



BOOK EXTRACT

Extract from

All Our Relations:

GreenSpirit connections with the more-than-human world

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Edited by Marian Van Eyk McCain

Bridging the Animal/Human Divide

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The white man has been only a short time in this country and knows very little about the animals; we have lived here thousands of years and were taught long ago by the animals themselves. The white man writes everything down in a book so that it will not be forgotten; but our ancestors married animals, learned all their ways, and passed on this knowledge from one generation to another.

—A carrier Indian, from British Columbia

(extract from *Becoming Animal*, by David Abram).

As a writer, I am passionately interested in words, their origin and how they are used to divide and separate as we all as unite and animate. Here, I am intrinsically fascinated by the division and unity which exists between the human and non-human dynamic, the animal. I understand that ‘animal’ comes from ‘*anima*’, i.e. having breath and soul. So this is life force, a process of animation. The whole of creation breathes and is animated, suffused with the Divine.

Looking at the word ‘human,’ it is made up 2 components: ‘hu’ has links with humus and the Earth, but—get this!—‘hu’ is Sanskrit for God and is described as a ‘love song’ for all creation. The second component of ‘hu-man’ is ‘man’ which originates from ‘hand.’ So embedded within our unique humanity is the potential to be Godlike by utilising the potential of our hands! We are defined by our hands, our ability to create, manage the environment, the soil, the work place. We talk about ‘man-agement’ that has its fingers in every pie and is ‘hands on.’ If we lose our ability to manage and to keep ‘in touch’ with the situation it spirals out of control and becomes wild and untamed.

I believe that we have a grave responsibility to remove the divisions that separate us from our animal brethren. So how can we bridge this separation between humans and non-human animals?

The first change we can make is in our use of language: i.e. by taking away the ‘us and them’ dynamic by which we divide and rule. The names we use can extract the vital humanity which is what connects us to our animal nature. In our language we amputate, assign, and divide non-human animals in a variety of ways. I am reminded here of Joan Dunayer’s in-depth work on ‘speciesist’ animal terms in her book *Animal Equality*. And as author, teacher and activist Les Mitchell writes,

Non humans are never murdered, but culled, processed or harvested. We eat meat or silverside but not flesh, we have on the table a leg of lamb but not a lamb’s leg...

As language can stir our deepest feelings through poetry and song it can also anaesthetise the potential to be in right relationship with our animal brethren. Language itself is not the enemy, it is the way we *manage* language that creates the divisions.

War and antagonism are created in the furnace of our own fears and desires. Yet as teacher, White Eagle, says,

The animal kingdom is closely interwoven with human and spiritual evolution. This is where danger lies both in breeding and slaughtering animals for man’s indulgence. Whilst man permits the slaying of animals, he cannot hope to escape the cruelties and the terrible suffering brought by war and disease.

This suggests a second level of change. As human animals at the top of the food chain, we wield responsibility and power for better or worse. We worry about environmental issues and yet the hot potato that keeps being passed hurriedly around is the methane generated by intensive farming of livestock. Methane is over 20 times more harmful than carbon and, overall, contributes more to global warming than all the carbon generated by the transport industry worldwide! So why isn’t this being addressed more cogently? The hot potato holds because animal parts bind our economy together, literally, in the form of glue, emulsifiers, chocolates, biscuits and shoe leather... and the list goes on. Basically, we are embedded in animals and animals are embedded in us.

The third change is to practise rediscovering and honouring our own innate animal senses. I want to include here several instances where I have been in touch with my own animal senses and I am sure you will have many of your own to share and reflect upon too.

I had a friend in Southfields with whom I used to stay for a long weekend every month when I was studying in London. Travelling down from West Cumbria and then across the London Underground, I was weary when I reached my destination. My friend lived in a long street that seemed to go on and on for ever. I would walk along, breathing in the fresh air, and gradually feel myself drop down into myself. I had reached my destination; now all I had to do was find the house. Usually, I would forget about looking for the house number and simply relax and enjoy the feeling of the ground beneath my feet and the wind cool against my cheeks as I walked, simply trusting my senses to lead me to my friend’s house. Then, just when I thought I must have overshot the house, there it would be, hanging in a musky scent as I checked my step. As the pungent foxy scent enveloped me I would recognised the house before me, the curtain, the books in the window. I did this many times over six years. The foxes stayed there, always informing me I had reached my destination, my guiding compass the scent markers they had left in that spot. I was grateful to fox for guiding me ‘home.’

Last month, I was staying within 50 yards of a wolf sanctuary in Texas. As always, Mystery, the Alpha wolf would lead the wolves in their ‘song’ at certain times of the day, usually after feeding time, but at other times as well, especially two o’clock in the morning! I would wake up, hear them serenading the stars and smile, knowing precisely what time it was.

One morning, I was relaxing outside the trailer in a chair with eyes closed, listening to the wind keening through the trees. It was a gentle fanning through several distinct cadences, a little reminiscent of distant waves on the beach. As I listened I was struck by the familiarity of the sound. Like a record playing somewhere in the background that I had heard at some time in the not far distant past yet couldn’t name. I went through the places I had been recently been where there were trees. Siphoning through the memories that were held in my sensory library, I hit blank after blank. But, like some tantalising scent, it wouldn’t let go. I tried another tactic: wondering how this murmuring cadence made me feel... It made me feel at home... And then I remembered, it was here that I had first heard the sound, again and again... last year, the year before and before that. I felt at home here... this was my *second* home. My animal senses had known this, held it unconscious, until the light broke through and I sensed I was home.

I believe that our deepest intuitions are embedded within our animal senses. Senses that long to find their way, their voice, in our busy world.