

A Walk with Gaia

Here you will find the instructions for a guided practice of connecting more deeply with earth.

This journey will take you through various layers of the living organism of earth enabling you to connect in a deeper way with our planet, its magnificence, its interconnectedness, and your relationship and place within the larger whole.

You will be asked to imagine yourself in places where it would not be practical to be physically, so just allow that experience to unfold for you in your own unique way. As you journey the vitality of the earth will become increasingly present to you as you experience it as it is, rather than in the way we preconceive it. So, just allow yourself to slowly and gently open to those possibilities.



Preparation

The practice will take about an hour. It will involve spending some time out in greenspace in an area that is quiet and where you will be able to settle down either sitting/leaning with your back to a tree or lying on the ground. This will be during the middle of the practice, with the beginning and

the end being a walking/wandering practice. So, it would be best to select a time of day where few people are around to disturb you, and/or an unpopulated area within the greenspace.

Make sure you are appropriately dressed for the weather as you will be still for some of the time. You may want to take an extra layer for the sitting/lying part, together with something waterproof to lie on. You may want to plan the walk so that you know beforehand where you want to settle down against a tree or lie down, so you don't have to search for a place during the journey. Also bring a journal if you wish to record the experience at the end.

Ideally the practice should be conducted with eyes closed, particularly for the sitting/lying down part, as the connection will work better without day to day visual incursions. Obviously keep your eyes open when walking! But you may be able to tune into other creatures and plants better if you soften your gaze or close your eyes. If you do not feel comfortable with closing your eyes when settled down, allow yourself to lower your eyes and gaze in an unfocused manner.

Before you start your walk, take three slow breaths and settle into yourself, letting go of day to day concerns.

First Steps

The earth is our home. As you start your first steps, reconnect with the understanding. It is our home, it provides for us. It offers us oxygen, water, plants and animals for food and nourishment, and provides us a rich and continually changing ecosystem to offer us an environment where we, as humans, can unfold our possibilities in partnership with all creation. We are part of it. There is no such thing as nature separate from us. We are as much a part of earth as the soil we stand on.

Now... as you walk, **become aware of the life that you see around you.** Human life too, if there is any. We are part of Gaia.

Notice the small animals you may see, and the birds... the trees... the plants... the insects. Appreciate each form as you see it; the specific formation of it, the colours, the sounds it may make, the way it moves. The smells too.

As you notice each living being, animate or not, just spend a little time becoming more deeply aware of it. What are its needs? How does it connect to other parts of the ecosystem? What does it bring to the whole in its richness?

Just spend a little time as you walk or wander communing with whatever being your attention alights upon, be it animate or inanimate. What drew you to that being? What would it feel like to be that creature or plant? Don't expect to get clear-cut ideas or messages necessarily. The level of connection you are making does not occur at a thought-based level. It may come fleetingly, as a body-based experience - it may pass through your awareness in the form of a colour, a sense on the skin, a subtle feeling in your body, or just as a 'knowing'.

Visit a few different plants or follow a few creatures. Just allow your body to lead you.



Settling Place

Now, as you walk you will be finding your way slowly towards your settling place for the middle part of this journey. As you step slowly and gently across the ground, become aware of how your feet land on the earth. Notice each part of your foot as it makes contact with the ground. Start to become aware of the teeming activity right under your feet. Activity that we take for granted normally, but on which all life on earth depends.

Once you have found your place, get yourself settled. You will be here for about 15 minutes, so you may want to take a little time getting yourself comfortable.

As you become settled, return to your breathing and take three slow breaths again.

Journeying Down

Now become aware of the ground underneath you. You are connecting to the less dynamic forms of the earth now. The ground beneath you is a mixture of inorganic and organic matter and a myriad of living microscopic beings. Together they form a complex system, completely interdependent to form the matrix on which the more dynamic forms of life, including ourselves, depend.

Feel how supported you are as you settle down. Allow your limbs to relax. Release any tension in your face and shoulders. Ensure your position is sufficiently comfortable to stay here for a while and make any adjustments now.

Now move your awareness down into the soil below you. This part of the journey will depend on your imagination. Imagination takes many forms. Some people can see a 'visual' representation. For others the imagination operates in its own way, maybe offering physical sensations, a whole body 'felt-sense' or just a 'knowing'. Just allow your imagination to unfurl in its own way. There is no such thing as a complete absence of imagination- it just happens in a way that is unique to you.

So, as we move down into the body of the earth, allow your attention to move down into the soil about 10 to 15 cms. Become aware, in your own way, of the multiplicity of activity that is emerging there, as the creatures and other matter interact, creating complex webs of creation. Become aware of how this is always happening below your feet, wherever you are, every minute of the day, even if you are normally in a multistorey building. Life carries on its teeming way just below your feet.

Now take your attention and awareness deeper into the soil, down to the subsoil, as the level of activity of animate creatures subsides. There is still activity here, but it is slower, and something we are less aware of normally. Notice your experience as you become more aware of this deeper and slower pace of creation.

Slowly move your attention deeper... to 3 metres... to 10 metres... to 100 metres... You are moving through the crust. Notice what your own experience is as you move through the crust. Not what science tells us, but what impressions you have as you journey through it.

Now we are moving deeper and deeper in towards the centre of the earth. Science has explored it from a rational point of view. In this exercise I suggest to you that you may want to let go of what science says about the role of the various layers of earth and see what experience you have of it. What do you experience as you journey through the inside of the earth? How do you connect with it? Does it have a sense of touch? A smell? Does it emanate a sound? Are there colours that you see, does it evoke a bodily sense? An emotion? Maybe there is something else that you are noticing.

Take this at your own pace.

Centre of the Earth

Now you coming to the centre of the earth, the focus of everything that has happened here on earth. Now, as we arrive at this place we have the opportunity to reflect and become aware of our place in the cosmos in this living planet which has existed for eons, before microbes arose, before plant forms developed. This wonderful planet has emerged into an extraordinarily complex living organism supporting innumerable forms of life and consciousness, over unknown periods of time beyond our comprehension.

Here we can start to become aware of the emergent nature of life, of the developing complexity of consciousness, of the network of interrelationships that have arisen as earth has developed.

At the current stage of our science we are starting to become aware that the basic building blocks for physical existence derive from quantum processes, which, in themselves, contribute and

respond to the development and interaction of consciousness. There is a mutuality in relationship in the quantum processes and the development of life.

What we are able to measure at a physical level is a minute part of what is actually going on within the physical reality of which we are a part. Increasingly, through science and also direct experience we are becoming aware that there are processes and activities that we experience that we cannot quantify and cannot yet substantiate. Each of us will have different fleeting experiences which we can choose to ignore and set aside, or we can notice them and embrace them as they add to the richness of our lives and to the whole of our planet.

So, as we are now at the centre of the earth, as much in imagined perspective as in a conceptual way, we have the opportunity to take a fresh look at how we perceive life. Let us now take the return journey with a new view of the nature of our world, being aware of it from the perspective of consciousness, and including hidden layers of consciousness, the parts that cannot be measured but arise from energies that interact with our physical atomic view of the world.

As we move back then, let's open our perception out. Let's recognise that there may be far, far more going on than we have given credence to. Expand your awareness, as if you were looking out with your peripheral vision, right on the edges of your vision. But we are not doing this with our eyes, we are doing this with our awareness. Every part of our body consciousness is now opening up to an expanded perception of what our home is. What the hidden processes might be, some which we may experience fleetingly, others beyond our perception and conception. What networks of interactions may there be occurring.

Journeying up

So, let's make that journey back, not to the same place, but to a fresh place, overlaid on your original starting point, a greater and deeper recognition of the whole complex system of earth and our interconnectedness with it. During this return journey we can open up to a broader way of being than we normally adopt in the mundane world.

We are aware that we cannot separate our consciousness from our environment. Scientific experiments confirm that we cannot help but influence the outcome of experiments. Our very existence in the world affects what happens.

And, also, science is beginning to show that there are many biological processes within our bodies that cannot be fully explained within the classical science framework. We may not yet have scientific theories and instruments to explore these realms adequately, but we can use our own consciousness to open ourselves up to a sense of something more than just what we can currently physically experience. This is where an imaginative and metaphorical journey can start opening up possibilities.

So, allow yourself to journey back, very slowly and at your own pace to the world we normally inhabit. As you journey back, allow for the possibility of the unseen consciousness and energies that we have always ignored becoming perceivable in your broadest awareness. Just allow that expanded way of being in the world to unfold. Don't push for it, but allow it to just creep in. It's a

matter of practice, it rarely happens in a flash.



As you make your way back to the surface of the earth, to our world we live in, in the here and now, notice how things may have changed for you. How do you feel now? Is there a difference? Maybe you can sense there is, but it cannot be put into words. That will probably be the case, because you have been experiencing something which we do not have a vocabulary for, because we have not needed to, and because everyone has a different and unique experience.

Back on the Surface

And as you approach the crust again, you may be more aware of the activity there, the matrix of activity. How we relate to the earth becomes much more evident here. Because as there are connections between all the components on earth, we also affect those connections in our own individual and collective actions.

As we become closer and closer to the surface of the earth the strength of our consciousness has an even greater impact on the activity below the surface. Our thoughts, our actions, our emotional state - all these affect the relationships with the layers of the crust and the overall health of the entire ecosystem, including us.

So explore how you interact as you journey through the crust. Notice how different the experience may be for you. You may want to pause again briefly to take in that change in perspective.

And now, you approach the surface of the earth, where you are resting.

As you return to the here and now, become aware of the feeling of your body touching the ground. Notice the sensations in your hands where they touch their support. Notice the sounds near to you.... And then further away. Sense anything else, wind, temperature? Before you open your eyes, or lift your gaze, just notice how you feel now in the broadest sense of that word, 'feeling', about being where you are just here and now in this world.

Now, gently open your eyes, and stretch as you want, before looking at the world around you. Does it seem different now?

As you get to your feet again, notice any difference in the quality of sense of your feet on the ground.

Return Journey

Retrace your steps, visiting the places and plants and creatures (as is practicable) that you connected with on your outward journey. Notice how you relate to them now. What is your sense of connection to them? Do you have any sense of them having a greater connectivity with you? It is a two way process, always. As you go, perhaps you might like to reflect on your appreciation of each individual part and the collective whole of this place where we all live. And finally, and just as importantly, notice the other humans in your surroundings. They are just as much a part of this entire ecosystem we call nature, not set apart from it as discrete from it, but an intrinsic aspect of the earth's ecosystem.

Now you are back where you started, except that it is not the same place now, it has been influenced by the journey you have just taken. Neither you, nor the place, the soil, the microbiota, the insects, the plants, the trees, the animals, nor the other humans have been left unaffected by your experience.

Spend some time capturing what has been most significant to you in this empathy walk in creation.
