

Summer Meadows

Noirin Sheahan · Noirin's Essays · 2 min read

Wildflower Wisdom

Oblivious to the pandemic and all its consequences, the wildflowers have been blooming here at Satipanya and giving me a few dhamma lessons in the process. My interest was sparked by reading Joanna Macey's 'Active Hope' last year, a guide to facing the climate crisis. One danger, she says, is that we get so overwhelmed by anxiety that we do nothing. To combat this, we need to start with gratitude: to develop and express appreciation for the natural world that supports us and is now so deeply threatened. Whatever actions we may take to combat the threat will then stem from good-will and be more effective and sustainable as a result.

So when Eddie, one of our dhamma group in Dublin, suggested a butterfly walk, I was enthusiastic. Luckily it was a beautiful sunny day and butterflies fluttered in abundance. It was a bit of a downer therefore to find aversion showing up. It all seemed so overwhelming – so many different butterflies, so many different wildflowers, so much beauty and profusion. My brain ached!

I kept reminding myself of the motivation – to develop and express appreciation for the natural world – as I adjusted myself to the news that this was going to be a long journey, that the heart was only going to open chink by chink to the biosphere. 64 years of ignoring the 'weeds' under my feet weren't going to be pushed aside that easily!

By the time those 'weeds' started blooming this year, aversion had given way to a tentative curiosity. Little pink flowers (from a photo Eddie identified these as Herb Robert) became differentiable from a companion pink (Red Campion). When I went out for my walk, these became friends greeting me on the roadside. With their encouragement little white flowers (Stitchwort) began to form a niche in consciousness, soon followed by the taller white ones (Yarrow) and yellow ones

As you can probably guess, greed was now triumphing over aversion, my heart aching with desire to know and name all the flowers peering at me whenever I glanced at the hedgerow. Doubt crept in – what was the point in making my daily walks stressful? Would I not be better off to cultivate tranquility, just feeling my feet on the ground as I walked?

Remembering the motivation – appreciation for nature as a way of countering the paralyzing anxiety associated with climate crisis – I could see that the stress was

worth bearing. On this side of enlightenment what relationship is free from greed? I could work with it mindfully and balance it out by spending more time admiring each flower, letting them draw me deeper into this new relationship, wishing them well as they coped with weather changes now and to come.

Maybe thanks to Joanna Macey's strategy, I now find myself on the biodiversity policy group of the Green Party. Although my expertise on Herb Robert might not save the planet, I will surely be able to compile an email list or in some way contribute to this work. No doubt greed and aversion will make their appearance here too. But that's OK, they have their place in life. Greed counters laziness, my tendency to ignore what I don't yet understand or value; aversion tells me when I've had enough, need to relax, let someone else compile that email list.

Nature, politics, committees can all be part of our path to freedom. The truth seeps in as we follow the breath in meditation, contribute to a meeting, discern one pink flower from another. Each mindful encounter with the world is to care for what is vulnerable, fleeting, unreliable – the perfect Dhamma teaching.

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