



HOW TO
USE THIS BOOK

*L*istening to Nature is arranged as a monthly diary that can be used again and again. Each day includes an inspiring quotation and an accompanying exercise or explanation to help you translate the passage into personal experience.

Each day's "theme" can open nature to you in ways that might be unfamiliar. Even if the exercise or thought is already familiar to you, you can benefit from consciously focusing on it during the day.

A sage once said, "As we think, so we become." Some of the quotations may be used as affirmations. You can read and repeat a quotation to yourself in the morning, and throughout the day, to help you live its meaning.

You do not have to be in the wilderness to use this book. In fact, you can use it while riding or walking to work, or while visiting a city park.

When you're outdoors, flip through the book to find quotations and exercises that inspire you. With the help of these passages and exercises, you'll find it easier to absorb the beauty and serenity of wild places.

*"Come forth into the light of things.
Let Nature be your teacher."*

—William Wordsworth



“The forest speaks
to me because I know
how to listen.”

—Mowgli, from *The Jungle Book*

HENRY DAVID THOREAU wrote that the “earth [is] the most glorious musical instrument, and I [am] audience to its strains.” During summer mornings he often sat in his cabin’s doorway from sunrise to noon, rapt in reverie, amidst the pines and hickories, in undisturbed solitude.

Thoreau had a magical relationship with the animals living near his Walden Pond home. He once told visiting friends, “Keep very still and I will show you my family.” He began to make a low, curious whistle, which immediately attracted a woodchuck who ran up to him. After he made another low, strange note, a pair of squirrels approached fearlessly. Then he whistled a third, distinctive note, and several birds, including two crows, flew toward him, one landing on his shoulder. After hand-feeding the animals, Thoreau dismissed each in turn with its own special whistle.

One day, some local children noticed Thoreau standing perfectly still and staring at the reeds along a river. The children knew they shouldn’t disturb Mr. Thoreau, so they waited patiently on their front porch until he was finished. Lunch passed, and the afternoon too, and Thoreau still continued to gaze at the water.

Finally, around dinnertime, he left the river and walked up to the house where the children lived. They were quite excited because soon they’d learn what Mr. Thoreau had seen.

“I discovered a mother duck hatching her eggs,” he reported.

Mr. Thoreau had quietly watched all day in order to see the mother duck lead her offspring to the water and teach them about the river.

*“You will find something
more in woods than in
books. Trees and stones
will teach you.”*

—St. Bernard of Clairvaux

NANY YEARS AGO there lived in a small village, in a country far away, a very wise and respected sage. He was often asked by visitors how he had become so wise. “Where did you study? Who was your teacher?” they inquired. The old man replied, “To this day, I have many teachers, and my studies continue in the woods and mountains that surround my village.” As he gazed at the forested slopes of the mountain, his face radiant with love, he said, quietly, “I have learned many wonderful lessons there.

“The rocks were my first teachers. From them I have learned how to sit and be still. Once I achieved this, I began to see everything around me in a new way. An oak tree taught me the difference one life can make: I saw how this oak and its brethren warmed the cold winter air and made summer’s heat more bearable; how the forest animals came to the tree for shelter, food, and comfort. Since then I have tried to live for others.”

Like the sage in the story, we can learn many lessons from nature. “Every natural fact,” Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “is a symbol of some spiritual fact.”

