

# happiness and the healing power of nature

Ann Whitaker

There's a ritual which I've repeated for a long time now. From late February each year, entering the Botanic Gardens in Glasgow via the Kirklee gate, I stroll up the path, and have a close look at the earth border to the left. Green shoots are just appearing. I check them every week, as the stems grow taller and sturdier, and the buds fatter. There is a magic moment in mid to late March when, at last, the first daffodil of Spring appears. Quite often, I punch the air and go "Yes!!" That moment provides a rush of pleasure which remains with me the whole day. I call my ritual The Daffodil Run.

You think I'm daft? I know it's an important part of what keeps me sane.

There are very few clear evening skies in Glasgow. If you're rushing up Byres Road on the way home on one of those rare nights, especially when you cross the Queen Margaret Drive bridge, look out for a small woman standing still,

gazing at the sky. That'll be me, admiring the wonderful, fragile beauty of a new crescent moon.

Even in the city, at the increasingly fragmented end of the most turbulent century in history, it is possible to maintain a connection to the cycles of the seasons and the rhythms of nature. It's increasingly recognised that regular contact of this kind is an important component in establishing and maintaining the kind of inner balance and peace that promotes happiness.

One of the many advantages of living in a small country like Scotland is that access to the great outdoors is not difficult - half an hour out of Glasgow, for example, it is possible to disappear into lovely countryside and forget the existence of the city very quickly. Try it! It doesn't matter how stressed you are, how much angst you are carrying - a couple of hours of tramping across the hills, often in rain and wind, focusing on nothing more complex than watching where you put every footstep in order to avoid disappearing up to your waist in a bog, is guaranteed to purge out at least some of it.

Over many years of walking, I have offered the hills both my joys and my sorrows, and have found validation for the former and solace for the latter. In

homeopathic medicine, broadly speaking, you treat an ailment with a very dilute form of the toxin which caused it. I have found the homeopathic principle works very well with bleakness of the soul or spirit; that condition can be effectively treated by choosing weather and landscape to match your mood, and immersing yourself in it for a few hours. Meeting bleakness with bleakness has a powerfully cleansing effect. Complementary to this is the powerfully life-affirming effect that natural beauty can have. Standing on top of a favourite hill on a sunlit day, looking at stunning panoramic views, listening to the joyous song of a skylark, feeling at one with the wind and the landscape, has on numerous occasions made me feel so glad to be alive that I have wept for joy.

These experiences may fade in the face of the rigours of an average life. But if you repeat them often enough, you develop a sense of being part of the great round of nature, where joy and sorrow, youth, maturity, decline, death and rebirth all have their part. You also learn, slowly, the importance of being a happy person of being able to 'grasp the joy as it flies', celebrate the moment, seize the day.

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