



Talking Conservation

Drie Valleyen

In Contemplation of Nature

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In our fast-paced lives, we are often disconnected from the rhythms of nature. Cityscapes, schedules, and constant demands on our attention pull us away from the grounding presence of our natural world. Every tree, flower or bird, every dune, every stream, every wave rolling in on the beach ... each of us sees them with different vision. We bring our own backgrounds, perspectives, needs, interests, desires, and problems to whatever we see.

Contemplating or reflecting on nature is accessible to everyone. It simply means taking a moment to pause and truly notice the natural world around you. It does not require strenuous hiking or a remote wilderness; it can be as simple as looking out of a window at a tree, listening to birdsong, the ocean, or a stream, or feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin. Think of it as a gentle reset for the mind, a chance to step away from the rush of everyday life and become more aware of the natural world in your surroundings.

I often wonder about nature, is it what we are taught or is it something more, a creator, an artist? Dante Alighieri, a 13th century Italian philosopher and poet glorified nature in his poem "Divina Commedia" or The Divine Comedy. Dante

states that all terrestrial things are due to nature, we are a product of nature's functions.

But nature not only makes and shapes the body of man, but it also gives him his instincts, appetites, "love for his fellowman," love of and the capacity for pleasure, and even the hope of immortality. Dante lauded nature as an artist in the beauty of flowers and landscapes, but especially the beauty of the body which reaches its peak in women, and to Dante the most beautiful work of nature was Beatrice, his lifelong love which he only met twice in life.

Reflexion on nature is a way to re-establish a relationship with something larger than us, something inherently calming and restorative. This relationship is not some abstract idea, it is a very real, tangible connection that can be felt in a quiet moment observing a flower or the movement of clouds.

Why is this important, especially when we talk about sustainable living? Well, when we lose touch with nature, it becomes easier to disregard its importance. Sustainability isn't just about recycling or reducing waste; it is fundamentally about recognising our inter-connectedness with nature and natural systems. When you regularly appreciate the beauty and fragility of nature, you are more likely to want to protect it. It is a gentle, personal pathway into a more sustainable lifestyle, starting

with simply noticing.

It is easy to bring nature contemplation into our daily routine. It does not require any special skills or equipment, just a willingness to be present and to relax. Simple practices for daily connection could be:

- **Thoughtful observation:** Spend five minutes each day noticing something in nature, such as a plant, clouds, birds, or a nearby tree. Focus on its colours, textures, shapes, rhythms, scents, and surroundings.
- **Sensory engagement:** When outdoors, use your senses fully. Listen, feel the breeze, notice scents, and touch bark, leaves, or grass to become present and more connected to nature.
- **Nature walks:** Take a short walk in a green space, by the lagoon, or on the beach. Leave your phone behind, slow down, and notice your surroundings with all your senses.

These steps will open the door to a deeper understanding and appreciation of both nature and our place within it. Actively engaging with nature in a contemplative way can be incredibly therapeutic, offering a relief from the persistent inner struggles that often fuel stress and unhappiness. Exposure to nature also reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and boosts morale.

Philosophically, nature contemplation opens doors to questions about our place in nature and the purpose of our lives. Observing the web of life in the forest, or on the dunes, for instance, reveals how everything is connected and interdependent. This understanding can extend beyond the natural world to our social and ethical responsibilities. Recognising our interconnectedness with nature can naturally lead to a greater sense of responsibility towards the environment and a desire to live more sustainably.