



COMING TO GROUND

To cultivate a spiritual practice, we deepen ourselves. We sink into ourselves and find refuge there. In deepening, we meet the universe at a more profound level. We turn ourselves inside out and discover the universe within. We encounter the goodness that resides within ourselves and experience the goodness in the universe. This is the process of *grounding*. Being grounded is one of the goals of following a spiritual practice. It is also one of my definitions of vegetarianism.

As my own story shows, my process of grounding has been long and circuitous. I have been touched by the four elements: water, fire, air, and earth. Through these experiences, I know I am a part of nature and I find myself grounded on this good earth.

Figure 3: The Four Elements in a Life Story



Water. Blood. My bloodlines, whence I flow. My history. Life's high tide and low tide. Becoming fluid. Water/tears. Sorrow. What am I giving myself that I do not want? What am I damming up? Water/streams. Immersed in water. Immanence. Water fairies. What am I flowing toward?



Fire. Vital heat. Where do I focus my energy? Volcanoes and lava: explosion and confrontation. The heat of battle. Being a fire-breathing dragon. Being tempered like steel.



Air. Breath. Breath work. Making space. Mental and intuitive work. Is air the essence of the soul? Is activism completed through meditation?



Earth. I am flesh. I am of the earth. Reverence for the earth, whence we come, to which we return. Myth. Mother Earth/Earth Mother. I am an earthling. I am grounded.



WATER

When I was five, my “boyfriend” Buddy Maklovich and I discussed getting married. “But I would have to stay an Adams,” I explained. That was okay with him. “And a Republican.” Okay, too. “And a Presbyterian.” With that settled, the agreeable Buddy and I climbed onto his pony and headed uptown, following the white stripe in the middle of the road.

Identity, politics, religion—I knew from the start what would animate me, even if I have shrugged off the political legacy of the 1950s.

In the small town where I grew up, we moved, lived, and played in a world that was still enchanted. This was partly because my older sister taught us how to see the enchantment of the natural world. The big willow in our backyard was not just a tree; it was “the Favorite Tree.” The rocks by and in a stream were a place for us to sit and talk and dream. Just around the corner, we knew that fairies and elves were busy with their lives. We might not have caught sight of them but we knew they were there. My favorite position was lying on my back on the grass, my knees lifted, looking at the floating clouds, and trying to feel the earth on its path.

As children we live in a world of immanence—where everything is connected to us, the world is alive, and animals are present to us in stories and dreams and as helpers. Then we move into relationships based on transcendence—of being separate from, and often above, the world and its beings, whether human or not. My childhood was one of immanence with nature, but transcendence with people. I could let down my defenses in the natural world, but with people I exhibited numerous mechanisms that separated me from them: most profoundly, a sense that I was different from, if not “better” than, others. Part of the reason why we grow spiritually may be that we set our sights on something, achieve it, but find we are still not satisfied. So, we either set our heights even higher, and further the transcendence model, or we pause and say: “There has to be something else.” If we do the latter, we are turning from transcendence to immanence. Vegetarianism is one way to do this.

It is not surprising that the idea of vegetarianism took hold for me in this village, near the Favorite Tree and the enchanted waters. It was here, after all, that Jimmy was shot. Because my identity was rooted here, I was ready to be pulled forward by vegetarianism into a deeper relationship with the natural world.

After becoming a vegetarian, I thought to myself: Why am I concerned about animals dying to be food and not animals experimented upon? Once I became involved in animal activism, I asked myself why I was concerned about animals and not the rest of nature. And so I became involved in ecofeminism, a movement that links concerns with the natural world with feminist concerns for justice, nonviolence, and the honoring of aspects of life that are traditionally female-identified. I followed the flow.

Dreams often signal the direction our lives should be flowing. Although it is difficult, at times, to heed them, dreams come to give us wholeness. I learned this in a most dramatic way: A vegetarian dream on January 21, 1978, changed my life. This is how I wrote it that morning:

I am in a cafeteria. We are going through the cafeteria line. I order a cheeseburger without a burger. Mom and [my older sister] Nancy are ahead of me. They took their trays and went and sat down. But I had to wait as they get another tray of cheeseburgers. I debate

whether I should go ahead and get the cheeseburger because I know they will just take the meat off of the cheese and the cheese will be contaminated. After an interminable wait, the people behind are getting restless and then pass me, the man brings me what I had ordered. But when I look at it, it turns out he hadn't removed the meat. I looked at the meat and started crying just as Nancy and Mom returned to find out what was keeping me.

I woke up in tears.

The dream occurred in California, en route to Hawaii, the Fiji Islands, and then to Australia. I had been awarded a Rotary Fellowship for Graduate Study and I was heading to Australia to do some graduate work. When I told her about my dream, my friend Chellis, with whom I was staying, asked me one question: "What are you giving yourself that you don't want?"

Chellis recognized that the dream was trying to tell me something. It was not simply a matter of: "How odd! I have dreamed about a cheeseburger." My unconscious knew it had to find a way to communicate with me, and this was the way it had chosen.

What was I giving myself that I didn't want? Throughout the day, we explored this profound question. It couldn't be this trip, could it? Later, we sat in a steam bath. How could it be this trip? My life had been moving on this path for the past six months. I would never give up this fellowship, this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

I held in my hand a round-the-world ticket—a ticket to discovery, excitement, and opportunity. The world was truly before me, and my restless self wanted all of it. But here was this dream saying I was giving myself something I didn't want. Was it this trip? Nothing in my life prepared me to admit that, yes, it was indeed the trip.

Later that day, as I crossed the Golden Gate bridge on a bus back to San Francisco, a conviction arose from deep within me: I did not have to make this trip. I did not *want* to make this trip. Something had happened in the six months between the award of the fellowship and the appointed time to begin my studies. Against all conscious desires on my part, I had become rooted in upstate New York. I had fallen in love with a red-bearded minister named Bruce and was doing meaningful work in the community.

Handing in my round-the-world ticket in San Francisco for a one-way ticket to Buffalo, New York, I was asked by the ticket agent: “Do you know what you’re doing?”

Yes, I did. I was going home and beginning again.

That is the gift of spiritual practice. One comes home to oneself. One begins again and again.

When I met my friend Anne after exchanging the ticket, she said: “I guess that is a trip you did not have to take.”

That is what my dreaming self understood.

Many years later, I recognized that there is a pattern to my growth. My mind leads the way by judging: “I would *never* do that.” And my conscious self believes this to be true. After all, it is a common enough thought: it establishes boundaries, it damns as it dams energy flow.

“I would never choose to live in upstate New York instead of traveling around the world.” Yet, I did.

After several of these remarkable, life-changing *nevers* became my choice, I realized that whenever I find myself saying “I’ll never do that” or “I could never do *that!*” it’s a sign I’m being led somewhere. The intensity of the reaction is my clue.

Resisting what pulls me forward is an art I cultivated for decades. While I stress in this book how important yoga practice is, I spent twenty-five years avoiding going to a class! I thought that practicing yoga on my own was enough and that I didn’t need a class, even though I knew that the well-respected religious historian Mircea Eliade had stated that the first step in yoga was to get a teacher. Still, I didn’t want the idea to apply to me. I wanted a transcendent relationship with yoga and couldn’t comprehend how to experience yoga through immanence, by experiencing it wholly and bodily. I rebelled against the idea of any sort of submission. In my mind, to have a teacher was to submit to someone else’s directions. I believed that yoga was about self-developing and unfolding and I thought I could supervise that for myself. But I couldn’t know what I *didn’t* know. And that made all the difference.

I *didn’t* know what a pose really felt like. I looked closely at pictures; I studied book after book; I made charts; I followed audiotape directions. But

the first time I went to a yoga class and felt the teacher gently correct my pose, I was shocked to realize that I hadn't understood basic aspects of yoga. "I don't know anything! I'm quite a baby," I thought, awestruck. "Never-mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby." I was thrilled I didn't know anything, because it gave me an opportunity to learn.

What caused me to take that step into the yoga class? After all, as far as I was concerned, my ignorant practice of yoga and my resistance to a teacher was not contributing to a lack of wholeness. I found myself in a yoga class for the first time because I promised myself the day before that I would do it.

I made that promise to myself when I was sitting in a dentist's chair. Ever since childhood, I've had a deep fear of going to the dentist. My own dental history created that fear and yet, as an adult, I knew I had to go. I lay in his chair, inhaling the nitrous oxide and trying to relax, breathing deeply but terribly uncomfortable, jumpy, nervous, anxious, and unhappy. He was giving me several shots in my gums so I could get my teeth cleaned. "Why am I putting myself through this, and yet I will not go to a yoga class?" I thought. I knew Dallas, where I lived, was full of yoga teachers. Somehow in my nitrous oxide-induced state, this question seemed entirely logical: Why would I endure *this* and not explore *that*? Why would I take care of my body in one way and not embrace this other way? And so I promised myself that come the morning I would go to a yoga class.

When you're in a dental chair, the dentist hovers above you in a way that confirms your powerless position. So now I presented myself with this implicit question: "If one form of submission is tolerable, then why not the other?"

The next morning I tried to find an excuse legitimate enough to allow myself not to go, but I could not summon one. How could I not honor the promise I made yesterday? So, with great nervousness, I went.

I learned again the lesson of the untaken trip to Australia: that sometimes to go forward, you have to go backward.

I wanted to keep my awareness of my imperfections my own secret. Of course, I didn't understand that yoga practice isn't about imperfections and identifying them; it's about being aware of where you are and creating a pos-

ture based on that. Being afraid of being exposed and under scrutiny kept me blocked and unable to tap into the transformative promise of yoga.

This resistance to change is ongoing. Recently, when I was discussing the *avasasana* position, a posture I used for a few minutes in my practice, Fred, my yoga teacher, told me how he used it for twenty minutes upon arising in the morning. “Oh I could *never* do that!” I heard myself say. But now I know my process. My judging mind was reacting first and showing me through its resistance where I had to go. Inevitably, my first reaction—“I will not encounter you. I will not change”—becomes welcoming: “I want to let you into my life.”

Before long, if I follow the flow, what I thought was too hard, or too difficult, too impossible or too unattainable, is exactly where I need to be.



FIRE

After celebrating New Year's Eve with their families and friends, the Gonzalez family—father, mother, and two children—collapsed into sleep in their apartment. The next day at 8:00 a.m., I got a phone call. Since my own evening festivities had sent me to bed very late, I didn't want to answer the insistent phone; but I did. In clipped sentences, Lucy broke the news. “Carol, there has been a terrible fire. The entire Gonzalez family is dead. We need your help. There is no money for the funeral. There are no clothes for them.”

I came to her house and, though we were stunned, we made lists and divided up assignments. Mine was to purchase clothes. We were walking on top of the tragedy, too numb and too busy to allow ourselves to dip into that deep well of grief. The next day, I went to the store and purchased the clothing: a beautiful dress for the little girl, a suit for the father, a dress for the mother, something for the baby.

I took the clothes to the funeral director. There were no minority funeral directors in this upstate New York community. One white funeral direc-

tor handled the funerals for the Puerto Rican community, another for the African-American community.

The funeral director, David, invited me into his business office, and I sat down.

“Carol, I need your help,” he said, looking at me deeply and steadily.

This surprised me. How could he possibly need my help?

Not releasing me from his glance, he explained his situation. His problem, in his mind, was excruciatingly clear and he despaired at the thought of it. “The Gonzalez family was burned so badly I can’t possibly do open caskets. You know how important it is to the Puerto Rican community to have open caskets. But these burns are too terrible.”

Funeral directors rise or fall with their reputations, and David was always alert to anything that could affect his. A professional with exacting expectations for himself and others, he approached me as another professional. He looked at me more intensely and held my glance. Then he appealed directly to that mass of supercharged energy—my neediness. “Carol, you are so respected by the Puerto Rican community. If you say there must be a closed casket, if you confirm that the community cannot see these bodies, they will accept that. Let me show you the bodies.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I protested. He must be kidding; no amount of respect would entitle me to be an expert on this. One thing, and one thing alone, I knew: I did not want to do this. He came close to taunting me. Why couldn’t I do this? Wasn’t this part of my ministry?

Five minutes later I was walking down the stairs, stairs that seemed to be narrowing with each step, crowding and tightening around me. He opened the basement door. I wanted to stay forever frozen on the last step, not move forward. I willed myself elsewhere, but I was still there, knowing the next step was coming and then the next, until I was standing in a room with four tables and a body on each. First, David showed me the father, who had been burned the most severely: “You see, I can’t possibly do an open casket for him.” Then he turned to the mother. She had been so young.

Why must I see them all? He was persistent. I was to be a witness. The children; not the children. Yes, the children. The little girl was the least burnt, but still flesh did not resemble this, did it? And the baby.

Nauseous from the smell and sight, from David's hovering, efficient, businesslike self performing his job, I returned upstairs.

"You will tell them won't you, Carol? Explain why there has to be closed caskets?" I agreed as I tried to zip up my winter coat and leave. My fingers had lost their nimbleness, the zipper would not find its place, but soon I was pulling on my hood and stepping out into the snowy day.

If funeral directors know one thing, they know how to manage people. Theirs is a profession of ushering, moving the living and the dead through the process of burial, the American way. He had just managed me too, sized me up and appealed directly to that part of me that would not say no. He flattered me while promising that my opinion would help prevent suffering. I had to be stoical to help others. And I was, throughout the day, carrying on an internal conversation about death, and my role, and my non-acceptance of death. If I could accept death, I would not be so alarmed about what just happened.

But it was a cruel thing that David had done. He shamed me by appealing to my sense of duty and professionalism. I felt I'd violated the privacy of the newly dead. And for what reason? Later that day, David figured out how to prepare the little girl's and the mother's bodies so the family could be invited in to view them.

That evening, in Buffalo, at a "get-to-know-you" with directors of not-for-profit agencies, I tried to say my name and position: I was the director of a rural ministry that worked with issues of poverty, low-income housing, race, and domestic violence. Instead, I started to cry and I was still crying when a snowstorm sent us home prematurely.

It had been a similar January snowstorm only three years earlier that had resulted in the death of four members of another family. The evening I returned from San Francisco to western New York to honor my vegetarian dream, a fire caused by an inadequate furnace had ravaged a house and a family. The next morning, I went to see the woman who had been left bereft—her father, brother, son, and cousin had perished. There was little I could do, except be present to the heartbreak that filled her house. But, after the funeral, she involved me in a campaign to buy fire detectors for low-income families. She had a purpose and she pulled me along with it. Her

campaign had been incredibly successful, but every deadly fire stripped the scab off that tragedy and made it fresh again. The Gonzalez apartment fire had been caused by faulty wiring. There were no working smoke detectors in the apartment.

A person who lives in a rural area bumps up against housing issues at every turn of the road. Providing smoke detectors was important, but so was advocacy. When I recognized how many people were living in terrible housing in the small city where my office was based, I responded in multiple ways: researching the tax roles to see who owned the housing; working to bring home repair money into the city; and directing energy to ensure that more low-income housing would be built.

Energy so direct and fresh is often naïve, and this was true for me. When people in the community protested that low-income housing would lower their property values, I did the research and tried to show those who were fearful that this simply wasn't true. When they complained that the government shouldn't be in the business of housing, I asked them how many had bought their own homes through Veterans' loans, a form of government subsidies. When whites went door to door in the area where the housing was to be built arousing alarm by asking, "You don't want your daughter raped by a black man, do you?" we were stunned. I'd thought racist and mean-spirited attitudes could be changed by education; this community was teaching me otherwise. White working-class men's status in the community was changing as the town went through a recession, and their frustration found a ready outlet at city meetings. Frightened, the officials decided not to move forward with building desperately needed public housing.

As the tensions rose, the frustrations of seeing one project after another being rejected, coupled with the awareness of children waking up in apartments with holes so big that rats walked around with impunity, made me boil inside. We sued the city for racism, and, in a very important move, both whites and blacks were the plaintiffs in the case. Whites claimed they were being denied the benefits of living in an interracial community, blacks that they were being discriminated against.

By the end of the battle, a campaign against my partner, Bruce, had been initiated through anonymous letters to his church leadership; our marriage and my reasons for keeping my own name had been discussed in detail over a radio show; and one of the plaintiffs had died. It was a very difficult time: disempowering one day, empowering the next; a seesaw of advances and losses.

We lived in a small steel town experiencing the economic displacement of many of the larger steel cities. The image that held me as I moved through this time was that my soul was being tempered just as steel is tempered by heat. Heat strengthens metal; this activism strengthened me. I learned how to draw upon inner resources, whose presence I discovered as the crises of the housing battle required them.

I can be grateful now for the housing battle because it taught a basic spiritual lesson about being courageous. Courage is not so much an *act* as a *commitment* to a process. If someone had said to me in 1979, “Carol, before this is through, you will experience these torments, these betrayals, these losses. Are you ready?” I probably would have said: “No. I cannot endure such suffering.” But all I needed in 1979 was the courage to take the next step. First we tried education. When that failed, we pursued litigation. When there was a backlash, we consolidated. Then we went on the offensive and challenged the radio station that had so unfairly provided a forum for the anti-housing contingent, allowing their unfounded claims about the housing and about me to be heard. Each step became the self-evident one because of the previous step. We did not have a map for our path, but we had conviction. I didn’t know I was being courageous as I responded to one instance after another of cruelty and institutional neglect, but I was. Courage was my ability to meet whatever happened as I took the next step. My inner self grew to meet the demands the activism required. This is the courage *to be*: to know that your inner self meets you on this path. You only have to have the courage to take the next step.

One night during the heat of the housing battle, Bruce and I were sitting in his study. Eggs had recently been thrown at the house, and we were jumpy and depressed. The doorbell rang. It was Ned, the caterer from our wedding—a talented man, more of an acquaintance than a close friend. One

night his newly redecorated house had gone up in flames and, while Ned had survived, his house had suffered severe water damage.

That night, at our door, he held in his hands a Maxfield Parrish print that had survived the fire. We'd admired it at a party at his house a month earlier. He did not want to come in, he did not want to talk; his purpose was simply to hand us this picture. "I know how much Bruce likes this picture," he said. And he gave it to us.

A few years later, as I thought about the housing battle, I realized that it was around the time that Ned gave us the fire-spared print that the tide had turned for us to win the housing battle and see low-income housing built. I didn't know at that moment that the tide had turned, but the name of the picture should have alerted me. It was called "Daybreak."



AIR

The phone was ringing as I climbed out of the shower. Wrapping one towel around my dripping hair while grabbing another one, I rushed into my study and picked up the phone. "Hotline for Battered Women," I answered.

A woman named Anita (not her real name) on the other end of the phone said: "My husband just held a gun to my head and said he was going to kill me. He pulled the trigger, but the gun was empty." She paused and then bravely asked her question: "Should I be worried?"

When I relate this to students in a seminary course I teach on the theological and pastoral issues raised by sexual and domestic violence, their initial reaction is often laughter. The first time this happened I was startled by it: I recalled her terror. But I hadn't made her terror palpable to these students; instead, they were astonished that someone would have to ask if this behavior was something to worry about. And they didn't know what happened to her after the phone call.

That night, I gathered the towel around me, sat on the floor and said to her: “Yes, you should be worried.” I explained to her about battering behavior, and how her husband’s threatening to kill her indicated he was extremely dangerous. I told her we could arrange a safe space for her to stay. I thanked her for calling and told her she’d done the right thing. She didn’t want to do anything that night, but the next day she did. We arranged for her to stay at a “safe house.” We didn’t have a battered women’s shelter; instead we had a series of homes that would welcome a battered woman and her family for three days as she decided what her next step should be.

We almost did not have the safe homes or the hotline. After returning from California in 1978, I gathered a group of women together to discuss the problem of battering. I had researched the police logs and knew that battering was happening all over the county. What were we going to do about it? We decided to have a trial run of a hotline by using the local college’s help line during the upcoming summer. We planned a meeting to finalize our plans. At that meeting, we discussed the training that would be needed for women who answered the hotline phone. A counselor from the college and I would develop that. Then one woman who was there because she represented an agency but was not herself deeply committed to the issue asked: “What are we going to do with them when they call? Where are they going to go?” I explained about the idea of safe home networks and how they had worked in other rural communities.

“I couldn’t have any kids in my house,” she sniffed. “They might break one of my antiques.” Where once we had been flowing toward establishing the hotline, that statement interrupted the energy of the meeting. Suddenly other women had concerns. “Someone could get hurt, couldn’t they?”

“Women are getting hurt now!” I said. “We know there are women suffering in their homes. They do not realize there’s a law that protects them. We need to help them. We need to reach them and let them know they can be safe.”

I tried to explain how everything would work, but other perspectives had taken over: self-interest and fear. Everyone left, saying it was too soon to do anything.

I was crushed. How could we know there was suffering and not do anything to stop it? The meeting was out so early that I realized there was still time to catch Bruce in his office, where he had gone to do some paperwork. I pulled into the church parking lot and went in to his study. I started to cry, explaining what had happened.

Bruce listened and then proposed a solution: “Carol, it takes different kinds of people to keep projects going than to start them. If you want, after we get married in October, we could start the hotline in the Manse (the minister’s house) and in your office here at the church. That way it would be covered almost twenty-four hours a day.”

This cheered me up. Once the hotline existed, then we could get volunteers. It was just a matter of starting it. This is why I had answered Anita’s call fresh from a shower. The next day, as she was hidden in a safe house, her husband searched for her. He placed a loaded shotgun on the back seat of his car and began methodically driving up and down each street in our community, stopping at every driveway and looking for her car. He did not find her. We called the police and asked them to arrest him; but the only thing they said they could charge him with was a violation of the conservation law against having loaded guns in the car.

On Monday, Anita came to the church. She met with me in Bruce’s study and we mapped out a strategy for her to leave her husband. Meanwhile, the husband continued looking for her. As I showed her around the church, I thought about the meaning of sanctuary—safety—and knew that, ironically, this was one place her husband would never look for her. When we finished, Bruce hid her on the backseat of his car, covered her with blankets, and ferried her to safety.

A year and a half after putting the hotline in our house, we were able to take it out because by then there was a trained group of volunteers who could answer it. Anita was one of them.

Judith Herman in a brilliant book on violence and its aftermath, *Trauma and Recovery*, writes: “All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering.” As Herman

explains, in the face of violence there is no such thing as neutrality. What poses as neutrality is detachment, and detachment sides with the one doing violence. This is why caring is intensively active.

To victims activists proclaim: “I care enough about your suffering that I will try to stop it and empower you.” To bystanders we insist: “We cannot be witnesses to this violence, we must bear witness.” To perpetrators we explain: “I care enough about you to hold you accountable for your actions.”

For many years, my struggle was with Christian theology itself—why did it create so many bystanders? My struggle went back to my experience at Yale Divinity School. I’d decided to go to divinity school because I was asking spiritual questions and I thought that divinity school provided the environment to pursue them. But divinity schools are actually vocational schools preparing individuals for Christian ministry. At Yale, I experienced deep alienation and yet strong attraction. Here, at least, we explored the questions “What do you want to do with your life?” and “How does one enact one’s beliefs?” But the school’s answers were not my answers. I didn’t even *have* answers, but a wealth of confusion over a well of deep pain.

I struggled with the issue of theology, transforming my alienation to creation, writing a book for ministers on woman-battering, co-editing a mammoth sourcebook, training ministers, and creating a course on the subject. I not only had to know what alienated me; I had to analyze it. Alienation showed me what direction I needed to be going in. I was alienated because the world was so askew; but I was also alienated from my own self as a sanctuary.

My activism was ferocious and intense, courageous at times, a way of focusing my restlessness. It was a way of acknowledging connections with others, of acting on the fact that I care about the fate of others. But I did not understand that the compassion that animated me to challenge substandard housing, start a hotline for battered women, and to create a “soup kitchen” needed to be brought to bear on myself. I deserved compassion for myself, too. So while my spirituality of connectedness could find an important expression through activism, I did not know then how to direct it to myself. And so I pushed myself very hard. Did I think I could do it all? No. But I thought I could do more than I was doing. I created a difficult standard to

achieve, one that was always out of reach because nothing would ever be enough.

To be grounded in one's community is to know how to identify where suffering is happening and what to do to transform this suffering. That form of appropriate activism, in itself, is a spiritual practice. But it is a fragmented one if my spiritual practice does not enable me to be at home with myself, loving myself enough to care about my own suffering.

Without balancing community activism and inner growth, I became a bystander to my own spiritual growth—outer-oriented to the suffering in my community, but not equally inner-oriented. Alert to the issues of bystanders, I understood that what I needed was engagement with myself. Through the battered women's hotline, I provided a safe space for others; what I now needed was to cultivate the ability to be a safe space for myself. I needed to come to ground.



EARTH

To become grounded, I cultivated spiritual practices other than activism: I began with keeping a journal, meditation, and yoga. I was prompted to keep a daily journal by Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*. Through meditation, I learned that alienation, and fearfulness, and other reactions my mind telegraphs to me are not permanent states. Meditation taught me this because it taught me to observe the mind.

The meditation I began with is one from Vietnamese Buddhist and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh:

Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. *In*
Breathing out, I know I am breathing out. *Out*

Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.	<i>Flower</i>
Breathing out, I feel fresh.	<i>Fresh</i>
Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain.	<i>Mountain</i>
Breathing out, I feel solid.	<i>Solid</i>
Breathing in, I see myself as still water.	<i>Still water</i>
Breathing out, I reflect all this is.	<i>Reflecting</i>
Breathing in, I see myself as space.	<i>Space</i>
Breathing out, I feel free.	<i>Free</i>

This meditation creates a peaceful movement. First I unite body and mind by focusing on my breathing in and my breathing out. Then I practice being a flower. It isn't a desire or a visualization, but breathing into myself that I am a flower. I bring the freshness of a flower to every cell. Then I am as solid as a mountain. When I am massive and immovable like a mountain, I don't let anger and frustration rock me. Problems are not mountainous; they do not cause earthquakes. I have a feeling of abiding presence that doesn't shatter. Then I am calm, like still water: I can absorb what is going on without it disturbing me. Then I know I am space. (You can read more about meditation on pages 55–59.)

Meditation practice and yoga practice ground me. When I am grounded I can relate to the world as continuous with me, connected to me through that grounding. When I am not grounded, I feel separate from the world and alienated from myself. At such times, anger has somewhere to land on unstable ground. Then I cause mountain slides and avalanches.

A couple of years ago my family and I traveled through Great Britain, finishing our trip on the islands of the Outer Hebrides. I wondered how we would all do, jumbled together in potentially stressful situations. I wanted to stay balanced and enjoy each moment of this special trip. Each day I took the time to practice this meditation. Suddenly, one day, as I relaxed on the Isle of Lewis, I realized that the Scottish Highlands manifested this meditation to me: the still waters of the lochs, the mountains rising from the shores, the massive sprays of rhododendrons—breath, flower, mountain, still water, space.

Space was what I had created within myself by consciously trying to empty myself of desires and simply stay present to the adventure. When I realized I was encountering my own meditation in the Scottish landscape, I wrote in my journal about this experience of being grounded:

*freedom of spaciousness
emptying myself of desires
desires destroy the present moment
desires are substitutes for experience
desires make me “full” when I want to be empty.*

The word “human” comes from the Indo-European root word (Dh)ghem-, meaning “earth.” From this root word we get the word “humus.” (Dh)ghom-on means “earthling.” Yoga, meditation, and keeping a journal are practices that constantly ground me: I am flesh. I am of the earth. I am an earthling.

Recently, I awoke with a dream image of two mountains and a valley between them and the thought that accompanied this image was: “I have loved my mind more than my body.” My mind, when I experience it as separate from my body, is often fearful. My mind sees limitations and accepts the idea of scarcity. It makes molehill issues mountainous. My mind wants to be done with the process of changing. But I have to accept that I am—as I will always be, as we all are—a person in process.

Between birth and death, between coming from our mothers and returning to the earth, we are each in the process of creation and recreation. Our skin, alone, replaces itself every twenty-seven days. The process of being grounded creates the ability to change. The revelation occurs when we say to ourselves: “I have always done it this way, but I don’t need to.” We can empty ourselves of past identities and become who we need to be. We are free, free to adapt and free to change.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen observes that, while we cannot see the wind, we can see where the wind has passed in the patterns on the sand. In the same way, we reveal where our energy has been through our body. A body worker would discover a different history for me than a tradi-

tional biographer would uncover; the biographer has the writing in the sand, the body worker the writing on the body. I may not be able to change my biography, but I can change the energy flow of my earthling body. I can come home to it.





Ripe apple, pear and banana,
gooseberry . . . They speak of life and death
as soon as they get in our mouths ...
Try watching a child's face: You can

see the far-off knowledge as he tastes it.
What's going on in your mouth? Something nameless,
slow. Instead of words, a flood of discoveries,
startled loose from the flesh of the fruit.

Do you dare tell what we mean by "apple"?
This sweetness that first condenses itself
so that when you lift it to take a bite

it will be pure, wide-awake, transparent,
two-meaninged, sunlike, earthlike, all presence—
Oh experience, sensation, happiness—*immense!*

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, I, 13.

