

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE KINGDOMS OF NATURE

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Every day we live our lives in the midst of the natural kingdoms. Even when we as farmers take care of the soil, animal or plants, the natural realms tend to fade into the background in our perception. In trainings, we have the opportunity to intensify our encounter with the natural kingdoms. For some people this is familiar, and the exercise renews awareness. For other people the exercise may be completely new or long desired. It is simple; every person can participate and experience nature in its present facet.

THE EXERCISE

- Gather the course group and walk together at a brisk pace to a quiet place about 10 to 15 minutes from the course room. Only when everyone is gathered in the quiet place, introduce the exercise.
- To start, form four groups. Each of which will be given a focus. It helps if you have written small cards with the pair of terms for each person ahead of time. The four focus of attention are:
 - **Focus 1:** Light and atmosphere
 - **Focus 2:** Air and Water
 - **Focus 3:** Plant and mineral
 - **Focus 4:** Animals and sounds
- At this stage, You can inspire your students by reading a poem or a small passage from the 2nd or the 7th lecture of the Agricultural Course.



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- Now everyone is invited to walk back to the classroom at their own pace, keeping quiet and not talking, while paying attention to experiencing their focus words. It helps many participants if you extend the task and everyone collects an object (leaf, branch, flower, feather, stone, root, etc.) to help their own focus along the way.
- Once everyone is back in the course room, the harvesting of the exercise begins in the plenary. If the room has a large blackboard, you can keep key words on the board. Be surprised by the abundance. Invite participants to say something about their own focus and to show the object they have collected. The object can be placed in the center of the room, and a keyword goes on the exercise board. Be aware of your breath. Take a moment to let your reflections settle. Then contemplate that reflection.
- At the very end, when everyone has shared something, summarize again. In this way, highlight what makes up each realm, where they touch, and how they complement each other. Using the words of the participants and the items collected, stay fully engaged in the experience.



MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Most participants are relieved when they get the term “plant and mineral”. Participants are even happier when they realize that it is possible to have an experience connected to light, air or sound as soon as they get involved. Participants are amazed by the tranquility and power of this exercise and by the aesthetics with which the natural realms reveal themselves. They are surprised by the diversity of their focus elements, knowing that it is only one of four. Participants find it relieving that we go into perception in a division of labor, and they are given guidance on how to follow one at a time. I was touched by the comment of one participant who said, “At first I was puzzled, but then I noticed how the focus helps me. I felt as if I were going through a gate, leaving behind the confusing and great abundance of nature. I enter into a realm and am gifted with a great abundance from that realm that would have remained hidden from me without the focus.”

VARIATIONS OF THE EXERCISE

For courses lasting several days, you can repeat the exercise many times. For example, go to the same place but at a different time or in different weather.

- You can use the exercise with an observation focus, such as looking at an animal, a field or a plant. For example, stand with the group under a large tree and distribute each group a specific focus: focus 1: the wood; focus 2: the leaves; focus 3: the flowers, fruits or seed heads; and focus 4: the sounds.
- The exercise can also be used very well in online courses. You lead the exercise; each participant is given the observation focus via chat or a list you share on screen. Then each person goes outside in their own place, walks around slowly, or engages in the experience while standing. After 20 minutes, everyone comes back. Online, it is a good idea to send participants into small groups to share the experience. Divide them into small groups of 4 people for each of the four focus words, with one person per focus word participating in each small group.