

Becoming Wild & Green

Hildegard of Bingen was a person of remarkable breadth and talent. She is remembered in history as a Christian mystic who, as a nun during the Middle Ages, was able to become an accomplished herbalist, painter, composer, abbess of her order and confidant to the Pope. She also produced a great deal of written material. In her writings she offered us a word; *viriditas* which literally translates to "greenness." This word was her effort to name the moment whereby the eternal, quantum world of Spirit becomes the visible, tangible world of time/space. This is the Word made Flesh--the enlivening of the physical reality.

During Hildegard's lifetime there would have been a carved face looking down from nearly every cathedral in Europe. A shaggy foliated head--part human and part growing plants. The Greenman. This archetypal image originated in prehistory, far before the Christian era. His face can be found across the Old World and the Americas. He is carved into cathedrals, painted into architectural friezes and remembered in ancient folk rituals. In the East he is echoed in the face of Hindu's green-skinned Rama, consort of Sita goddess of Nature who springs from the plowed soil. He appears as Islam's Al-Khidir: the Green One, a former vegetative deity who was described in the Koran as a spiritual guide to both Moses and Alexander the Great. Due in part to this relationship, green is the color associated with divine wisdom in the Arab world.

The Greenman represents many interrelated energies. For instance, his face can remind us of the irrepressibility of Life. In this one of his aspects, he represents the force that allows grass to make its way between the cracks in a sidewalk, tree roots to heave up city paving and a weed's stubborn ability to demand its place in an orderly garden.

He also stands as a consort of and partner with the Earth Goddess. As the son/lover of the Great Mother, he is destined to regenerate every Spring to watch over her fruitfulness and receded into darkness once again when she takes her Winter slumber. His death is never final but reminds us of the cyclic rhythms of the world which are both eternal and transitory. LIFE will reassert itself, even as individuals die.

The Greenman is also the protector of Wild Nature. He is a blended being exhibiting a body that is at once human and plant. Part green himself, he keeps an careful eye over every aspect of the Mother's green body. Being a guardian of the plants and trees also ultimately makes him a guardian over all living things. As we learned in grade school, all life on Earth depends on the photosynthetic ability of the plants, algae, trees and shrubs to capture sunlight and water and miraculously transform them into usable nurturance while exhaling essential oxygen into the environment.

Spirits who work in this role are often shown in this state of partial metamorphosis. For instance, Cernunnos, the Celtic lord of the forest has an antlered head while the Greek demigod Pan strides through the forest on goat legs. A Greenman may be seen bearded with leaves or with leaves pouring from his mouth. Like J.R.R. Tolkien's Ents resemble the trees that they shepherd--the Greenman shows us that he is literally a part of what he loves. As he loves each leaf, he remind us of the preciousness and vitalness of every part of the Whole and that he and we are inseparable from the Earth. It is perhaps this aspect most of all that holds a power for us today.

The Greenman has reappeared in our culture to offer us a spiritual archetype for a new way of being. His leafy head may be seen peering out from the covers of books, on CDs, paintings, movies and even carvings of Greenmen are once again being made available. We have called this spirit into being again to remind us of what we must do. Following his lead, we--both women and men of the Earth--can step into our places as Her protectors. One only has to read the story of Julia Butterfly Hill who defended the forest by living in the branches of a 200-foot tall redwood tree to know that the warrior energy of the Greenman is actually genderless! We all can embody his/her desire to protect Mother Nature and in so doing remember our own wildness.

Peruvian spiritual teachers from the Andes refers to this wild energy as *salka*. It is the non-domesticated part that lives inside each of us and all other beings of this planet. Domesticated beings are overly rational and materialistic, whereas the wild parts of us live more in our hearts and therefore harmony with Mother Earth--Pachamama. In our hearts we can feel our own preciousness and the holiness of all beings. From this wild, heart-centered place we can see Beauty in all things. We can feel the interconnections in our biosphere and therefore approach each part of the larger world with a deeper reverence. When we then allow our actions to flow from this wild, heart center, we naturally make more respectful choices for ourselves and the Earth.

Try this breathing exercise to awaken your wild, green, self. With your eyes closed, stand up or sit in an erect posture. Now, focus on your own heart beat. Listen and feel as it pumps blood through your body. Now, outstretch your arms. Take a sharp breath inwards while bringing your fingertips toward your heart. Hold it for a heartbeat. Then, exhale fully and extend your arms again. On the in breath, you may see your arms gathering in all of the Earth's love--bringing it to your heart. When you exhale and extend your arms again, feel yourself giving energy back to the Earth. Do this for at least 10 breaths. (If you feel a little dizzy, take more gentle breaths. Please remember to exhale fully so that you don't experience hyperventilation!) As you approach your tenth breath remember a time that you felt grateful. If you can, it is especially useful to remember a time that Nature gave you a gift. A cool breeze on a very hot day. Welcome rain during a drought. The swoop of a hawk over your car. The sound of coyotes howling on a desert night. Snow enough for a snow day when you were a child! The deer that watched you without moving. Let yourself remember your special experience of Nature's gifts.

Allow the memory of that time and the feelings of gratitude to fill you as you begin to breathe more gently. Allow your breaths to move now like ocean waves, grasses waving slowly in the wind or the elegant beating of an eagle's wings. Let the gratitude you feel flow out from your heart and extend from your fingertips.

When you feel complete with this exercise. Gently bring your awareness to the place where you are standing or sitting. Smile--if you aren't already--and wiggle your toes and fingers! When you are ready open your eyes and look at this world with your wild heart. Look to where you can make a change that will benefit the Earth and her children. It can be very simple to start but as you practice the above exercise and continue feeling your wild heart you will naturally desire to be more of a loving force for Her nurturance and protection.

You don't have to have a lot of money or time to be of service. Let me give you an example. Just last evening, at sunset my partner and I were going to the ocean's edge to place a ritual offering of gratitude. Just a flower, two apple slices and a piece of unwrapped hard candy to

"feed" the Earth Spirits and to say "thank you" to the Mother for the gifts we had received during what had felt like a very long week. On the ocean road, there was a very young man walking along carrying a black garbage bag. We had assumed at a distance that he was picking up bottles, but upon getting closer could clearly see that he was picking up paper and trash. Once at the shore, we prayed aloud our thanks to the Earth, the elements, all of nature and even included our thanks to the young man. During our prayers, the sky turned from red-orange to a twilight indigo. As darkness overtook the beach, we left the simple offering in a crack between the rocks for the tide to swallow up and returned to the car.

The return trip found the young man walking home in a sprightly manner with a bag, now as large as his torso, thrown over his shoulder. Imagining how splendid that roadside was going to look in the morning we cheered! As a living Greenman that night, his prayers for the Earth had just manifested in a different, physical way from our own!

So allow the Greenman to whisper the energy of regeneration into your life. Listen to the wildness that lives inside of you and connects you to this wonderful Earth. Begin thinking more with your heart instead of your head and let your beautiful heart guide you into again being in Reverent Participatory Relationship with our beautiful world!

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Nationally recognized shaman teacher/healer, speaker, and author, Evelyn C. Rysdyk delights in supporting people to remember their sacred place in All That Is. Whether through face-to-face contact with individual patients, groups and conference participants, or through the printed word in books, columns and articles--Evelyn uses her loving humor and passion to open people's hearts and inspire them to live more joyful, fulfilling and purposeful lives.

She is the author of *Modern Shamanic Living: New Explorations of an Ancient Path* (1999), columnist and writer of numerous articles and features. Her writing and artwork have appeared in regional, national and international publications—both in print and online-- and she is the executive editor of *Spirit Living*, an eco-spiritual e-magazine.

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