



Listening at Lookout Creek: Nature in Spiritual Practice

Gretel Van Wieren

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Spiritual wanderer, mystic, and ordained minister Gretel Van Wieren's memoir of her stint as writer-in-residence in Oregon's Cascades covers her quest to rediscover her connection with the natural world, which is her main source of spiritual sustenance.

Recalling memories of growing up in Michigan's Manistee National Forest, the book affirms the rich connection between nature and spirituality. Earthy and poetic, it touches on what can best be learned through intimate contact with nature, from the constancy of change, to how life and death intermingle, to the way lowly spiders create shimmering lace.

Honest and at times raw, the book records moments of intense awareness. Silence opens up the paradoxical creative space between the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*. Noting the work of scientists who study the way the forest responds to change, Van Wieren also responds to the forest in body and soul. A spot calls her to sit for a time in silence, answer a wild urge to run, and then refresh herself by skinny-dipping in a creek. Questions open up, inspired by awareness of what is lost when ecosystems are destroyed. Van Wieren muses on mourning irreversible losses and facing inevitable suffering.

Touched by the beauty, the vitality, the myriad shades of green, and the depth of silence encountered in the forest, Van Wieren confronts her lack of answers. She ends as one person faced with the enormity of change. *Listening at Lookout Creek*, while revealing how immersion in nature can help and be healing, stops short of antidotes for the advancing effects of climate change, and instead reveals how listening to the forest and breathing with it in silence can lead to true care.

KRISTINE MORRIS (September / October 2019)

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