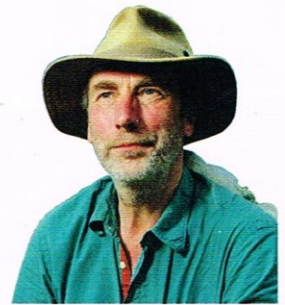


TALKING POINT SIMON BARNES

"I have sought not peace but the songs of birds, the footprints of mammals and the interactions between insects and plants."



Is it possible to find peace in nature? Well, of course it is, but I'm not too impressed by the idea that life has spent more than three billion years evolving so that humans can take a break from the stresses humanity has created. So let me introduce you to the Alice Theory of Love.

In *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice sets off to meet the Red Queen. She is advised to set out in the exact opposite direction, but thinks that nonsense. Later, after she has failed to get anywhere near the queen, "she thought she would try the plan, this time, of walking in the opposite direction. It succeeded beautifully."

In other words if you go looking for something, you won't find it, but if you set off on a quite different course you might come face-to-face with it. Here's how it works.

Most human beings wish to be loved, comforted, protected and forgiven. But you don't achieve that by making yourself loveable: you do so by loving. In the main, by and large and taking one thing with another, comfort tends to come to those who give comfort, protection to those willing to protect, forgiveness to those willing to forgive.

As a general rule, you find love not by seeking love but by giving love away. Obviously I'm not saying that as a result the Earth is in a state of universal happiness, but it's the basic principle on which love operates. Or as the Incredible String Band sang in *You Get Brighter*, a song about the sun as well as love:

Your give all your brightness away
And it only makes you brighter.

People take up running to get fit, but those who stick at it do so because they have fallen in love with running for its own sake, and they'd do it even if it was positively bad for you. Fitness is a bonus, a highly acceptable one, but running is the thing.

So let's turn to nature, because this is, after all, a nature magazine. If you turn to nature you will find peace, at least up to a point. I turn to nature every day of my life, and it has brought me peace in times of trouble, comfort in times of sorrow and added joy in times of happiness. But I don't go looking for any of these things: I look only for nature.

I have sought not peace but the songs of birds, the footprints of mammals and the interactions between

A kestrel among bluebells rewards a moment of 'birdcalm'.



insects and plants. In other words I've set off in the exact opposite direction. Just as the runner peaks on a runner's high and inadvertently finds fitness, so I turn to nature for its own sake and I inadvertently find peace.

So as with human love, loving nature is about setting off in the opposite direction. You will find more peace in nature when you know it better: when you can tell one birdsong from another, when you can name the butterflies that sup on the marjoram and the flowers that grow at your feet.

And just as love of another human grows from a sense of caring, responsibility and cherishing, so love of nature grows the same way. The more you try and make things better for nature, the more nature will give you... and that only makes it brighter. ■

Share your stories

Let us know what you have found in your journey with nature. Contact details on p3.