

Immerse oneself in nature for re-balancing, healing



Highland Views
Chris Highland
Guest columnist

Here in Western North Carolina, we can enjoy just about any kind of natural experience from tubing and kayaking to birding and biking, hiking and ... more hiking ... and of course there's always a leisurely drive along the Parkway. We can also avail ourselves of the seemingly endless variety of "supernatural" experiences: churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, covens and much more.

One could perhaps argue that our breweries, music venues and art studios offer their own kind of secular sanctuary as well, spirits or not.

All of these activities and places can provide, at times, a sense of healing, or at least rejuvenation and refreshment for our bodies and minds.

A BBC article on traditional healers in Australia ("A 60,000-year-old cure for depression") caught my attention. The writer speaks of "lying on kangaroo skins ... engulfed in plumes of smoldering leaves from a peppermint tree by the banks of a sacred river."

She was there "to have my spirit rebalanced" by a local "medicine man."

"At the heart of [aboriginal] communities were traditional healers. They have been respected and entrusted with the well-being of Aboriginal communities for as long as the culture has been alive, yet still today surprisingly little is known of them. The few healers who remain ... have extensive knowledge of Aboriginal culture and are believed to

possess supernatural abilities. Their role is to treat physical, mental and spiritual ailments using bush medicine, smoking ceremonies and spirit realignment – the latter being a common remedy for depression, or what indigenous Australians call 'sickness of the spirit.'

There seem to be two essential aspects to what these healers do: immerse in nature and listen.

She writes, "Whether healers truly possess any psychic ability, it seems a key skill Aboriginal people have honed over thousands of years is an advanced way of listening."

One elder described the meaning of the word, "dadirri," as an "inner deep listening and quiet still awareness ... a form of mindfulness and reciprocal empathy we can develop with the land, each other and ourselves It is something like what you call 'contemplation.'"

For many years I was impressed and inspired by the beliefs and practices of native peoples throughout the world. I read their stories, learned some of the mythology beneath their tribal identities, followed Joseph Campbell's descriptions of the "masks of God." I still honor and respect many of the roots of these original and aboriginal traditions. Yet the more I've learned and thought about "origins" the more I've become convinced that the complex root-systems of each and all lead back to those rather simple truths: immerse in nature and listen.

As the BBC writer explains, "For indigenous Australians, this spiritual listening practice provides a way to observe and act according to the natural seasons and cycles in a way the modern

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