

Seeking Balance With Earth & Sky

Reflection Shared by Michael Caduto (©2022)

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SWAHILI STORY: WISDOM OF NATURE (from Michael's storytelling CD, *The Wisdom of Nature*. A copy will be donated to the North Chapel's library.)

At the heart of this story is the fundamental conflict between human beings and the natural world. *We all need to eat in order to survive, and other lives must be sacrificed in order for that to happen.* No matter where we choose to draw the line identifying the kind of life that we consume—whether it be plant or animal or some combination of the two—no one can escape this fundamental truth.

We often do not feel and understand the depth of the spiritual and physical connection between our selves and the natural world. Without this kind of deep relationship with nature, it is hard to sense the pain we cause when we harm other forms of life. We often treat nature as if it were a thing that we can control at will.

We live in the land of the Abenaki, which they call *Nkakinna*, "Our Land." The Abenaki are the indigenous peoples of this region whose ancestors go back over 11,000 years. Showing respect is a strong part of Abenaki tradition. When gathering edible and medicinal plants, permission is asked of the plant and of the Great Spirit, *Kici Niwaskw*. Patches are thinned, leaving some plants behind to continue the next generation. The tallest "Grandmother" plant is not picked—it is left out of respect for that progenitor of all others and to assure regeneration. Finally, thanks is offered, and a gift of seeds from that plant is left for future propagation, or a symbolic gift of sunflower seeds or tobacco to complete the circle and restore the balance.

Traditionally, each Abenaki family had a specific territory under its care and protection where they closely observed the plants and animals. Hunters could tell which animals were weak or healthy, which were young or old and even whether or not a doe was pregnant. The number of animals was carefully watched, and hunting was conducted so as to maintain strong breeding populations. Archaeologists have even discovered that some families hunted mostly male deer:

the remains of white-tailed deer at some ancient homesites are nearly devoid of bones from females.

Wasteful killing was not condoned among the Alnôbak, nor is it considered acceptable among the Abenaki today. Among those who follow the old traditions, hunting is considered both a way of survival and an expression of how well the People respect the life around them. Within this belief system animals have their own individual lives, families and spirits. Similar to humans, animals form communities with their own fates and destinies.

The Book of Job says “God holds the souls of every living thing and the breath of every person.” (Job 12:7-10). We are only here to keep Earth in trust for future generations. What will our children, and their children, think when they find themselves living in an altered climate and a world in which many plants and animals have disappeared, all because we lived as if we could have our environment and eat it too? Do we want to be forever remembered as the environmental Marie Antoinette’s of the modern age?

Ultimately, we are only one small part of a sacred web of life: a global community of spiritual and sentient beings who depend upon each other for survival.

Thoreau said, “Simplify, simplify, simplify!” *Moderation, minimalism and discipline* will go a long way toward bringing our relationship with nature into balance. Many of us—myself included—have a very long way to go, and many things to cut back on before we even begin to pare down to the level where we are actually considering what we really *need* to live a quality life as spiritual beings in community with other people and the natural world.

SONG: ALL OUR RELATIONS (from Michael’s music CD, *All One Earth*. A copy will be donated to the North Chapel’s library.)

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