



The Woodpecker & Connecting to Life

By Manjunaga

I recently spent a week teaching on a yoga and meditation retreat at Dhanakosa, a Buddhist retreat centre in Scotland located next to Loch Voil & the Trossachs National Park. Those of you who have been lucky enough to visit Dhanakosa will know It provides a quiet and beautiful setting for retreats.

During my stay I became aware of the chorus of bird song that would surround me every day. When we would meditate in the shrine room in the afternoon I particularly loved hearing the sound of a Woodpecker in the nearby trees, tapping away. I noticed that when I listened to sound of the Woodpecker it acted as a reminder to stay embedded in my body whilst also staying connected with the world.

I reflected on how often we can lose our sense of belonging and connection to our environment and the world. The meditation teacher Paramananda wrote about this in his book, *'The Body'* where he described watching a television programme about the culture of Indigenous Australian peoples.

"I was struck by their intimacy with the world around them. I was impressed not only by their vast knowledge of plants and animals, but also by their sense of care and appreciation for their environment, a profound sense of belonging within the landscape that brought forth a feeling of reverence and responsibility for the world that sustained them. They seemed totally at home in the world, in a deep, yet relaxed, intimacy with everything around them".

How can we find our own way to connect more deeply with the environment and our world? This may not come naturally to us, we may not live directly in nature or be able to visit beautiful landscapes all the time. However, I think that in our daily lives our meditation and yoga practice can help us towards this goal.

When I meditate or do my yoga practice in the morning I try and come into a simple relationship with my body, feeling through my senses where my body meets the floor and when I do this I give myself the opportunity to notice any sensations through my pelvis, my back or my legs. Then, I open my awareness out to include any sounds around me in the room such as a ticking clock or the hum of a radiator. From there, I focus on the sounds outside of the room. For example, I have a neighbour who is a talented musician and I can often hear them practicing their guitar. Sometimes I hear children playing in the gardens outside my room. Rather than interpreting these sounds in my environment as an intrusion on my practice, I try and see them in the same way as I saw the Woodpecker – as a calling bringing me deeper into life and my connection with the world. If I can relax and open to the experience, I often feel more connected and embedded in the world and my life. From this, a natural desire to want to care for my community and the world around me comes alive and I feel less isolated.

“Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.”

E. M. Foster – ‘Howards End’