spirits of wild animals; and so forth], and this is very good”. They can repeat this simple statement over and over as they walk.

### **Consecrating Sacred Places**

Central to Tefist (and NeoDruidic) practice is the nemeton, a sacred place for conducting worship, meditation, and ceremonies. The

nemeton is a place of spiritual power, either because it has been repeatedly/traditionally used as sacred space or because it exudes an inherent mysterious influence—usually both. The nemeton is hallowed and holy ground: a place of retreat, a place of inspiration, a place of empowerment, a place of contact between This World and the Other Worlds, a place for Tefist ritual.

Traditionally for ancient Druids, the nemeton was an outdoor site, sometimes remote from centers of population, and often deep in the forest—hence one of its common names, the Druidic Grove. There among the trees, the ancient Druids are said to have conducted their sacred rites. And today’s modern Druids also frequent their own “groves”, though circumstances may require that these be indoor and/or urban locations.

The advantage of outdoor worship is that “under the eye of the sun” one can build strong bonds with nature. There—falling under the spell of trees and sky, wind and stones, waters and wild animals—we can more fully achieve Wholeness and Home and Harmony than we can among traffic and office buildings and smog. Outdoor worship is not an idea unique to Tefists and modern Druids; people from many wisdom paths have been drawn to nature (forested or otherwise) for Communion, Contemplation, and group worship. But the ancient Druids made a point of worshipping in the open air, and the outdoor nemeton is an honorable tradition for Tefists and modern Druids to carry into the future.

The lone Tefist, especially the neophyte, may wonder: How does one discover or appoint a nemeton? From my own experience, I know that many factors influence this search:

\* Your nemeton, or “sacred grove”, will be yours first, others’ second. That is, if you yourself have not sensed the sacredness of that place, its reputation among other Tefists is of small consequence. Your nemeton

may or may not be sacred to others, but it must certainly be sacred to you.

\* Know that almost every place on Earth can be sacred, if you permit it. But also know that only one or a few sites will be especially powerful to you, and thus candidates for *your* nemeton.

\* One obvious way to find your nemeton is to go looking for it. Recall places you have visited that seemed to “grab” you, or that seemed to harbor a residing spirit, or that thrilled you to the core. Perhaps you felt this kind of power in Yosemite Valley. Perhaps you felt it on a lonely desert peak, way out in Nevada. Or in an Eastern deciduous woodland. Or perhaps you felt it beneath the apple trees in your neighbor’s orchard. Or beside the languid waters of some great, slow river. You may discover it simply by hiking or canoeing or camping. If you go out of doors with a heart expectant and open, and you come to a place “oozing” sacred power, you will simply know it—like knowing you have fallen in love. You will feel better in that place than anywhere else in the world. And, with luck, your sacred place will be located near your home...not 500 miles away!

\* Your nemeton will need to be a place of relative safety, seclusion, and solitude. Do not allow danger, noise, and interruptions to interfere with your Tefist practice. But these factors are relative, both to the person and to the occasion. Some people can tolerate, or actually prefer, the proximity of other people and background sounds, whereas others seek absolute wilderness and silence. And you will find you have different needs on different days. Nonetheless, the ideal nemeton is a place where you can conduct ritual, meditate, sing, or dance without feeling at risk, self-conscious, or distracted.

\* Do not limit your search for a nemeton to any one category of natural place. Certain kinds of natural places have always “grabbed” people more than others: mountain peaks, the base of trees, the depths of caverns, the brink of streams and lakes, the seashore, and by night, almost any place illuminated by moonlight. On the other hand, you may perhaps discover your nemeton within a cluster of spiny shrubs, beside walls of glacial ice, out upon a vast, grassy prairie, or within a busy city park. Where you find it is where you find it.

Once you have found your nemeton you will need to consecrate it. When you are ready to make it your own, you will need to come to it with Tefist centeredness, focus, and will. Come to it with gladness and sincerity in your heart. Speak to it. Touch it tenderly. Feel toward it somewhat as you would toward a lover. Drop to your knees and pray to it, or sit in its center and meditate, or stroll around and through it with reverence. Ask that it nourish you and inspire you. Ask that you be found worthy to enter it and remain within it.

The circle is the primary symbol of Tef Theory and of Tefistry. Tefists employ it as the ceremonial form—the Sacred Circle—in our nemetons. Therefore you, too, will probably want to mark out a circle within your nemeton, perhaps 10-20 feet in diameter (or, say, up to three times your height in diameter), in which to do your Tefist work. (See below for additional instructions about setting up a Sacred Circle.)

Your nemeton will be a place for important spiritual experience. Go to it often, but be aware that your need for it will probably be irregular, and in any event circumstances will prevent your visiting it whenever you like. Having a nemeton that is freely and easily accessible is helpful. Because you will be outdoors, go prepared for the weather, and carry emergency supplies if appropriate. Be very careful with fire, or just do without it. And consider the possibility of vandalism: Should

you leave sacred objects at your nemeton, unprotected? Should you officially mark the site and thereby risk attracting people who might defile it or destroy it?

In addition to your primary nemeton, you may discover other sacred sites in the landscape. Called power points, these are places you may not intend to visit as often as the nemeton, perhaps because of their inaccessibility or because they are less powerful than the nemeton. In my own landscape of Southern Oregon, I have discovered, over a period of decades, many such favorite places. A number are high elevation sites on peaks and ridges. But others include significant trees, stream-sides, meadows, and assorted other places. Finding and using these sacred sites helps make the entire landscape sacred. Power points are like the brightest stars in a sky full of stars, forming a constellation of relationship across the landscape and helping the Tefist to feel thoroughly at home in nature. May you find your own personal nemeton and power points, thereby to make of your land a sacred place.

## **Tefist Festivals**

Many Tefists, modern Druids, Wiccans, and others observe eight major festivals—four Fire Festivals alternating with four Solar Festivals—spaced evenly throughout the year. (We know for certain that the ancient Druids celebrated the four Fire Festivals, whereas our assumption that they celebrated the four Solar Festivals is an educated guess. My personal preference is to celebrate all eight dates.) These festivals are like signposts along our way, ever renewing us, reminding us of our values, and keeping us integrated with nature, with one another, and with our life journey.

All eight festivals are “natural” events. Thus, the four Solar Festivals include Winter Solstice and Summer Solstice—marking the most and least daytime and nighttime—and Spring Equinox and Autumn Equinox—marking times of year when day and night are of equal length.

Halfway between the four Solar Festivals, Tefists celebrate four Fire Festivals. Their traditional Celtic names are Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasa, and Samhuinn (pronounced, more or less, IM-molk, BEL-tayn, LOO-nah-sah, and SAH-win). The Fire Festivals acknowledge the progress of the seasons, the events of the agricultural year, the stages of our lives, and various other human concerns. For example, Imbolc initiates the new growing season, Beltane revels in Spring growth, Lughnasa initiates the harvest, and Samhuinn concludes the growing season.

I tend to think of the Solar Festivals as more celestial, intellectual (L.3), and nonhuman-centered, and of the Fire Festivals as more terrestrial, intuitional (L.2), and human-centered. But these emphases cannot be carried very far without distorting the common purpose of the Festivals: to celebrate *all* of reality, all of Tef, all of *It*.

Be aware that several of our familiar modern holidays have usurped old pagan holidays, so these modern festivals share certain themes with the Tefist festivals. For instance, Christmas (birth of the Holy Child) elbowed aside the Winter Solstice (rebirth of the Sun), and Halloween (a night of trick-or-treating ghosts, monsters, and witches) took over Samhuinn (a night of wandering trickster spirits, up from the otherworlds). Realize also that Correspondence Charts can be drawn up for each of the Festivals. These charts are lists of themes and symbols and qualities that can be associated with each festival. Once you have learned about, and celebrated, the eight festivals, you will most likely want to prepare your own Correspondence Charts for them.

If you are a solitary practitioner of Tefistry, you may be content to celebrate the festivals alone. Solitude has its deep rewards. Moreover, you literally may be the only Tefist in your community. However, if you do seek companionship on this path, and decide to invite others to join you for these major festivals, you will want to think about the requirements of group celebration. The following are some practical considerations.

Whom will you invite to your ceremonies? Family and friends may be interested. Colleagues and coworkers and even members of other spiritual groups may be curious. Or you may be able to join with people following kindred paths, such as Wicca or Native American spirituality—knowing that you will need to adapt to their ways.

Where and when? Your home may be a convenient place, and it can be a haven during inclement weather, but outdoors is traditional for Tefist ritual, often around a fire. So a park or campground may meet your needs. Night lends mystery to fire and candles, though daytime may be better suited for the harvest celebrations. You will have to choose a place and time according to your needs, whims, and purposes. Always check with police, park officials, or landowners for permission to use the chosen site and to legally have a fire there.

You need very little equipment for your Tefist celebrations: firewood and a safe place for your fire, a few candles (in wind-proof holders if possible), matches, perhaps a musical instrument, perhaps folding chairs. I suggest keeping your needs few. You can even try using no equipment at all. Some Wiccans even celebrate in the nude (“skyclad”), though I find this practice too minimalist for my own practice, especially in Winter! At the other extreme, you might hire a Celtic band, tailor elaborate vestments, install dramatic lighting, purchase expensive candlesticks, set up a great cauldron, collect carefully crafted ritual tools,

and even arrange to have totem animals present at the nemeton. I must confess I have a tendency toward such elaboration. Therefore, from time to time I find it necessary to heed Henry David Thoreau's sage advice: "Simplify! Simplify!"

One part of your festivals (and of all Tefist practice) that should be observed consistently is safety, especially when you invite others to join you. Open fires and candles pose hazards of bodily burns and wildfires, so you should contain all fires within safe fire rings, and always keep water or extinguishers on hand. Carry a small first aid kit and think about how you would summon help in an emergency. Darkness may lead to injuries due to stumbling, tripping, or running into unseen objects, so think ahead about safety and comfort in the dark. Consider the needs of the aged, the infirm, little children, and those with impaired sight and hearing. Working outdoors increases the chance of encounters with cliffs, uneven footing, allergenic plants, biting/stinging insects, sun/heat, wind/cold, traffic hazards, and even unsympathetic onlookers. However, you should not let worry about such things curtail your outdoor rituals, for they won't all happen at the same time! Just be alert to them and prepare for them. Initially, at least, try to choose dry, comfortable weather for your celebrations. And remember, clouds of hungry mosquitoes can ruin a wonderful event!

The following brief liturgies (yes, you will likely need to print out a liturgy for each participant, preferably in large print), one for each Tefist Festival, provide examples of what you might choose to do. But as you gain experience with Tef Theory, Tefistry, and Tefist Festivals, you will more and more want to design your own festivals. They will then harmonize best with you, your group, your place in The Great Surround, and your time on the Wheel of the Year.

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# Tefist Rite of the Winter Solstice, ~21 December

By Vern Crawford (composed in December 2015, edited March and January 2016, March and November 2017)

[Ring gathering bell]

On this occasion [in the year \_\_\_\_\_] we gather to celebrate the turning of The Great Wheel. Drawing upon the traditions of NeoDruidry and the insights of Tef Theory, we gather to celebrate the Tefist Festival of the Winter Solstice. We gather in Gladness, Gratitude, and Good Will.

Let us appoint our Ceremonial Center.... Let us mark the Cardinal Directions.... Let us cast our Sacred Circle....

Now let us join together in Tefist Affirmation: “We affirm that the goal of life, the goal of all Perception and all Action, is Harmony throughout Tef. We always prefer Harmoniousness. We always heed the Vector of Value.” [Pause]

[Ring bell]

We gather to honor the Winter Solstice and to give heed to its many correspondences. We honor and celebrate the resting Sun, now poised to begin its long trek northward from this, its southern standstill. [Pause]

[Ring bell]

We honor and celebrate the Season of Winter, season of short days and long nights, season of cold weather, season of quiescence and dormancy in the green world. We recall its Neo-Druidic emblem, the Bear, now sleeping in the Dark Earth. And at this time we also honor Lithos, the Gaian matter of least freedom and greatest solidity. Do you have signs of the season to place on the altar? [Pause]

[Ring bell]

We honor and celebrate deep night and its glittering Winter stars: Sirius and the Greater Dog, Procyon and the Lesser Dog, Orion the many jeweled Hunter, twin-starred Gemini, Capella in Auriga the Chariot Driver, Aldebaran and the Pleiades in Taurus the Great Bull, and so on. [Pause]

[Ring bell]

And we honor and celebrate the moment of Inception, the spark that initiates the creativity of Gestation. From this instant of beginning will emerge, at Imbolc, the Newborn, the Created. Let us now ring the Winter Solstice Bell and kindle the Candle of Inception. [In darkness, ring the bell and kindle the candle.]

[Ring bell]

[Do additional Winter Solstice activities, if any—e.g., singing, drumming, poetry, nature walks.]

[Ring bell]

With the words and ritual acts of this rite we have gladly marked the Winter Solstice. May we cherish and hold dear all that this festival has given us. May we now and always, through our Good Works, hasten to bring Harmony to our world. [Pause]

Let us open our Sacred Circle.... Let us retire our Cardinal Markers.... Let us retrieve [extinguish] our Ceremonial Center....

This Tefist Rite of the Winter Solstice Rite is now concluded.

[Ring bell]

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# Tefist Rite of Imbolc, ~ 4 February

By Vern Crawford (composed in January and February 2016  
and edited in March and November 2017)

[Ring gathering bell]

On this occasion [in the year \_\_\_\_\_] we gather to celebrate the turning of The Great Wheel. Drawing upon the traditions of NeoDruidry and the insights of Tef Theory, we gather to celebrate the Tefist Festival of Imbolc. We gather in Gladness, Gratitude, and Good Will.

Let us appoint our Ceremonial Center.... Let us mark the Cardinal Directions.... Let us cast our Sacred Circle....

Now let us join together in Tefist Affirmation: “We affirm that the goal of life, the goal of all Perception and all Action, is Harmony throughout Tef. We always prefer Harmoniousness. We always heed the Vector of Value.” [Pause]

[Ring bell]

At Imbolc we gladly honor signs of the present Season. Hints of Spring surround us, even though Winter still remains. Daytime is longer, nighttime is shorter. Regulus sparkles as it rises in the East and then sets in the West. Touches of green await us in lawns and gardens and on sunny hillsides. Catkins of alder and hazel shed their golden pollen. The Mourning Cloak butterfly has emerged from its Winter hibernation. And a few eager birds

are already singing. Let us bring forward to the altar some signs of this Season.... [Pause]

[Ring bell]

At Imbolc we focus especially upon the theme of Creativity. At Winter Solstice we ritually marked the moment of Inception. Since then we have visualized the process of Gestation and its mysterious creation of something new. That something, whenever and wherever it emerges into Manifestation, is what we call the Created. Let us name examples of created things.... The main source or cause of a Created thing is what we call a Creator. Let us name examples of Creators.... Most Creators give birth to the Created only with the help of others. Therefore, let us also name examples of Helpers—those who assist Creators in the sacred process of Creativity.... Thus, at Imbolc we honor the entire process of Creativity, from Inception through Gestation to Manifestation. We honor the Created, the Creator, and the Helper. We honor the Newborn, the Mother, and the Midwife. [Pause]

[Ring Bell]

In NeoDruidic tradition, Imbolc also celebrates the feminine principle, well exemplified by the goddess Bride and her lore. Her name means “Exalted One”. The correspondences of Bride are many, and they emphasize Creativity. She is the patroness of Bards and Poets, of Smiths and other Artists in Metal, and of Healers. She watches over home and hearth and flame. She is the goddess of life-sustaining herds of cattle and sheep. And she guides Midwives as they assist Mothers in giving birth. Though

Bride is a goddess of the Celtic lands, not of our land, she is nonetheless part of our NeoDruidic heritage. Her ancient flame of Creativity continues to inspire us. [Pause]

[Ring bell]

[Do additional Imbolc activities, if any—e.g., singing, drumming, poetry, or rituals specific to Bride.]

[Ring bell]

Through the words and ritual acts of this rite we have gladly celebrated the Tefist Festival of Imbolc. May we cherish and hold dear all that this festival has given us. May we always, through our Good Works, hasten to bring Harmony to our world. [Pause]

Let us open our Ceremonial Circle.... Let us retire our Cardinal Markers.... Let us retrieve [extinguish] our Ceremonial Center....

This Tefist Rite of Imbolc is now concluded.

[Ring bell]

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# Tefist Rite of the Vernal Equinox, ~ 21 March

By Vern Crawford (composed in March 2016 and edited in March and November 2017)

[Ring gathering bell]

On this occasion [in the year \_\_\_\_\_] we gather to celebrate the turning of The Great Wheel. Drawing upon the traditions of NeoDruidry and the insights of Tef Theory, we gather here to celebrate the Tefist Festival of the Vernal Equinox. We gather in Gladness, Gratitude, and Good Will.

Let us appoint our Ceremonial Center.... Let us mark the Cardinal Directions.... Let us cast our Sacred Circle....

Now let us join together in Tefist Affirmation: “We affirm that the goal of life, the goal of all Perception and all Action, is Harmony throughout Tef. We always prefer Harmoniousness. We always heed the Vector of Value.” [Pause]

[Ring bell]

At the Vernal Equinox we gladly honor signs of the present season. Spring is fully underway, with its blossoming trees and flowers, everywhere. We eagerly welcome the purple Grass Widow flowers and their companions, the yellow Western Buttercups. We eagerly welcome bright green leaves crowning our Black Cottonwood trees. We eagerly welcome the return of

swooping swallows and soaring ospreys. We eagerly welcome warm vernal rains.

At this Equinox we honor Day and Night, each 12 hours long. This is a moment of equality, of balanced light and dark. And we honor the dawn, when the sun, earlier and earlier, shoots up his spiky rays in the eastern sky. Do you have additional signs of Spring to present or name? [Pause]

[Ring bell]

At the Vernal Equinox we also honor human childhood. Recall that, six weeks ago, at Imbolc, we honored human birth. And know that in another six weeks from now, at Beltane, we will honor human puberty. Now, at this festival we honor the wonder and beauty of human childhood, a time of exceptional growth and learning. We celebrate these special, enchanted years—from about 2 to 12—as a time of eagerness, of increasing independence, and of expanding skills and powers. Our human children are an inspiration to us all. Do you have a story or an insight about childhood to offer us? [Pause]

[Ring Bell]

At this festival we also honor several other correspondences of the Vernal Equinox. This festival's emblem is the Hawk, soaring aloft on swift, sure wings, slicing through fresh, pure Air—through Atmos, the Gaian matter of greatest freedom and least restraint. We also celebrate the Morning Hours, the hours of Early Day. On our Sacred Circle this festival coincides with the Car-

dinal Direction East. Do you wish to name other correspondences of the Vernal Equinox? [Pause]

[Ring bell]

[Do additional Vernal Equinox activities, if any—e.g., presentation of children, singing, drumming, poetry, nature walks.]

[Ring bell]

With words and ritual acts we have gladly celebrated this Tefist Festival of the Vernal Equinox. May we cherish and hold dear all that this festival has given us. May we now and always, through our Good Works, hasten to bring Harmony to our world. [Pause]

Let us open our Sacred Circle.... Let us retire our Cardinal Markers.... Let us retrieve [extinguish] our Ceremonial Center....

This Tefist Rite of the Vernal Equinox is now concluded.

[Ring bell]

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# Tefist Rite of Beltane, ~ 4 May

By Vern Crawford (composed in April 2016 and edited in April and November 2017)

[Ring gathering bell]

On this occasion [in the year \_\_\_\_\_] we gather to celebrate the turning of The Great Wheel. Drawing upon the traditions of NeoDruidry and the insights of Tef Theory, we gather here to celebrate the Tefist Festival of Beltane. We gather in Gladness, Gratitude, and Good Will.

Let us appoint our Ceremonial Center.... Let us mark the Cardinal Directions.... Let us cast our Sacred Circle....

Now, reflecting the insights of Tef Theory, let us join together in Tefist Affirmation: “We affirm that the goal of life, the goal of all Perception and all Action, is Harmony throughout Tef. We always prefer Harmoniousness. We always heed the Vector of Value”. [Pause]

[Ring bell]

At Beltane we gladly honor signs of the present season. The green growth inspired by Spring rain and sun is now most intense. Oaks and maples have blossomed and their crowns have filled with leaves. Tender needles and soft cones adorn the Douglas-fir trees. Wildflowers have spread across the valley floor and up the mountainsides. Migrant birds have returned

from the south, bursting into song within their nesting grounds. Soon our Scrub Jays will go silent and furtive as they brood their hidden eggs. After sunset, orange Arcturus sparkles in the east, Regulus reigns overhead, and the glittering Winter stars exit to the west. Let us now place signs of this Beltane season upon the altar.... At Beltane we honor these and all the many signs of Spring in our land. [Pause]

[Ring bell]

What a special festival this is! For today we honor Puberty and the beginning of Adolescence. During this stage of human life the sexual fires flame higher, and human fertility begins to mirror nature's fertility. Our youths more fully awaken in body, mind, and soul, seeking to become individuated selves. Our adolescent girls and boys—no longer children, but not yet adults—now begin a wonderful and complex transition. To them we offer our support, our gladness, and our good cheer. [Pause]

[Ring bell]

Finally, Beltane serves as our time to celebrate the planting of crops. Planting is an integral part of the annual agricultural cycle. Frost is unlikely now, and the sun shines warmly. So let us this day plant seeds and seedlings, dreaming of bountiful garden growth in the coming months.... With these Beltane plantings we express our hopes for a fertile future. [Pause]

[Ring bell]

[Do additional Beltane activities, if any—e.g., singing, drumming, poetry, nature walks.]

[Ring bell]

With words and ritual acts we have on this occasion gladly celebrated the Tefist Festival of Beltane. May we cherish and hold dear all that this festival has given us. In the spirit of Tef Theory, may we now and always, through our Good Works, hasten to bring Harmony to our world.

Let us open our Sacred Circle.... Let us retire our Cardinal Markers.... Let us retrieve [extinguish] our Ceremonial Center.

This Tefist Rite of Beltane is now concluded.

[Ring bell]

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# Tefist Rite of the Summer Solstice, ~21 June

By Vern Crawford (composed July 2016 and edited in November 2017)

[Ring bell—begin rite at 1:00 p.m. PDT on the Solstice; high noon is at ~1:11PDT in Southern Oregon]

On this occasion [in the year \_\_\_\_\_ ] we gather to celebrate the turning of The Great Wheel. Drawing upon the traditions of NeoDruidry and the insights of Tef Theory, we gather to celebrate the Tefist Festival of the Summer Solstice. We gather in Gladness, Gratitude, and Good Will.

Let us appoint our Ceremonial Center.... Let us mark the Cardinal Directions.... Let us cast our Sacred Circle....

Now let us join together in Tefist Affirmation: “We affirm that the goal of life, the goal of all Perception and all Action, is Harmony throughout Tef. We always prefer Harmoniousness. We always heed the Vector of Value.” [Pause.]

[Ring bell]

At this festival we gladly honor signs of the Summer season. The Pacific Madrone—a tree for all seasons—is now shedding its worn-out leaves, casting sunny yellow color across the forest floor. Mockorange blossoms are richly perfuming the air. Fluffy Mallard ducklings are exploring still waters. Fawns of Deer and calves of Elk are bounding in the uplands. By night, Arcturus

commands the zenith, while Altair, Deneb, and Vega—the Summer Triangle—are rising in the East. Come, let us place upon the altar our collected signs of this Summer season.... We honor these and all signs of this Summer Solstice. [Pause.]

[Ring bell]

Today our leader, the Sun, attains its maximums. Now, for example, it will pause for a few days, having reached its northward terminus. Watch, now, as we enact the Sun's journey from sunrise to sunset, first at the Winter Solstice...and at the Summer Solstice.... Yet more, the Sun has reached its highest noontime elevation of the year. [Conditions permitting] We will measure the noontime shadow cast by the Sun and calculate its angle in the sky [ $\tan A = \text{opp/adj} = \text{pilon/shadow}$ ;  $A = 71$  degrees].... Moreover, daylight is now 15 and 1/4 hours at our Southern Oregon latitude, our greatest light for the entire year. Thank you, Sun, for your light and heat and inspiration...all year long! [Pause.]

[Ring bell]

This Summer Solstice Festival celebrates the Sun...and much more. For at this season we also honor adulthood, the attainment of our full physical and mental powers. For many humans, adulthood entails parenthood, careers, and full membership in the human community. We give our loving encouragement to all adults...of whatever species! [Pause.]

[Ring bell]

This Festival honors many other Tefist correspondences of the Summer Solstice. Its emblem is the Elk [Deer], feeding in verdant woods and meadows. Its esoteric Element is Fire and the transformation that this implies. Its associated Gaian class of matter is Bios—the organic, living matter found in all plants and animals, including us humans. Bios is mixed with regard to its solidity and fluidity, mixed in the freedoms it affords to us. Finally, this Festival is linked to mid-day and to the Southern Quarter, where our supernal Sun now ascends to its highest point in the sky. [Pause.]

[Ring bell]

[Do additional Summer Solstice activities, if any—e.g., singing, drumming, poetry, nature walks.]

[Ring bell]

With words and ritual actions we have on this occasion gladly celebrated the Summer Solstice. May we cherish and hold dear all that this festival has given us. In the spirit of Tef Theory, may we now and always, through our Good Works, hasten to add Harmony to our world.

It is time to conclude our festival. Let us open this Sacred Circle.... Let us retire our Cardinal Markers.... Let us retrieve [extinguish] our Ceremonial Center....

This Tefist Rite of the Summer Solstice is now concluded.

[Ring closing bell]

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# Tefist Rite of Lughnasa, ~ 4 August

By Vern Crawford (composed in August 2016 and edited in November 2017)

[Ring gathering bell]

On this occasion [in the year \_\_\_\_\_ ] we gather to celebrate the turning of The Great Wheel. We gather, in the context of Tef Theory and Tefistry, to celebrate the NeoDruidic Festival of Lughnasa. We gather in Gladness, Gratitude, and Good Will.

Let us appoint our Ceremonial Center.... Let us mark the Cardinal Directions.... Let us cast our Sacred Circle....

Now let us join together in Tefist Affirmation: “We affirm that the goal of life, the goal of all Perception and all Action, is Harmony throughout Tef. We always prefer Harmoniousness. We always heed the Vector of Value.” [Pause]

[Ring bell]

At this Festival we gladly honor signs of the present season. We have reached the Heat of the Year. Blackberries are ripe, gardens are overflowing with produce, and the harvest of Bartlett pears begins at about this time in our valley. Pacific Madrone trees have been peeling and shedding their red-brown paper, exposing smooth green bark underneath. At night, ruby-red Antares anchors the southern sky and the Great Square rises in the East. Snowy Tree Crickets chime loudly on these warm summer nights.

What other signs of the season have greeted your inquisitive eye and ear? [Pause]

[Ring bell]

Lughnasa celebrates many important correspondences. Chief among these is Optimacy—our lifetime height of accomplishment and ability—which coincides roughly with Midlife, say from ages 50 to 65. Indeed, people of this age range have gained vast knowledge, abundant skills, and perhaps even a wide reputation. Many have reared children—which is a very great achievement. They may have explored several wisdom paths. They may have amassed considerable wealth; and their health and stamina are still adequate to most tasks. Thus we say that this is their time of Optimacy. However, at Lughnasa we celebrate all of our human accomplishments, whether our age be 5, 15, 25, 50, or 105! Shout Hurray!

Moreover, at Lughnasa we celebrate bonding and community. Bonding included the love between parent and child, the loyalty of patriot to country, the infatuation of lovers, and the commitments of marriage. It is the glue that holds people and communities together. At the heart of our bonds lies our Good Will and our Love for other beings.

At Lughnasa in ancient Ireland, Celts could enter into provisional marriages. After a year and a day, if their marriage was “terminal”, the bride and groom could simply stand back-to-back and walk away from each other, ending their bond. The Festival

of Lughnasa was also a time of community-building, for it was a time of fairs and games and humor and business transactions.

In our own times let us celebrate and honor bonding and the community it builds. With whom are you bonded in your life? What are the communities to which you belong? [Pause]

[Ring bell]

[Do additional Lughnasa activities, if any—e.g., singing, drumming, poetry, games, sports, and visits to high hills and peaks (traditional at Lughnasa).]

[Ring bell]

With words and ritual actions we have on this occasion gladly celebrated the Tefist Festival of Lughnasa. May we cherish and hold dear all that this festival has given us. In the spirit of Tef Theory, may we now and always, through our Good Works, hasten to bring Harmony to our world.

It is time to conclude our Festival. Let us open our Sacred Circle.... Let us retire our Cardinal Markers.... Let us retrieve [extinguish] our Ceremonial Center....

This Tefist Rite of Lughnasa is now concluded.

[Ring closing bell]

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# Tefist Rite of the Autumnal Equinox, ~21 September

By Vern Crawford (composed in October 2016, edited November 2017)

[Ring gathering bell]

On this occasion [in the year \_\_\_\_\_ ] we gather to celebrate the turning of The Great Wheel. We gather, guided by the traditions of NeoDruidry and the insights of Tef Theory, to celebrate the Tefist Festival of the Autumnal Equinox. We celebrate in Gladness, Gratitude, and Good Will.

Let us now appoint our Ceremonial Center.... Let us mark the Cardinal Directions.... Let us cast our Sacred Circle....

Now let us join together in Tefist Affirmation: “We affirm that the goal of life, the goal of all Perception and all Action, is Harmony throughout Tef. We always prefer Harmoniousness. We always heed the Vector of Value.” [Pause]

[Ring bell]

At this festival we gladly honor signs of the present season. For we have entered into the Autumn of the year. Mid-harvest, with its abundance of fruits and vegetables, brings us joy in orchard and garden. The feathered Neotropical migrants, so common and full of song in spring and summer, have set wing for southern wintering grounds. Soon vees of geese will fill the skies.

Wildflowers are fading, butterflies are fewer, and the very first Autumn colors are touching the leaves, including the pink glow of Poison Oak. Seeds of cedar and acorns of oaks will soon be falling to earth. After dark, Arcturus is setting in the west, Vega rules the zenith, and Aldebaran is rising in the east. Celebrants, what other signs of the season have you noticed at this time of Equinox?.... [Pause]

[Ring bell]

This Festival of the Autumnal Equinox celebrates important themes. Among these are Elderhood and Wisdom. This is our time to honor those among us who have lived beyond Midlife and who have come into the final chapters of their lives. These we call Elders. They are rich with life experience, both happy and sad. They can offer younger generations a wealth of knowledge, insight, and wisdom. They can offer all of us informed love. And they can offer suggestions and inspiration in how to live, at every stage of life. Let us honor our Elders and their Wisdom by seeking them out and asking for their help. Does any Elder here present wish to share a bit of Wisdom?.... [Pause]

[Ring bell]

Another theme of this Autumnal Equinox is the NeoDruidic emblem of the West—the Salmon, swimming and leaping in the Water, or Hydros, Gaian element of moderate freedom. And finally, we celebrate the equality of day and night, occurring on this date and again six months from now at the Vernal Equinox. For now we enjoy a perfect, balanced dyad of Day and Night. Let us

celebrate this and other balanced dyads by chanting “This and That: The Major Dyad Chant”.... In the days ahead, let us think back upon this chant as we move deeper into Autumn and then into Winter. [Pause]

[Ring bell]

[Do additional Autumnal Equinox activities, if any—e.g., tales told by the Elders, singing, drumming, poetry.]

[Ring bell]

With words and ritual actions we have on this occasion gladly celebrated the Tefist Festival of the Autumnal Equinox. May we cherish and hold dear all that this festival has given us. In the spirit of Tef Theory, may we now and always, through our Good Works, hasten to bring Harmony to our world.

It is time to conclude our festival. Let us open our Sacred Circle.... Let us retire our Cardinal Markers.... Let us retrieve [extinguish] our Ceremonial Center....

This Tefist Rite of the Autumnal Equinox is now concluded.

[Ring closing bell]

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# Tefist Rite of Samhuinn, ~ 4 November

By Vern Crawford (composed in November 2016, edited in November 2017)

[Ring gathering bell]

On this occasion [in the year \_\_\_\_\_] we gather to celebrate the turning of The Great Wheel. We gather, guided by the traditions of NeoDruidry and the insights of Tef Theory, to celebrate the Tefist Festival of Samhuinn. We celebrate in Gladness, Gratitude, and Good Will.

Let us now appoint our Ceremonial Center.... Let us mark the Cardinal Directions.... Let us cast our Sacred Circle....

Now let us join together in Tefist Affirmation: “We affirm that the goal of life, the goal of all Perception and all Action, is Harmony throughout Tef. We always prefer Harmoniousness. We always heed the Vector of Value.” [Pause]

[Ring bell]

At this festival we gladly honor signs of the present season. Leaves have colored to amazing hues and have and begun to fall. Madrone berries are red and ripe. Crickets are silent now, and butterflies are all but absent. Soon white frost will announce the cold times. In the skies we say farewell to the Summer Triangle, while the Great Square anchors the zenith, and in the east we welcome the Pleiades, Aldebaran, and Capella. The last of this year’s harvest is coming in, with pumpkins and carved Jack-o-

lanterns for Halloween present everywhere. Celebrants, what other signs of the season have you noticed or wish to place upon our altar?.... [Pause]

[Ring bell]

At Samhuinn we honor ancient and essential themes. Among these are Completion and Vanishing, thus concluding the great cycle of change. With this ending, many Tefists celebrate the beginning of a New Year. This can also be a time for letting go, unburdening ourselves of unhappy memories, of unhelpful personal traits, of grudges and jealousies and envies. [Take a cone. Silently charge it with whatever it is that you need to let go. Then cast your cone into the flames.]

This is also a time to remember the dead. Let us honor the departed throughout the days ahead, for our NeoDruidic heritage tells us that Samhuinn is the season when the living and the dead can most easily commune and communicate. At Samhuinn, This World and the Other Worlds are most fully intermixed. Here is a poem by Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn:

In the rising of the sun, and in its going down, we remember them.  
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, we remember them.

In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring, we remember them.

In the blueness of sky and in the warmth of summer, we remember them.

In the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of autumn, we remember them.

In the beginning of the year and when it ends, we remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength, we remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart, we remember them.

When we have joys we yearn to share, we remember them.

So long as we live, they too, shall live, for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.

[Pause]

[Ring bell]

[Do additional Samhuinn activities, if any—e.g., singing, chanting, drumming, etc.]

[Ring bell]

With words and ritual actions we have on this occasion gladly celebrated the Tefist Festival of Samhuinn. May we cherish and hold dear all that this festival have given us. In the spirit of Tef Theory, may we now and always, through our Good Works, hasten to bring Harmony to our world.

It is time to conclude our festival. Let us open our Sacred Circle.... Let us retire our Cardinal Markers.... Let us retrieve [extinguish] our Ceremonial Center....

This Tefist Rite of Samhuinn is now concluded.

[Ring closing bell]

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The sample liturgies presented above are subject to refinement or even major revision, so they are offered as examples only, not as the last word.

### \*\*\*PRAXIS\*\*\*

Before you begin to conduct rituals in the Tefist Sacred Circle, you will likely want some instruction about setting up and using such a Circle. (Most, though not all, Tefists and modern Druids use the circle as their basic ritual form.)

Find a reasonably flat, level place at least 20 feet wide in all directions, larger if you expect a large number of people to participate. Preferably this place will be outdoors, but indoors will do, especially in bad weather. Choose a location where you can feel secure, private, and not distracted—no noise, odors, or pesty bugs. You will be doing private, sacred rituals; you do not want to be interrupted or distracted. If you feel self-conscious about doing your rituals, this is all the more reason to assure privacy. A pleasant grassy setting near trees or rocks or water is ideal, but a quiet family room or a secluded back yard will also do.

Your Sacred Circle will need a Center. This can be marked with a special stone, a quartz crystal, a cut glass prism to refract the sunlight, a seashell, a plant, a burning candle, a small fire, or anything else that you find meaningful or sacred—actually, almost object will do. Place your special object at Center (or at least select the location for Center, then

emplace the special object there as part of the ritual, as in the liturgies given above).

Next, you will lay out your Sacred Circle and mark the Cardinal Directions. Stepping out from the Center 5 or 10 feet, sketch out a big circle around it. (Your Circle's diameter might be three times your height, for example.) Outdoors, you may wish to etch a circle in the soil, or set stones along your circular path, or lay live or dead branches around its perimeter. Indoors you might simply position your furniture in a large circle. (Making a perfect circle is best, but a less regular loop or oval will work, too.)

When you have defined your Circle, mark each of the four Cardinal Directions (North, East, South, West) with a stone, chair, flag, or other object. Place these Cardinal markers just outside the Circle, where you won't step or trip on them. (As with marking your Center, marking the Directions can be built into the ritual itself.) If you don't know your Cardinal Directions, determine these with a compass or look at a local map—streets are often laid out North-South by East-West. Or observe the heavens: The Sun is due South at noon Standard Time and 1:00 p.m. Daylight Time; by night the North Star is always due North.

Arrange to approach and enter your Circle from the West. Placing a pair of Cardinal markers at or beside West will permit you to enter the circle between them, as through a gateway. (You may find it helpful to also mark the Cross Quarters as well: halfway between each of the Cardinal Direction markers. Doing this will give you a total of eight stations around the Sacred Circle.)

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Now you are ready for your Tefist Sacred Circle rituals. What you actually do with your rituals is up to you. Always keeping your purpose in mind, you can be as creative as you wish. Nevertheless, I believe certain guidelines apply at all times:

- \*Never do ritual when your conscience disagrees. If something feels disharmonious or completely out of place or offensive or dangerous, do not do it.
- \*Always come to ritual with a feeling of positive anticipation. Regardless of whether you are happy or sad, confident or worried, wired or tired, always look forward to your ritual. If it ever becomes a burden, take a break from it for an hour or a day or a week or a year. Seek always to be positive toward it.
- \*Always conduct yourself with decorum and dignity and responsibility. Remember your purpose. You come to ritual in order to nurture a precious thought in your heart, to whisper to the gods, to salve your wounded soul, and to celebrate the splendor of nature and life. Humor helps, too!